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Article

Victims of religious hate crime: Victimisation of Muslims, Jews and Hindus compared

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Abstract

The surge in Hate Crime within the United Kingdom has disproportionately impacted religious communities, particularly Muslims, Jews and Hindus. This article provides a comprehensive exploration of hate crimes targeting these three religious groups in the United Kingdom. Through qualitative interviews with victims, the study aims to analyse their immediate response following the victimisation. Drawing insights from 30 individual interviews and three focus groups, the research uniquely combines three distinct religious groups for comparative analysis, revealing both commonalities and differences in their victimisation experiences. Findings highlight the pervasive nature of victimisation, emphasising community visibility and perceived safety. Notably, collective responsibility is evident among Muslim and Jewish participants. This research contributes to a nuanced understanding of challenges faced by victims, emphasising the need for robust law enforcement measures.

Keywords

Collective responsibility, safety in neighbourhood, visibility

Introduction

Religious hate crime in the United Kingdom has been on the rise. Religion is one of the five monitored strands of hate recognised within the UK's legislation. Number of

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recorded cases show that in the year ending March 2023, 39% of religious hate crime offences were targeted against Muslims (3452 offences). The next most targeted group were Jewish people, who were targeted in 17% of religious hate crimes (1510 offences), and the last most targeted group were Hindus in 3% (291). Hindus and Sikhs fluctuate in being the third religious group which is most targeted (Office of National Statistics (ONS), 2023).

Over the preceding decade, there has been a notable twofold increase in documented instances of anti-Muslim hate crimes (Tell MAMA, 2023). The reported categories of hate crime incidents encompass abusive behaviour (51%), assault (16%), discrimination (9%), vandalism (8%), threatening behaviour (8%), dissemination of anti-Muslim literature (6%) and instances of hate speech (2%) (Tell MAMA, 2023). The Muslim community frequently encounters derogatory comments, such as being urged to 'go back home' and being derogatorily labelled as 'terrorists' and 'bombers' (Awan and Zempi, 2015). Such verbal abuse often escalates to physical assaults, involving actions such as punching, kicking and forcible removal of religious attire (Ab Halim et al., 2022; Allen et al., 2013).

These stereotypes extend into educational environments, where Muslim students contend with bullying, manifested through name-calling and physical violence (Alizai, 2021; Farooqui and Kaushik, 2021). Visible Muslims also encounter challenges in employment contexts, experiencing discrimination during the job application process (Di Stasio et al., 2021). Mosques and Islamic institutions in the United Kingdom confront acts of vandalism, with 35% of mosques enduring religiously motivated attacks on an annual basis (Muslim Census, 2023). Furthermore, the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to a surge in the highest recorded instances of online hate crimes, as reported by Tell MAMA (2023). Social media platforms are often utilised for the dissemination of anti-Muslim language, fostering threats, abuse, and the ostracisation of Muslims (Wiedlitzka et al., 2023). Illustratively, hashtags like #KillAllMuslims have trended on Twitter, accompanied by derogatory labels such as 'animals', 'paedophiles' and 'terrorists' across various social media platforms (Awan and Zempi, 2016).

The Jewish community contends with the highest incidence of targeting relative to its population size, as evidenced by a discernible escalation in antisemitic sentiments since 2013 (Hodge and Boddie, 2021). According to hate crime statistics compiled by the Community Security Trust (CST) in the United Kingdom for the first half of 2023, a total of 803 antisemitic incidents were documented by the organisation. Among these, 74 instances constituted physical assaults, encompassing actions such as hurling eggs, stones, bricks, bottles and various objects at victims, as well as launching objects while in motion. Assaults also extended to acts such as punching, kicking, spitting and forcibly removing religious attire or accessories. Some incidents involved the deployment of weapons, and in two instances, vehicles were employed to jeopardise the safety of the victims. Notably, these attacks were concentrated in neighbourhoods predominantly inhabited by Jewish communities (CST, 2023a).

Moreover, the CST (2023a) report disclosed 666 instances characterised by abusive behaviour, including verbal and written abuse, offensive vocalisations and gestures in public spaces. In addition, instances of antisemitic graffiti, primarily featuring depictions of Hitler and swastikas, were prevalent. Such graffiti was frequently employed as a

means to defile Jewish property. Further transgressions encompassed theft, destruction of mezuzahs, and the use of projectiles such as stones, bricks and bottles to inflict damage upon Jewish properties. Within the spectrum of the 803 antisemitic incidents, 210 were identified as online offences. The majority of these online instances occurred on social media platforms, utilising vulgar and derogatory language to inflict harm upon victims, accompanied by online threats intended to intimidate (CST, 2023a). Online antisemitism often operates through hidden and coded mechanisms, making it challenging to identify and combat. Much of this form of hate is cloaked in so-called ‘humour’ and relies on stereotypes and caricatures to perpetuate antisemitic tropes. This includes the use of memes, jokes and seemingly innocuous comments that, when examined more closely, propagate harmful stereotypes about Jewish people. Such content can appear as harmless or playful to those who do not recognise the underlying antisemitic messages, thus normalising prejudice and subtly reinforcing discriminatory views.

Online antisemitic rhetoric often translates into offline behaviour, as hateful discourse on social media can embolden individuals to commit physical acts of violence or vandalism against Jewish communities. This connection is evident in the way online hate can escalate, from inflammatory posts and memes to real-world. Digital platforms, by providing anonymity and a sense of impunity, facilitate the spread of antisemitic content and enable hate groups to organise and mobilise. Consequently, the patterns of online antisemitism frequently mirror or exacerbate offline antisemitic incidents, revealing a troubling feedback loop where online hatred not only influences but also fuels physical manifestations of prejudice.

