

# The Worldwide Rise of Hate Crimes Against Muslims

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## **Abstract:**

*Hate crime or bias motivated crime refers to a crime or violence which is perpetuated by racial, religious, sexual motives. It is not a new phenomenon, but it has lacked proper attention. Muslims continue the second largest religious tradition in the world. More often than not they are becoming the victims of hate crime in many non-Muslim dominated societies. This paper shows different types and multifarious reasons behind the worldwide rise of hate crime. Increasing Islamophobia, bigotry, far right-wing nationalism, growing influence of religion based political parties and hate speech are few of the many reasons behind the surge of hate crime against Muslims. In recent years, hate crime in cyberspace has created a new challenge in the current era of intense rancor and fear. Social cohesion along with tolerance and acceptance is essential to curtail hate crime.*

**Key Words:** Hate crime, Bias motivated, Muslim, Violence, Islamophobia, Far right-wing, Nationalism, Cyberspace

## 1. Introduction

Nasser Kurdy, a Muslim orthopedic surgeon who treated Manchester Arena bomb victims, was stabbed in neck with a knife in a hate crime attack. He was attacked from behind as he arrived at the Altrincham Islamic Center for evening prayer at about 6 pm on 24 September 2017. Kurdy is the vice-chair of the Altrincham and Hale Muslim Association and a lay Imam. Fortunately, he survived the attack and told the media that he had been targeted because he was entering the Islamic Center (Perraudin, 2017). 23 years ago in 1994, 17 years old Shah Alam was attacked by group of white youths in Poplar, in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. He was hit with a hammer, punched, kicked, stabbed and left for dead on ground. Fortunately, he survived following emergency surgery. Later he informed that, one of his attackers was heard to shout 'Paki', 'Kill him' (Iganski, 2008, p. 14). These two events are among thousands of hate crime incidents perpetuated against Muslims around the world. FBI, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, in 2015 reported that 21.9% were victims of anti-Islamic (Muslim) bias in the United States (FBI, 2015). Anti-Muslim hate crimes in the United States rose 67%, from 154 incidents in 2014 to 257 in 2015, according to the latest numbers released in the bureau's Hate Crime Statistics report (Ansari, 2016). In recent years, the world has experienced a sharp rise in hate crime against Muslims in different parts of the world. The interconnectedness of societies with the help of globalization has facilitated new opportunities for some of the most damaging of criminal activities, including hate crime and hate based conflicts (SchweppeandWalters, 2016, p. 2). Historiography of past decades shows that Muslims living in the Western countries are on the receiving end of hate crime. But more recent evidences claim that Muslims are the sufferer in many Asian countries. The rise of far-right nationalists in different countries are fueling the contemporary hate crime (SchweppeandWalters, 2016, p. 15). At first, this paper will focus on the various definitions of hate crime. Then it will unfold different types of hate crimes and reasons that motive its perpetrators.

## 2. Objectives of the Study:

The main objective of the present study is to provide a clear understanding of hate crime against Muslims living in non-Muslim dominated societies. More specifically, this paper shows the different types of hate crimes perpetrated against Muslims and multifarious reasons behind these crimes.

## 3. Methodology of the Study:

For the purpose of this study, a broad literature review has been conducted. Required information have been collected from different secondary sources including books, journal articles, newspaper articles, research works, and online resources. As the study is qualitative in nature, descriptive research method is used.

## 4. Definition of hate crime

Since 9/11 the world has been more concerned about terrorism than any other criminal activities. Very little focus has been shed on the rise of hate crime on a global scale. Hence, quite unsurprisingly there is no universal definition of hate crime. Different organizations and states have developed diverse working definitions of hate crime. ODIHR, the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, has developed its own definition of hate crime that acts as guidance to all of the 57 countries on OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe). According to ODIHR, crimes motivated by prejudice, also known as hate crimes or bias-motivated crimes affect the security

of individuals, their communities and societies as a whole can be labelled as hate crime. Hate crimes can include threats, property damage, assault, murder or any other criminal offence committed with a bias motivation towards individuals or specific groups. There are two criteria of hate crime- first, the act must constitute an offence under criminal law; second, the act must have been motivated by bias (OSCE, 2017). FBI defines hate crime as a criminal offence committed against a person, property, or society which is motivated, in whole or in part, by the offender's bias, against a given race, religion, disability, sexual orientation or ethnicity/national origin. It can also be defined as bias crime (Barka, 2006, p. 107).

