ISLAMOPHOBIA:

An Evidenced-based Approach

A Briefing Paper prepared

For the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on British Muslims

Wes Streeting MP and Paul Bristow MP

For the Debate on Islamophobia in Parliament

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By

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As authors of a number of trailblazing peer-reviewed academic papers[1], several books that push the boundaries on our understanding of Islamophobia[2] including the books, Islamophobic hate crime[3] and the first ever International Handbook of Islamophobia[4], we have spent our whole academic careers, researching and investigating Islamophobic hate crimes. Drawing on our extensive ground breaking research and empirical findings, we provide a brief outline below of some of our key findings from an evidenced-based approach on the drivers of Islamophobic hate crime.

Introduction

1. Islamophobic hate crimes send a message to the victim and the victim's group members that they are neither safe nor welcome in the community or country.

2. Islamophobic hate crimes can be one-off events or form part of a series of repeated and targeted offending. Evidence from our research studies indicate that many Islamophobic hate crime incidents form part of an ongoing process of victimisation.

3. Islamophobic hate crimes often have a disproportionate impact on the victim on the basis that they are being targeted because of their identity. They therefore not only impact the individual victim but also the wider community to which the victim belongs.

4. Whether one-off events or a series of repeated and targeted offending, Islamophobic hate crimes can send reverberations through communities as they reinforce established patterns of bias, prejudice and discrimination.

5. In the British context, Islam and Muslims have increasingly been seen to be 'culturally dangerous' and threatening the 'British way of life'. Muslims have been labelled as being both deviant and evil.

6. The racialisation of crime has led to a drastic upsurge, following terrorist attacks. Islamophobia has now evolved into attacks against Muslim-looking people because of external factors such as their skin colour, facial hear and clothing.

7. Victims of anti-Muslim incidents include not only Muslims but also anyone who looks like a Muslim or an Arab. Many non-Muslims such as Sikh men (with readily identifiable turbans and long beards) and Hindus, and many non-Arabs such as Indians, Pakistanis, and other South Asians are affected.

8. Racism and Islamophobia are inextricably linked. Participants in our 2018 study noted how their appearances acted as a trigger for the types of hate and abuse they suffered. For example, if they had a beard or were perceived to be from a Muslim background because of the way they looked then they were more likely to be targeted for racial abuse. [5]

9. The political rhetoric and sensational media reporting in the aftermath of Islamist terrorist attacks illustrates the ways in which Muslim identities can be transformed

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[2] Dr Irene Zempi, Nottingham Trent University profile: https://www.ntu.ac.uk/staff-profiles/social-sciences/irene-zempi
[3] https://www.routledge.com/Islamophobic-Hate-Crime-A-Student-Textbook/Awan-Zempi/p/book/9781138552708
[4] https://www.routledge.com/The-Routledge-International-Handbook-of-Islamophobia/Zempi-Awan/p/book/9780367783914
[5] https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1477370818812735

across time and space. The effect of these transformations has been the construction of hate and fear, resulting in the rise in the level of Islamophobia through the construction of Muslims as synonymous with 'deviance', 'un-Britishness' and terrorism.

10. Counter-terrorism measures have contributed to the 'demonisation' of Muslims in political, media and public discourses, portraying Islam and Muslims as a security 'threat'. A series of policies around securitisation and 'tackling extremism' have positioned all Muslims as a 'suspect community'.[6]

11. Islamophobic hate crimes and incidents often occur in public spaces such as streets, city centres and public transport networks. Common locations for these incidents also include shops, restaurants, gyms and other business environments accessed by members of the public, as well as surrounding public areas.[7]

12. Rather than being single, one-off incidents, Islamophobic hate crimes can sometimes form part of an ongoing process of victimisation that often makes up part of a victim's everyday experiences of hostility. A significant proportion of Islamophobic hate crimes are committed by perpetrators who are known to the victim such as neighbours, local community members, and even friends, carers, family members and work colleagues.[8]

The visibility of Muslim identity

13. Evidence shows that Islamophobia is highly gendered. Muslim women are more likely to be attacked or abused than men in public settings, particularly if they are visibly Muslim (for example, wearing Islamic clothing such as a headscarf, face veil, abaya), and the largest proportion of perpetrators remain white males.[9]

14. The visual markers of Islam are the tools for identification upon which Islamophobia can be expressed. This approach demonstrates why certain individuals and groups are more likely to become targets for hostility than others.

15. The veil ban across Europe stigmatises veiled Muslim women as 'criminals', thereby potentially 'legitimising' acts of violence towards them when they are seen in public. In this sense, the law increases the sense of vulnerability of veiled Muslim women in the public sphere.

16. As such, the threat of Islamophobic hate crime has long-lasting effects for individual victims including making them afraid to leave their homes and feeling like 'social lepers' and 'social outcasts'.[10]

17. As a result a common sensation cited by veiled Muslim women is the panic attacks, worry, extreme anxiety and depression, which was said to derive from the fear of having to endure future victimisation when in public.

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[6] https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1747-1346.2012.00397.x

[7] https://www.tellmamauk.org/wp-content/uploads/pdf/tell_mama_2015_annual_report.pdf

[8] https://www.routledge.com/The-Routledge-International-Handbook-of-Islamophobia/Zempi-Awan/p/book/9780367783914

[9] Zempi, I., 2014. *Uncovering Islamophobia: The victimisation of veiled Muslim women.* Leicester: University of Leicester.

[10] Zempi, I., 2014. *Uncovering Islamophobia: The victimisation of veiled Muslim women.* Leicester: University of Leicester.