The scholarly research of Hindu hate crimes is limited, notwithstanding a noteworthy surge of 400% in reported incidents since 2017, as per hate crime statistics from the Office for National Statistics (ONS, 2023). Hindus, constituting a minority within the UK, are frequently perceived as ‘outsiders’ (Long, 2017). Littlewood (2023) delved into this under-researched domain, conducting a study involving 988 students to investigate anti-Hindu hate crimes within educational settings. Findings revealed that 51% of students encountered instances of anti-Hindu hate, with less than 1% formally reporting such incidents. These occurrences encompassed derogatory references to idol worship and religious practices, with more egregious cases involving coercive appeals to convert to Islam. Furthermore, students were subjected to derogatory remarks concerning the colour of their skin and racial slurs.

Littlewood’s (2023) investigation also spotlighted the adverse effects of teaching Hinduism in schools, positing that it contributes to religious discrimination. The under-reporting and under-researched nature of anti-Hindu hate crimes were featured in the study. Hindu temples, as exemplified by the 2022 attacks in Leicester (Paleri, 2022), face recurrent targeting, vandalism and destruction.

This research transcends individual examinations of religious hate crimes by incorporating a broader perspective that amalgamates data from various religious groups. By drawing parallels in the victimisation experiences of these groups, the study aims to elucidate the pervasive nature of targeting against Hindus, as well as other religious communities. Focusing on these three religious groups—Jews, Muslims and Hindus—provides a nuanced understanding of religiously motivated hate crimes in the United Kingdom. Each group represents a unique intersection of visible religious identity and historical

context, highlighting how different forms of prejudice manifest and overlap. In addition, these groups collectively experience the highest incidence of religious hate crimes, making them critical for examining the broader trends and responses necessary to address religious intolerance effectively. By concentrating on the most targeted religions, it becomes evident that there is a systemic problem of targeting within the United Kingdom, underscoring the need for comprehensive policy and community responses.

Literature review

Collective responsibility

Collective responsibility, as posited by Giubilini and Levy (2018), pertains to attributing moral accountability to a specific group or community for the actions of particular individuals. This phenomenon is often observed in the aftermath of global events and terrorist attacks (Fischer-Preßler et al., 2019). The experiences of hate crimes within religious communities are notably exacerbated by trigger events, a well-researched concept that highlights the impact of certain events on the incidence of hate crimes (Feldman and Littler, 2015). Such trigger events, exemplified by terrorist attacks, have the potential to elicit negative sentiments and reactions towards individuals sharing similarities in ethnicity and religion with the perpetrators (Junuzović, 2019), resulting in heightened occurrences of hate crimes as communities are collectively held accountable for global events (Guerra, 2023).

Research elucidates that subsequent to the 9/11 attacks, there was a surge in Islamophobic hate crimes (Disha et al., 2011). The media played a significant role in propagating a targeted narrative associating Muslim individuals with the face of terrorism (Andersen and Mayerl, 2018), thereby instigating moral outrage and shifting blame onto innocent Muslims who visibly conformed to the disseminated narrative (McGranahan, 2017). This dynamic was evident in the aftermath of 9/11, where American citizens united against the perceived new enemy, resulting in the normalisation of hate crimes against Muslims (Disha et al., 2011). This collective responsibility, arguably perpetuated by media narratives, propaganda and societal stereotypes, contributed to the creation of a dichotomous ‘them versus us’ narrative, casting Muslims as purportedly ‘dangerous’ to public safety (Awan and Zempi, 2015).

Similarly, ongoing conflicts, such as the Israel-Palestine conflict, trigger tensions between the Muslim and Jewish communities, leading to spikes in hate crimes after each episode (Egorova and Ahmed, 2017). Since 7 October 2023, there has been a notable surge in hate crimes targeting Jewish and Muslim communities, marking a distressing escalation in hostility. The Community Security Trust (CST) reported a record 4103 antisemitic incidents in the United Kingdom for 2023, surpassing previous annual highs significantly; no prior year had exceeded 300 incidents (CST, 2023b). As well as this, between October 7th to 13th December, 2093 antisemitic incidents occurred across the UK, an increase of 534% compared to the previous year (CST, 2023c). Similarly, Tell MAMA recorded a substantial rise in anti-Muslim hate crimes, with 2010 cases post-October 7—a staggering 335% increase compared to the same period the previous year (Tell MAMA, 2024). These figures underscore the way trigger events, such as the one on

7 October, can lead to a marked rise in targeted hate crimes against Jewish and Muslim communities in the United Kingdom.

While there is limited academic exploration of collective responsibility within the Hindu community, the conflict between Hindus and Muslims in India has led to instances of targeting Hindus in Britain (Khan and Sen, 2009). For instance, violence erupted in Leicester in 2022 between the Muslim and Hindu communities, stemming from the ongoing conflicts in India and Pakistan and exacerbated by the victory of the Indian cricket team against Pakistan, resulting in 47 arrests (Paleri, 2022).

These incidents evidence the far-reaching consequences of overseas conflicts, transcending immediate victims. The concept of collective responsibility transcends geographical confines and manifests globally. Imposing punitive measures by attributing responsibility to individuals of the same religious group denies individual accountability and fosters fear among those who bear no personal culpability.

Visibility

The existing literature consistently highlights a substantial correlation between religious visibility, specifically pertaining to individuals identifying as Muslim, Jewish, or Hindu, and heightened susceptibility to hate crime incidents (Colliver and Silvestri, 2022; Flax, 2018; Littlewood, 2023). Extensive studies have delved into the intricate dynamics surrounding the tension between preserving religious identity and the concomitant victimisation arising from increased visibility (Awan and Zempi, 2015; Perry, 2014). Some investigations emphasise that certain individuals opt to curtail the expression of their individual identity, taking measures to diminish their visibility (Awan and Zempi, 2015; Perry, 2014).