According to Sheffield, hate violence is motivated by social and political factors and is bolstered by belief systems which [attempt to] legitimate such violence..... it reveals that the personal is political; that such violence is not a series of isolated incidents but rather the consequences of a political culture which allocate rights, privileges and prestige according to biological or social characteristics (Chakraborti and Garland, 2015, p. 4). Carolyn Petrosino defines hate crime in line with power distribution. The perpetrators and victims belong to the majority and minority groups respectively in a given society. The victims are less powerful or weak and the perpetrators are stronger (Petrosino, 2015, p. 9-26).

### **5. Many faces of hate crime against Muslims**

From time to time Muslims have been experiencing manifold hate crimes. Each type of hate crime has its own characteristics and historical root. In order to find out the potential perpetrators behind hate crime, in 1993, Jack McDevitt and Jack Levin found four major kinds of hate crimes after examining 169 hate crime files at the Boston Police Department. Firstly, in *thrill seeking* hate crimes young people are driven by immature emotions and excitement. In this sort of crime, the victims simply suffer due to their sexual, racial, ethnic, gender or religious differences from that of their attackers. Secondly, in *defensive* hate crimes category, the perpetrators see themselves as the protectors or defenders of their respective neighborhoods or countries. Sometimes they block the entrance for Muslims or other target groups into their territory. Thirdly, *retaliatory* hate crimes are often seen as revenge or reaction towards racial, ethnic or religious groups who they believe committed the original sin. Finally, *the mission offenders* consider themselves 'crusaders' for a racial or religious reasons. This sort of hate crimes is the deadliest (Burke, 2017). For instance, on 19 June 2017, one person was killed and another ten injured when a van hit pedestrians following night prayers at the Finsbury Park Mosque in North London. While causing havoc, the attacker shouted at the victims and said '*I'm going to kill all Muslims*' (Sharman, 2017).

Religion is probably one of the main reasons behind the rise of hate crimes against Muslims. According to Pew Research Center, as of 2010, there were an estimated 1.6 billion Muslims around the world, making Islam the world's second-largest religious tradition after Christianity. By 2050 the number of Muslims worldwide will grow to 2.76 billion, or 29.7% of world's population and will be the largest religion in terms of subscribers (Desilver and Masci, 2017). People's association with Islam sometimes proves to be the only reason for their troubles as we have already seen in the case of Nasser Kurdy. Since the sensational terrorist attack of 9/11, Muslims and Arabs have been experiencing harsh treatment in the western world, especially in the United States. After becoming the 45<sup>th</sup> President of the United States, Donald Trump imposed a controversial 90-days ban on travelers from seven predominately Muslim states- Iraq, Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen-because his administration marked these countries as 'source of terror' (Foster, 2017). On the other hand, racism

in the United Kingdom against Muslims has been rising significantly. On 24 August 2016, three Indian ethnic origin siblings—Maryam Dharas, 19, Sakina Dharas, 24 and Ali Dharas, 21 were removed from the EasyJet flight from Stansted to Naples after being accused of Islamic State supporters. The two sisters were wearing headscarves at that time and became subjected to racial profiling. The Dharas siblings were asked if they had Arabic text on their phones or copies of the Qur'an. Although they were born and brought up in England and can only speak in English, their affiliation with Islam proved to be the main reason behind such ill treatment (Grierson, 2016). Stefano Bonino confirms that most Muslims have negative experiences at European airports. As a consequence, they try to travel less and avoid certain airports (Bonino, 2016).

Muslim women are disproportionately targeted as victims of anti-Muslim hate, often because of the way in which visual identities as the *hijab* or *niqab* readily demarcate veil-wearers as 'different' and ostensibly anti-western (Chakraborty and Garland, 2015, p. 39). More often than not hate crime can be perpetrated on the basis of gender identity. On 14 December 2016, a Muslim woman was dragged along the pavement by her *hijab* in a horrific attack in London. In this case, two white teenagers were responsible as they tried to rip the woman's *hijab* off (Dearden, 2016). A similar hate crime took place in London seven months later. In this case, a man spat at a Muslim girl and pulled another's *hijab* off her head (White, 2017). On some occasions, Muslim women face the worst consequences. 21 years old aspiring model Resham Khan and her cousin, Jameel Mukhtar, suffered horrific injuries on 21 June 2017 when an attacker squirted acid through their car window in Newham, East London (Lusher, 2017).