18. Muslim women are often reluctant to leave the house through fear of being attacked particularly on the street, in parks, in shops and on public transport. However, some veiled Muslim women described feeling like 'prisoners in their own home'.

'Trigger' Events

19. The prevalence and severity of Islamophobic hate crimes are influenced by 'trigger' events of local, national and international significance.

20. Islamophobic hate crimes increase following 'trigger' events as they operate to galvanise tensions and sentiments against the suspected perpetrators and groups associated with them. Evidence shows that Islamophobic hate crimes have increased significantly following 'trigger' attacks including terrorist attacks carried out by individuals who choose to identify themselves as being Muslim or acting in the name of Islam.[11]

Online Abuse

21. Social media companies such as Twitter and Facebook have been slow to react to the dangers posed by far-right groups and individuals who promote hate speech online.[12]

22. Awan and Zempi found that online these impacts are both psychological, emotional and anxiety related.[13] This is particularly strong when considering hate speech online that aims to threaten and incite violence.

23. According to the typology of Islamophobic hate crime perpetrators on social media, first developed by Awan in 2014[14], there are eight 'types' of perpetrators These are; **the trawler** (someone who uses other people's profiles to specifically abuse people online); **the apprentice** (someone who targets people with the help of more experienced online abusers); **the disseminator** (someone who shares malicious online communications); **the impersonator** (someone who uses a fake profile and account to target individuals); **the accessory** (someone who spreads misinformation); **the reactive** (someone who uses trigger events aimed at Muslims); **the mover** (someone who regularly changes their profile and victim) and finally, **the professional** (someone with a large following and is likely to have multiple social media accounts aimed at targeting Muslims).

Individual impacts

24. Being a victim of any kind of crime can have devastating and long-term impacts upon individuals including emotional, psychological, behavioural, physical and financial effects. However, victims who have been targeted on the basis of their perceived 'difference' are likely to experience a host of negative emotions that are qualitatively distinct from those experienced following victimisation that is not motivated by hate or fear towards the 'Other'.

25. The emotional impacts of Islamophobic hate crime can be especially severe, with victims suffering a loss of confidence or feelings of vulnerability after the incident.

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[11] https://tellmamauk.org/wp-content/uploads/resources/We%20Fear%20For%20Our%20Lives.pdf
[12] https://www.routledge.com/Islamophobia-in-Cyberspace-Hate-Crimes-Go-Viral/Awan/p/book/9780367597030
[13] https://policy.bristoluniversitypress.co.uk/islamophobia
[14] https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/1944-2866.POI364

They are also more than likely to experience fear, difficulty sleeping, anxiety or panic attacks or depression.

26. Victims' responses to Islamophobic hate crime may include downplaying or perhaps denying parts of their self so as to reduce the potential risk for victimisation, which may lead to the 'invisibility' of certain identities.

27. Actual and potential victims may attempt to make themselves as 'invisible' as possible to try and reduce the potential for abuse. A decision not to veil, a decision to reduce travel by foot and public transport, and a decision to avoid visiting specific public places, are all ways of trying to reduce the risk and manage the fear of Islamophobic victimisation.

28. Experiences of Islamophobic victimisation impact upon the way in which Muslim women and men express their 'Muslimness' particularly in relation to their outward displays of faith, body presentation and dress.

The Future of Islamophobia

Address issues around social mobility

29. Muslims are the most disadvantaged faith group in the labour market in the UK. According to Social Mobility Commission (2017), Muslims experience the greatest economic disadvantages than any other faith group in the UK.[15]

The need to define Islamophobia

30. The following is our working definition of Islamophobic hate crime which we recommend should be adopted by the British Government as a working definition of Islamophobia to assist policymakers, the police, CPS and victims of Islamophobic hate crime. Islamophobic hate crime is a: "A fear, prejudice and hatred of Muslims or non-Muslim individuals that leads to provocation, hostility and intolerance by means of threatening, harassment, abuse, incitement and intimidation of Muslims and non-Muslims, both in the online and offline world. Motivated by institutional, ideological, political and religious hostility that transcends into structural and cultural racism which targets the symbols and markers of a being a Muslim."

Tackling community impacts

31. As discussed above, Islamophobic hate crime may damage victims' self-esteem, confidence and feelings of security far more than 'normal' crimes. In this regard, it is victims' intrinsic identity that is targeted; something which is central to their sense of being and which they cannot or do not wish to change. However, the emotional, psychological and behavioural harms associated with Islamophobic hate crime are not restricted to victims; rather, the harm extends to the wider Muslim community, locally, nationally and globally. Correspondingly, the individual fear and vulnerability discussed earlier is accompanied by the collective fear and vulnerability of all Muslims, particularly those individuals who have a 'visible' Muslim identity.

Islamophobia has become an international problem

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[15] https://www.gov.uk/government/news/young-muslims-in-the-uk-face-enormous-social-mobility-barriers

32. Evidence indicates that Islamophobic hate crime in Europe is on the rise. Specifically, key findings from FRA's (2017) second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey (EU-MIDIS II) include: Four out of 10 respondents (39%) reported being discriminated against in the five years before the survey because of their ethnic or immigrant background – including skin colour, ethnic origin or immigrant background, and religion or religious belief – in one or more areas of their daily lives, and one in four (25%) experienced this in the 12 months preceding the survey.

Addressing how social media companies deal with Islamophobia

33. A new cyber hate policy is much needed both at government level, social media and policing level which would be timely considering the recent spike of online Islamophobic abuse. We propose using a new duty of care provided by social media companies and a traffic light system that enables deterrents for perpetrators online.

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