Religious male Muslims adorning distinctive Muslim attire, as well as religious Muslim women donning the hijab or niqab, confront an elevated risk of victimisation, rendering them more susceptible to perpetrators (Awan and Zempi, 2015). Research indicates that visible Muslim women are particularly vulnerable to repeated hate crime victimisation compared to their male counterparts, often being perceived as 'weak', 'oppressed', 'passive', and as easy targets (Awan and Zempi, 2015). Consequently, the primary antecedent to being targeted is discerned to be clear markers of visibility (Allen and Nielsen, 2002). Consequently, victims may adopt strategies such as concealing their identity and embracing a more westernised demeanour to assimilate and mitigate the risk of victimisation (Chakraborti and Garland, 2012).

Within the Jewish community, statistical data from the Community Security Trust (CST, 2017) reveals that the Orthodox Jewish segment experiences the highest incidence of physical assaults among British Jewry. This vulnerability is attributed to their heightened visibility and distinctively identifiable attire, rendering them more susceptible to attacks compared to their secular counterparts. Unlike secular Jews, who lack distinct markers of identification and are more integrated into secular culture, the Orthodox Jewish community emerges as a prime target for antisemitic victimisation due to their marked visibility. Moreover, in contrast to the Muslim targeting dynamic, Jewish males are identified as the primary targets, often owing to visible features such as a beard and the wearing of a kippah (skullcap) (Flax, 2018).

Hindus, similarly, encounter a heightened risk of hate crime victimisation, attributed to both racial and visible factors (Silver et al., 2004). Littlewood's (2023) investigation highlights instances where Hindu students were subjected to insults specifically targeting the colour of their skin. In addition, research posits that members of the Hindu community become targets of hate crimes due to associations with other ethnic and religious minorities (Awan and Zempi, 2020). Interviews conducted with non-Muslim men accentuated that those with physical resemblances to Muslim men were perceived as ideal targets for hate crimes, exemplified by one Hindu participant's experience of online targeting based on visual similarities to Bin Laden (Awan and Zempi, 2020).

The literature consistently highlights the prominence of notions of visibility, particularly in relation to Muslim and Jewish participants. The marked visibility and distinctive attire of these groups render them more vulnerable to attacks, distinguishing them as more likely targets compared to their non-religious counterparts.

Method

This study adopted a qualitative research design, employing semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection method to explore the experiences of individuals subjected to religious hate crime. The choice of a qualitative approach was informed by the intention to delve deeply into the multifaceted aspects of these experiences. Rooted in an interpretivist paradigm, this research sought to comprehend the reality of religious hate crime as perceived by participants. Such an approach allows the researcher to construct an understanding based on the subjective experiences of individuals and derive meaning from their engagement in social interactions. Morrow (Brooks, 2016: 1) notes that qualitative techniques are the 'most useful approach to understanding the meanings people make of their experiences' and 'delve into complex processes and illustrate the multifaceted nature of human phenomena'. A qualitative approach was thus adopted in order to gain a deeper understanding of narratives experienced by victims of religious hate crime.

In adherence to high ethical standards, the research underwent scrutiny and obtained ethical approval from the School of Human and Social Sciences Ethics Panel at the University of West London. This ethical oversight ensures the responsible conduct of the study, safeguarding the welfare and rights of the research participants.

Participants were asked to provide detailed descriptions of their experiences, as well as their immediate response to victimisation, which is the primary focus of this article. Future articles will address other topics covered during the interviews, including the impact of the targeting, any coping strategies adopted by the participants, reporting to the police and seeking support from third parties. Additional questions considered the influence of the media and participants' sense of safety. All focus groups were conducted in person, while interviews were conducted both in person and online.

Participants

Participants for this study were recruited through a hybrid of homogeneous and snowball sampling techniques. The research design encompassed 10 individual interviews and one focus group from each of the three distinct religious groups, culminating in a total of 30

semi-structured interviews and 3 focus group sessions. Each focus group was made up of three participants. It is noteworthy that the data emanating from the focus groups holds a distinct status in comparison to that derived from individual interviews, as respondents in the focus groups assume a more official standing within their respective communities. These focus group participants typically wield significant influence and serve as representatives of their communities, possessing vision and agency. The inclusion of these influential voices adds depth to the study by providing an additional perspective.

Participation in the research was entirely voluntary, and potential participants were identified through local religious organisations as well as hate crime groups actively addressing incidents of religious hate crimes. In addition, individuals not affiliated with local religious organisations were recruited through the utilisation of snowball sampling.

Of the 30 interview participants, 53% were male and 47% were female. Their ages ranged from 21-60. They varied in ethnic, religious, economic and educational backgrounds. Respondents ranged in age from 18 to 66. The median age of respondents is 35 (See Table 1). The median age for Hindus (34) and Muslims (32) was similar. However, the Jewish respondents were older, with a median age of 39.

The table below presents the focus group participants with some elementary information about each of them.

All participants exhibited varying degrees of visibility as members of their respective religious groups, although certainty regarding their religious affiliation was not absolute (See Table 2). Among the Muslim female participants, those who were visibly identifiable adhered to the practice of wearing a Hijab or a Niqab, while their male counterparts adorned an Imama and commonly sported a beard. Approximately 50% of interviewees, however, opted for Western attire, rendering their religious affiliation less apparent. The Jewish male participants were distinguishable by the wearing of a kippah or a black hat, often accompanied by a beard. Conversely, the female Jewish participants presented a less conspicuous outward appearance, refraining from wearing trousers and instead opting for skirts/dresses, with the additional practice of covering their natural hair with a wig. In contrast, Hindu participants emerged as the least identifiable religious group within this study cohort. While sharing a darker complexion, their specific origins remained ambiguous and could encompass multiple ethnic backgrounds.