One very striking development in recent years is the rise of far-right nationalists in many democratic countries. This type of extreme nationalist political parties shows zero tolerance to the outsiders or minorities within their countries. If we turn our focus on India, the largest democracy in the world, Muslims are no way safe. Since April 2017, at least ten Muslim men have been lynched or killed in public in suspected hate crimes and the country has been experiencing a rising tide of Islamophobia. On June 27, Usman Ansari, a dairy farmer, was beaten up by a mob of about hundred people and part of house was set on fire after a dead cow was seen outside his house. In west Bengal on 24 June 2017, three Muslim construction workers were beaten to death by a mob allegedly for stealing cows. Some other cases show that the perpetrators use words like '*mulla*', '*beef eater*', '*Jai Sri Ram*' (*Hail Lord Ram*) while attacking the victims (Amnesty, 2017). Aakar Patel, executive director of Amnesty International in India, stated that the pattern of hate crimes committed against Muslims with seeming impunity—many of them in states where the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) is in power—is deeply worrying. Unfortunately, both the Prime Minister and various Chief Ministers have done little to show that they disapprove of this violence (Amnesty, 2017). Another reason behind the worldwide rise of hate crimes is hate speech delivered by political or religious or ethnic leaders. On 30 September 2015, Donald Trump, while talking about Syrian refugees, said 'They could be ISIS, I don't know. This could be one of the great tactical ploys of all time. A 200,000-man army, maybe. This could make the Trojan horse look like peanuts' (Johnson and Hauslohner, 2017). Narendra Modi, present Prime Minister of India and former Chief Minister of Gujarat, made a controversial comment following the Gujarat riot of 2002. He referred to the refugee camps of Muslims as '*baby-making factories*' (Chakraborty, 2014). Bal Thackeray, leader of the Shiv Sena, a Hindu far right political party, stated that 'Muslims are cancer to this country.....cancer is an incurable disease. Its only cure is operation. O Hindus, take weapons in your hands and remove this cancer from the roots' (Haynes,

2011, p. 150). This type of hate speech is very influential and gives birth to what McDevitt and Levin labelled as *defenders*.

The high tech communication system and internet have brought the societies closer than ever. The ever increasing social media networks and instant messaging system have guided remote and distant places to join the global village. From top most political leaders to an ordinary citizen, everyone is, more or less, influenced by social networks. But such togetherness has also created enormous risks. A simple tweet or Facebook status given by influential figures can motivate thousands of people. AshinWirathu, a nationalist Buddhist monk, compared Rohingya Muslims to dogs. He said ‘You can be full of kindness and love, but you cannot sleep next to a mad dog’ (Fuller, 2013). Later, this comment became viral across the social media networks. In addition to this, sometimes, Muslims are the victims of cyberbullying which includes harassing emails, instant messages, and text messages, as well as intimidating or threatening websites, blogs and posts (Sultan, 2012). Muslim students in California schools report being bullied and discriminated against at significantly higher rates than their peers, according to a study released by the Council on American-Islamic Relations (Sanchez, 2015). In Malaysia, girls and women often become abused on cyberspace. Earlier this year on Twitter a 17 years old girl expressed her dream to be the first female Prime Minister in Malaysia. Soon after that tweet, she was roundly abused online for not donning the hijab. Although this sort act does not hurt the victim physically but it can drain their mental strength and make them very vulnerable (Ragavan, 2017). It is interesting to note here that, most of these cases the perpetrators are Muslims.

## 6. Conclusion

In spite of being the followers of the second largest religious tradition, Muslims in different minority groups in non-Muslim dominated societies seem to be very vulnerable to hate crimes or violence associated with it. Muslims’ distinct religious, racial and cultural identity make them exposed in those societies. The global rise of terrorism, perpetuated by few bad guys, is making the survival of Muslims even more harder in face of hate crimes. In addition to this the emergence of far-right nationalists in power is developing a sense of anti-Muslim sentiment in many democratic countries. Muslim women are victimized due to their distinct outfits and traditions. Muslims are not only suffering physically but they are also being hurt psychologically in cyberspace. The worldwide proliferation of social networks has created space for hate crimes to flex muscles. If we see the big picture, hate crime actually paves the way for other reactionary conduct from the Muslims who find their backs against the wall. Thus, eradicating or minimizing hate crime is a tough ask for all. Communities must act to prevent the spreading of hate crime and discourage the perpetrators. People need to understand that hate only creates more hate. The law enforcing agencies need to keep statistics on hate crime and make them public so that everyone has the opportunity to know about this social evil. The real success of democracy depends on the protection of the rights of minorities. Every individual should circulate the message of tolerance and acceptance. Social medias can be used to a big advantage in this regard.

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