While this research aimed to focus on religiously motivated hate crimes, it was not feasible to entirely avoid interviewing participants of colour due to the demographics of the targeted religious groups. Racial and religiously motivated hate crimes are frequently interlinked, with perpetrators often conflating racial and religious identities, and

Table 1. Age group.

	Respondents	Muslims	Jewish	Hindu
18-29	27%	30%	10%	40%
30-49	57%	60%	60%	50%
50-64	13%	10%	20%	10%
65 +	3%	0%	10%	0%

Table 2. Unambiguous religious visibility of participants (participants whose traditional attire reflect their cultural heritage and religious values of their respective communities).

	Visibility of interview participants
Muslim	50%
Jewish	100%
Hindu	Questionable
	Visibility of FG participants
Muslim	33%
Jewish	100%
Hindu	33%

individuals are targeted not solely based on their religious affiliation but also on their racial appearance.

Table 3 presents the focus group participants with some elementary information about each of them.

Western clothing refers to styles of dress that originated in Western geographical areas such as Europe and North America, characterised by their modern and casual designs. This category typically includes garments such as jeans, shirts, blouses, skirts, dresses, suits and jackets. Traditional attire reflects the cultural heritage and religious values of each respective community. Muslim traditional attire included Thobe and Keffiyeh (a long robe worn by men, often paired with a headscarf). Jewish traditional attire includes Kippahs (a small cap worn by men) and Tzitzit (fringes worn by men under their clothing). Hindu traditional attire included Saris and a Kirta (long tunic worn with loose-fitting trousers).

Materials and procedure

Utilising a semi-structured format, face-to-face or videoconferencing interviews were conducted with individuals in the United Kingdom who had been victims of religious hate crimes. Participants were explicitly reminded of their right to withdraw from the study at any point, and assurances were provided regarding the strict adherence to confidentiality and anonymity. The interview sessions, which spanned between 45 and 60 minutes, were succeeded by both verbal and written debriefs furnished to all participants.

Analytic plan

The interviews were meticulously recorded in a digital format and subsequently transcribed verbatim. The data analysis employed a thematic approach in accordance with the methodology outlined by Braun and Clarke (2022). Thematic analysis, as conceptualised by Braun and Clarke (2006), aims to explicate the 'experiences, meanings, and realities' elucidated by the participants (p. 81). Analysis initially took the form of an open coding process, assigning a code or word to particular themes and generating a record of

Table 3. Focus group participants each focus group comprised three participants from the same religious group, resulting in three separate focus groups.

Focus group	Religion	Occupation	Visibility
Focus Group 1: FG1	Muslim	Operation manager	Traditional attire
FG2	Muslim	Operation manager	Western clothing
FG3	Muslim	Learning technologist	Western clothing
Focus Group 2: FG4	Jewish	CST volunteer	Traditional attire
FG5	Jewish	Shomrim volunteer	Traditional attire
FG6	Jewish	Barnet councillor	Traditional attire
Focus Group 3: FG7	Hindu	Leads a Hindu charity	Traditional attire
FG8	Hindu	Leads a Hindu charity	Western clothing
FG9	Hindu	Operation manager	Western clothing

where these themes appeared across the interviews. Once these themes were identified, an axial coding process enabled any relationships between the dataset to be identified and explored.

This analytical process sought to unveil inherent patterns and themes embedded within the dataset. Thematic analysis, as a method, facilitates the identification, analysis, and reporting of patterns and themes within a given dataset (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Thus, the researchers embraced an open stance, actively seeking unforeseen insights and perspectives. Identifying recurrent themes across interviews served to provide comprehensive insights into the phenomenon under investigation and contributed to a nuanced understanding of the experiences and perceptions of victims of religious hate crime.

The transcriptions of interviews were outsourced to a professional transcription company, and subsequent thematic development ensued. To ensure methodological reliability, all transcripts, field notes and identified themes were systematically compiled throughout the research process, thereby establishing an audit trail (Shaw, 2010).

Findings

Types of victimisation

The prevalence of victimisation was evident across all three religious groups, as discerned through individual and focus group interviews. Collectively, Muslim participants endured 23 hate crimes, Jewish participants faced 18 antisemitic crimes, and Hindu participants encountered 23 hate crimes. Among the participants, 8 experienced a single hate crime incident, while 22 individuals endured multiple incidents, with some subjected to up to 5 hate crime events within the past few years. Incidents varied in severity, encompassing physical abuse, verbal abuse, stereotyping, discrimination, bullying and the dissemination of hateful material.

Muslim participants predominantly encountered verbal abuse or hostility (31%), followed by stereotyping (26%), discrimination (17%), physical attacks (17%), and bullying (8%). Verbal abuse often manifested as racial slurs and negative stereotypes, including instances where participants were labelled as a 'dirty p*ki' or subjected to derogatory comments insinuating association with terrorism. Noteworthy physical attacks involved altercations resulting in injuries, spitting at a participant's hijab, and flicking a cigarette at another participant's hijab. Instances of workplace and school bullying were also reported. For instance, some Muslim children faced frequent bullying at school, including taunts such as 'we don't want you here' and derogatory 'terrorist jokes'. Attempts to address these issues with the headteacher often yielded no results. In the workplace, Muslim participants encountered comments like 'go back home' and 'you lot again' in reaction to news reports of attacks by Muslims.

Jewish participants predominantly experienced physical attacks or attempts (44%), followed by verbal abuse or hostility (39%), discrimination (11%), and bullying (6%). Extreme incidents included being hit by a car, having hair set alight on public transport, and being spat at by a group. Aggressive racial abuse, invoking Hitler and leveraging overseas politics were recurrent themes. Discrimination and bullying were less prevalent among Jewish participants in comparison to the other religious groups.

Hindu participants mostly encountered physical attacks or attempts (39%), discrimination (22%), verbal abuse or hostility (13%), bullying (13%), stereotyping (9%) and one incident of material distribution (4%). Severe physical attacks included being punched in the face, chased and kicked by skinheads, and regular stone-throwing. Discrimination incidents spanned denial of services, entry refusal based on skin colour, and discriminatory hiring and rental practices. Hindu participants, compared to their Muslim and Jewish counterparts, experienced the most discrimination, bullying and ostracism at school.

This section highlights the diverse degrees of victimisation across the three religious' groups, emphasising that while certain types of victimisation were shared, each group faced distinct challenges. Muslims encountered pronounced stereotyping, Jews faced heightened physical attacks, and Hindus experienced elevated discrimination, bullying and school ostracism.

The impact of the constant victimisation, including all forms of victimisation, has been eloquently summarised by Perry (2008):

The descriptions of the impact remind one of a form of water torture, wherein the constant drip, drip, drip on the forehead ultimately unhinges its subject. Taunts are the metaphorical equivalent of the drip, drip, drip.. these incessant, pervasive microaggressions, along with more serious forms of victimisation, wear down their victims, as intended.

Sense of safety among respective community

Participants articulated their perceived sense of security within their respective neighbourhoods and communities. The assessment of safety levels was not contingent upon crime rates or empirical statistics; rather, it was influenced by the assurance derived from residing in close proximity to fellow community members. Participant R3 (a 41-year-old

Muslim male) exemplifies this phenomenon, having grown up in a predominantly Muslim neighbourhood. Despite encountering routine abuse as a Muslim, R3 consistently experienced a genuine sense of safety throughout his life. He reflected on this by stating, 'My entire life, I have always felt secure. Despite Tower Hamlets being a notably challenging area, my identity as a Muslim provided me with a continual sense of safety'. R3 attributed this sense of security to the prevailing comfort found in communal solidarity. However, subsequent to relocating to a predominantly non-Muslim neighbourhood, R3 noted a discernible increase in his anxiety levels and perceived fear:

First time I ever felt it. We used to leave our door open in the council estates. It was that safe for us. There were drug dealers everywhere, but it didn't matter, stabbings everything, it didn't matter, we always felt safe. (R3, Muslim Male, 41)

The Muslim participants collectively agreed that they feel safe within their Muslim communities. FG3 explained:

If it's in a predominantly Muslim area such as Whitechapel, East London Mosque, that area, I would say Muslims generally feel safe. . . But in other places like central London, North London, West London, I would say people do not feel as safe and especially the women, they don't feel safe'. (FG3)

These perspectives align with current literature, illustrating that individuals tend to perceive their local neighbourhood as a safer milieu compared to other settings (Paterson et al., 2008).

Furthermore, the Jewish participants emphasised the profound impact of their Jewish residential area on their sense of safety and mental well-being. Collectively, they elucidated that the Jewish community experiences a heightened sense of safety and security within their own neighbourhood. Participant FG6 encapsulated this sentiment by affirming, 'There isn't much of it here, there isn't much of it at all. You get the odd graffiti, and this and that, but generally speaking, it doesn't really impact us over here'.

However, these assertions diverge from factual accuracy, as antisemitism manifests most evidently within their immediate neighbourhood. Communal data from the Community Security Trust (CST, 2023a) attests to the heightened expression of antisemitic incidents within these localities. This incongruence highlights that the construction of one's sense of safety is not strictly contingent upon crime rates or statistical data but is intricately intertwined with individual cognitive processes. As Sparks et al. (2001) observes, 'Place-awareness nowadays tends to be relational and comparative' (p. 888). R26 expressed that:

People in the United Kingdom don't care or want to help Jewish victims: I am very aware of, if something happened to me in Israel, people will be there to help me. In this country, no one cares about me, besides family, friends, etc. Anything outside of that, if something happens to me, they don't care. No one cares about me. (R26, Jewish male, 26).

The respondents in my research have denoted 'here' (referring to their neighbourhood) as safe, and 'there' (referring to anywhere else outside their neighbourhood) as unsafe. Existing studies on social cohesion show that individuals who feel connected to their communities and are more invested in their neighbourhoods have a lower fear of crime because they feel safer in their community (Swatt et al., 2013). These can often be viewed as places of safety. It is also consistent with the research of Moran and Skeggs (2004), who stress that a sense of community is fundamental to feeling safety because 'community gives you a sense of belonging 'of being yourself', it is, therefore a key factor in experiences of security and safety' (p. 9).

The Hindu participants felt a sense of safety in their neighbourhoods and socialising with other Hindus. R16 (Hindu female, 38) feels more comfortable in her neighbourhood as it is more accepting, 'I know they accept me for who I am. . . It doesn't matter what car I drive, or how I dress up, or whatever. They know OK this person is good, and that is what we need'. As well as this, R14 (Hindu female, 26) feels more bold, resilient and safe when at home in comparison to a foreign country.

There was some conflation of religion and nationality (Hindus and Indians) when Hindu participants discussed the theme of socialisation within their community. R14 (Hindu female, 26) feels more comfortable socialising with Indians:

I've never actually had a friend outside of Indians, only because I don't understand their lifestyle and they probably don't understand mine. We're different lifestyles in that sense. . . I think I wouldn't be my true self. I'd have to hide a part of me. (R14, Hindu Female, 26).

R16 (Hindu female, 38) shared similar feelings of safety when in the company of fellow Hindus. R13 (Hindu male, 22) explains that due to constant feelings of being excluded from society she only chose to socialise with other Indians:

For me, if there's not a lot of Indians around me, I feel very uncomfortable with myself. I would choose only to socialise knowing that there are other Indians around. . . And that's just me feeling very awkward about myself in an environment where there aren't any Indians or Hindus around me because I don't want to be the minority kind of thing. I'd rather there be, you know, you just don't know what people are thinking' (R13, Hindu Male, 22).

Existing scholarly investigations suggest that when individuals experience sensations of threat, fear or anxiety, they exhibit a propensity to seek affiliation with larger groups, a behaviour attributed to an innate inclination for enhanced perceived safety (Tedeschi and Moore, 2021). In R13's experience, he felt less of a minority when he was with other Indians, this created a more comfortable environment for him to be himself and for the authentic expression of his identity.

Similarly, R19 (Hindu male, 19) feels uncomfortable around those who do not share the same culture as him,

I've been growing up seeing people who are brown, like, from my culture. But then when I go out, I see people from different cultures and background with different languages, doing different things. So I might sometimes feel, 'Oh, shit, I don't want to be around them'.

The observed data aligns with the tenets of Social Identity Theory, as posited by Tajfel and Turner (1979). According to this theoretical framework, individuals derive their sense of identity from their affiliation with social groups, which in turn provides them with feelings of belonging, purpose, self-worth and a distinct identity. The deliberate choice to associate oneself predominantly with cultural and religious groups contributes to an enhanced sense of comfort and calm. Current research establishes a correlation between a sense of safety and mental well-being, as evidenced by studies such as those conducted by Allik and Kearns (2017).

Moreover, recognising the significance of feeling secure within a community is paramount, as it not only fosters a sense of belonging but also establishes a support network. This, in turn, has been shown to mitigate stress, reduce feelings of isolation and afford individuals a heightened sense of communal belonging, as substantiated by studies such as those conducted by Stewart and Townley (2020).

Collective responsibility

The concept of collective responsibility was particularly salient among Muslim and Jewish participants, wherein both communities were collectively implicated in triggering events occurring both within the United Kingdom and globally.

Among Muslim respondents, a prevalent theme revolved around the recurrent comparison to terrorists, constituting a pivotal aspect of their victimisation experiences. The ascription of terrorist associations to Muslims was distinctive, as they were collectively held accountable for global terrorist attacks. Participant R1 (Muslim male, 41) recounted instances of verbal abuse at his workplace, where a colleague derogatorily exclaimed, 'here comes ISIS, here comes the terrorist'. Similarly, participant R3 (Muslim male, 25) shared encounters at school where a white teacher directed offensive remarks at a predominantly Muslim classroom, asserting, 'You guys come to the country and you guys bomb stuff and leave. You guys are going to get nowhere in life'. The reinforcement of negative stereotypes through personal encounters was corroborated by a participant in a focus group who articulated:

I feel like a villain, because when something happens- I know I joke about this, but I do say this a lot, that I am guilty until proven innocent. So, I've already lost before I have even started. (FG3).

In addition to the collective attribution of responsibility for terrorist attacks, Muslim participants were subjected to comparisons with individuals involved in child exploitation, constituting a distinct and recurring experience among this demographic. Participant R3 (Muslim male, 25) recounted an incident wherein he was labelled a paedophile by a group of white men who, while uttering slurs, accused, 'You lot groomed young girls, I've seen the documentaries all that stuff'. This derogatory reference pertained to the notorious paedophile ring in Bradford implicated in the grooming of young girls. For Muslim participants, the pervasive theme of collective responsibility, wherein they were held accountable for the actions of others both as terrorists and paedophiles, emerged prominently.

Several Muslim participants conveyed the ramifications on their perceived identity when a fellow Muslim deviated from societal norms. For instance, Focus Group 3 (FG3) explicated:

If an event involving a Muslim happened in the news, the Muslim here will be judged by those around him “This guy’s a Muslim, probably thinks like them as well. . .If a Muslim does it, all of a sudden, everyone is on trial. Muslims feel victimised, as well, and they have to walk on eggshells. (Muslim Male, FG3).

The Jewish participants in the study similarly encountered a recurring theme of collective responsibility, particularly stemming from incidents related to the Israeli-Arab conflict. Tensions emanating from the conflict in Israel have contributed to a palpable divide between the Muslim and Jewish communities in the United Kingdom. Instances of victimisation among Jewish participants included being subjected to verbal harassment with slogans such as ‘Free Palestine’. A notable incident involved participant R27 (Jewish man, 57), who faced physical threats outside a synagogue in central London. Five Muslim men, one carrying a Lebanese flag, confronted him, with one individual explicitly demanding, ‘Say free Palestine or I’m going to hit you in the face’. Despite R27’s non-compliance, the threat persisted, with the man reiterating the ultimatum.

In addition, a focus group participant recounted an incident from 2021 wherein pro-Palestinian vehicles drove through a Jewish neighbourhood in NW London, shouting antisemitic abuse and brandishing Palestinian flags. The derogatory slurs employed during this episode were explicit and offensive, including phrases such as ‘F*** all of them. F*** their mothers, rape their daughters’ (FG4). Moreover, instances of antisemitism were reported by R28 (Jewish man, 39) and R30 (Jewish man, 63) in their professional capacities as schoolteachers. In both cases, students shouted ‘Free Palestine’ at them and left printed Palestinian flags on their desks. These incidents underline the perceptible impact of the Israel-Palestine conflict on British Jews, implicating them collectively in the ongoing Israeli-Arab discord.

In contrast, the Hindu participants demonstrated a lesser degree of association with notions of collective responsibility. Nevertheless, focus group participants recounted instances of heightened tensions between the Hindu and Muslim communities, attributing the primary threat to Hindus as a consequence of the India-Pakistan conflict. During the celebration of Indian Independence Day outside the Indian Embassy in 2018, the event was disrupted by Pakistani protestors and pro-Khalistan enthusiasts who pelted eggs and stones at the embassy building and the gathered Indian community. One participant in the focus group articulated:

For whenever they have Independence Day or republic day, all these are Muslims. It is only they attack the embassy, and they literally ruined the entire building by throwing any kind of nonsense on the wall and eggs bricks and everything. This has been happening continuously. So, what is their problem? I mean generally Hindus are very peace-loving people. (Hindu Male, FG7)

FG7 continue to explain:

Coachloads came from Bradford to demonstrate outside the Indian embassy. The road between Aldwych and Charing Cross was totally blocked. We were so frightened. (Hindu Male, FG7)

In a separate incident, Islamists assaulted Hindus in Leicester in August 2022 following India's cricket victory. One participant in Focus Group 9 remarked, 'Activity where Indians succeed, there's always some fights and something like this happening all the time. When India wins, that is what happens'.

The theme of collective responsibility was clearly prevalent among Muslim and Jewish participants. Both communities experienced victimisation in connection with triggering events of global significance. It is noteworthy that occurrences transpiring on an international scale have exerted a direct influence on the experiences of British citizens, implicating them in events beyond their control and responsibility.

Visibility

Visibility assumes a crucial role in instances of religious hate crimes, where perpetrators actively seek discernible indicators of religious identity to identify their victims. Participants in the study acknowledged that their susceptibility to victimisation is contingent upon their public visibility, and they drew a direct correlation between instances of religious dress and subsequent victimisation.

Within the cohort of Muslim participants, it was observed that Muslim females were more frequently targeted than their male counterparts. The hijab, in particular, became a focal point of abuse, with perpetrators making derogatory comments, attempting to forcibly remove it, or endeavouring to damage it. For instance, participant R9 (Muslim female, 29) faced harassment from a group of English Defence League (EDL) supporters while smoking, who questioned her hijab and subsequently burned it with a cigarette. Another participant, R15 (Muslim female, 33), encountered a similar incident when a white man shouted disapproving remarks about her hijab while she was walking home. Furthermore, R9 (Muslim female, 29) experienced verbal abuse and threats while working at Superdrug, with the aggressor threatening to forcibly remove her hijab. Similarly, while R11 (Muslim female, 50) was in a Tesco car park, a group of teenagers spat at her hijab.

The heightened targeting of Muslim females as opposed to their male counterparts is consistent with existing research that posits female Muslims as perceived "weak" and "oppressed" (Zempi, 2018), thereby rendering them more susceptible targets for hate crimes. As articulated by R9:

I feel like people that target hijabs, they have this thing in their head: if I'm going to say something to a hijab, she's not going to respond back. She's going to put her head down and start crying and get scared. (R9, Muslim Female, 29)

Jewish participants, distinguishable by their traditional religious attire, found themselves susceptible to targeted abuse due to their marked visibility. For instance, while shopping

at a toy store, R22 (Jewish woman, 34) was approached by two women who expressed a desire to harm Jews. On another occasion, a group of teenagers accosted R22's son, making derogatory remarks referencing Hitler. Similarly, R23 (Jewish female, 37) encountered an incident where an elderly man directed offensive language, specifically targeting her as a Jew, while admonishing another individual. The overt markers of identification led to a vehicular incident involving R26 (Jewish female, 66) and her visibly Orthodox Jewish husband, wherein a car drove directly towards them. In another occurrence, R26 (Jewish male, 26) experienced an attempt to knock off his kappel and burn his hair by two white boys while on a bus. Furthermore, while R30 (Jewish male, 63) was returning from the synagogue in Golders Green, a car with four Muslim men stopped, and he was spat on his face.

These incidents have engendered a profound sense of vulnerability among Jewish participants, who are acutely cognisant of their identifiable markers of visibility, rendering them potential targets for abuse. R21 (Jewish female, 38) extends this heightened awareness to concerns about the safety of her children in public spaces, expressing anxiety about their potential vulnerability as targets. R21 articulated:

Whenever we go out, whether it's on the tube or we're in London, there's always that conscious- especially when we're with children. Sometimes in the past, depending on where we are going, I might have said to the children 'Wear a cap'. (R21, Jewish female, 38)

R22 (Jewish female, 34) expressed apprehension concerning the vulnerability of her family members as potential targets, particularly when her sons venture outside the Jewish neighbourhood. To mitigate this unease, she finds reassurance when her sons wear a cap, concealing their kappel.

The concept of visibility also featured prominently among Hindu participants, where the colour of their skin became a significant marker of victimisation. The empirical findings revealed that Hindu participants were notably prone to racial abuse based on their ethnicity. Owing to their darker pigmentation, Hindu participants encountered racial slurs, such as being derogatorily labelled as P*ki*. For instance, since a young age, R7 (Hindu male, 50) endured persistent racial abuse from a group of white skin-heads who physically assaulted him, threw stones, and subjected him to racial epithets like P*ki*. Similarly, R12 (Hindu female, 42) faced harassment in secondary school, where the colour of her skin became a target, leading to derogatory comments referring to her as 'brown like sh*t' in school corridors. Blatant discrimination based on ethnicity was evident when R14 (Hindu female, 26) was denied entry into a bar in Lisbon due to her darker complexion, with other patrons in the queue explicitly stating, 'They're not letting you in because you're too dark'.

Hindu participants encountered derogatory comments frequently, associated with their visible markers of identity. For instance, R14 (Hindu female, 26), leaving a temple dressed in Sarris with her father, experienced a distressing incident where a passing group threw cows' feet at them and instructed them to 'go back to where you belong'. Similarly, R16 (Hindu female, 38), wearing a Bindi at school, became a target for consistent bullying and abuse, with peers making insensitive comments about the mark on her face.

The theme of visibility emerged as an evident factor in the experiences of abuse across all three religious' groups. A salient observation was that virtually all participants in this research were visibly identifiable as belonging to their religious group, rendering them potential targets for abuse.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the research findings demonstrate an urgent need for robust law enforcement measures to address the range and recurrence of hate crimes experienced by Muslim, Jewish and Hindu communities. The high prevalence of hate incidents across all three groups – spanning physical assaults, verbal abuse, discrimination, and bullying – reveals not only the severe impact on individuals but also underscores the inadequacy of current responses in preventing these crimes. The fact that a significant number of participants have been subjected to repeated victimisation points to systemic failures in protective measures and legal enforcement. This alarming frequency of hate incidents also illuminates a pressing need to strengthen support mechanisms within law enforcement to more effectively deter, address and follow up on hate crimes that target individuals based on visible religious or cultural markers.

This article elucidates that, despite variations in the degree and extent of incidents, victimisation is observable across all three religious' groups. The diverse nature and severity of these incidents notwithstanding, each religious community has encountered a spectrum of victimisation, spanning from physical abuse to the dissemination of hateful material. A recurring theme shared among participants is the profound sense of solace and security within their respective neighbourhoods. The research data further highlights that hate crimes impact not just the immediate victims but also their communities, amplifying fear and diminishing individuals' perceived sense of safety, particularly outside of familiar, culturally homogeneous neighbourhoods. Despite the profound sense of solace and security within their respective neighbourhoods, respondents from all three religious groups reported increased anxiety and fear when venturing outside these areas. This dichotomy between local perceptions of safety and actual experiences of victimisation reveals a fragile sense of security that is reliant on isolation rather than comprehensive legal protections. Thus, law enforcement must actively address hate crimes not just within victimised communities but across all public spaces, ensuring consistent and visible protective measures to help bridge the gap between perceived and real security.

Noteworthy, shared experiences, particularly evident among Muslims and Jews, involve elements of collective responsibility. In stark contrast to Hindu participants, the burden of being held accountable for global actions was most pronounced among Muslim and Jewish individuals. This underscores the need for public awareness campaigns to challenge and dismantle these harmful stereotypes. The visibility of religious or cultural markers, such as hijabs, traditional Jewish attire or even skin colour, has been shown to exacerbate vulnerability to hate crimes across all three groups. These findings indicate that hate crimes are often opportunistic and targeted towards individuals with outwardly identifiable traits. Protective measures, education, and increased awareness about the significance of religious attire and symbols are therefore necessary to protect individuals from targeted abuse. Such measures could enhance victims' confidence that law enforcement is committed to protecting visibly vulnerable groups from targeted abuse.

Addressing hate crimes requires a multifaceted approach that goes beyond general measures and considers the unique experiences and vulnerabilities of different religious groups. A nuanced approach is vital to effectively support victims and prevent future incidents.

- i. Educational Initiatives:** Implementing educational programmes in schools and communities can promote understanding, tolerance and cultural sensitivity. These programmes should address the specific stereotypes and prejudices faced by each religious group.
- ii. Community Engagement:** Fostering interfaith dialogue and community-based programmes can build relationships and mutual understanding among different religious communities. This helps to create a more cohesive and supportive social environment.
- iii. Public Awareness Campaigns:** Campaigns that highlight the harmful effects of collective responsibility and the importance of respecting religious markers can help reduce incidents of hate crime and improve public attitudes towards minority religious groups.

The findings also have direct implications for law enforcement measures:

- i. Targeted Training:** Law enforcement officers should receive training on the specific types of victimisation faced by different religious groups. This includes understanding the nuances of stereotyping, discrimination and physical attacks related to religious attire and symbols.
- ii. Community Policing:** Building strong relationships between law enforcement and religious communities can enhance trust and cooperation. Community policing strategies should be employed to ensure that officers are seen as allies and protectors within these communities.
- iii. Reporting Mechanisms:** Encouraging and facilitating the reporting of hate crimes is crucial. Law enforcement agencies should ensure that reporting mechanisms are accessible, culturally sensitive and provide support for victims throughout the process.
- iv. Legal Framework:** Strengthening legal frameworks to address hate crimes, including harsher penalties for crimes motivated by religious hatred, can act as a deterrent. Ensuring that hate crime laws are robust and effectively enforced is essential.

By understanding the specific needs and challenges faced by different religious groups, law enforcement and community support systems can develop more effective strategies to combat hate crimes and protect vulnerable populations.

Implementing these proposals requires a concerted effort from government agencies, non-profit organisations, religious institutions and the broader community. Collaboration and ongoing commitment are essential to creating a society where individuals of all religious backgrounds can live free from fear and discrimination.

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Author biographies

Dr. Maya Flax's doctoral studies centred on hate crime, a field that continues to captivate her scholarly pursuits. She has published widely in this field, with a specific focus on religious hate crime and bystanders to hate crime. She is an active researcher who explores issues of miscarriages of justice, being ostracised from religious groups, and teaching enhancement, which is aligned to her passion for teaching. She is, at present, embarking on a funded research project exploring the experiences of individuals with multiple minority identities who have experienced hate crime.

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