

Hate speech: Crime against Muslims

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CASS

Corpus Approaches
to Social Science

CASS: Briefings

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Contents

About CASS...

The ESRC funded Centre for Corpus Approaches to Social Science (CASS) is a research centre based at Lancaster University which aims to bring the methods and benefits of the corpus approach to other disciplines.

From the Centre Director

The corpus approach harnesses the power of computers to allow analysts to work to produce machine aided analyses of large bodies of language data - so-called *corpora*. Computers allow us to do this on a scale and with a depth that would typically defy analysis by hand and eye alone.

In doing so, we gain unprecedented insights into the use and manipulation of language in society. The centre's work is generating such insights into a range of important social issues like climate change, hate crime and education. This series of briefings aims to spread the social impact and benefits of the work being done by the centre and, in so doing, encourage others to use our methods in future.

Prof. Tony McEnergy

Introduction.....	3
Data.....	4
Key findings.....	5
Tackling hateful invective - some recommendations...	8



The notion of 'hate crime' might conjure up an image of premeditated violence perpetrated by a bigoted thug. But in reality, a majority of so-called 'hate crimes' are committed with little aforethought by very ordinary people in ordinary circumstances and involve a verbal assault rather than physical attack.

Data recently published by the Home Office Data Hub show that hate crimes are far more likely to involve 'hate speech crimes' — public order offences which cause public fear, alarm or distress, or amount to harassment — than overall recorded crime.

Well-over half of all 'hate crimes' involve such offences whereby hateful invective is hurled rather than fists flung.

Often, these offences are referred to as 'low level' because they don't inflict physical injury. But the mental wounds can be severe as evidenced by studies of post-victimisation distress and the testimony of victims. We all know the old-adage 'sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me'. What an awful lie. The emotional wounds inflicted by hateful invective can linger long beyond the time it takes for physical injuries to heal.

Experiences of hateful invective against Muslims were recently illuminated by a research report on *Crime and Religion in Lancashire* launched by the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Lancashire and Lancashire County Council. See more here:

- http://www.report-it.org.uk/files/home_office_hate_crime_data_201314.pdf
- <http://www.lancashire-pcc.gov.uk/News-and-Events/News-Archive/2014/Commissioner-backs-hate-crime-report.aspx>

This briefing provides the key research findings from the project as it provided important groundwork for a CASS research project launched in 2014 on *The management of hateful invective by the courts*.

Data

The key elements of the research for the *Crime and Religion in Lancashire* project consisted of:

- A mail survey of Mosques, Madrassas and Muslim centres in Lancashire carried out in collaboration with the Lancashire Council of Mosques. Fifty-two completed questionnaires were returned from 115 distributed.

- Six research group meetings involving 118 participants who responded to invitations to discuss crime and religion in Lancashire. They included a mixed faith, mixed sex, group of young people, three women's groups, one specifically with 'revert' (or convert) participants, and two groups of men working in the night-time economy as taxi drivers, in restaurants, and in takeaways.
- An analysis of anonymised police records for all 288 crimes recorded as 'religiously aggravated' by Lancashire Constabulary for the period January 2011 to June 2013.

Key findings

The group meetings elicited accounts of numerous incidents of verbal abuse and other acts of hostility and incivility. The experience is so frequent that it is seen to be normal or 'part of life'. Only a few incidents of physical assault were reported in the research.

- Reported acts of victimisation were almost entirely opportunistic, rather than pre-planned.
- Children feature among the perpetrators, although all ages of perpetrators were involved, and both women and men.

- The most common locations of incidents were in town centres, on public transport, in car parks and supermarkets.
- This pattern of experience by Muslim communities is similar to what we know about racially and religiously aggravated victimisation of other communities.
- However, distinctly, Muslim women wearing the veil were perceived to be at particular risk of victimisation — especially Muslim women ‘reverts’.
- While victims were subject to abuse because of their religious identity as Muslims, their religion was generally not the subject of abuse. The most common terms of abuse were “Paki” for men and “Ninja” for women. Others were called “Taliban” and some “terrorist”. “Go back to your own country” was shouted at some.

The survey of Mosques, Madrassas and Muslim centres in Lancashire revealed that over half of the respondents had been verbally abused in Lancashire in the past 24 months. Most stated that it had happened more than once. Most incidents occurred nearby the Mosque, Madrassa or Muslim Centre. Just two respondents reported being physically assaulted.

Two-thirds of respondents believed that the incident seemed to be motivated by hostility towards their religion, with most also believing that they were picked on because of their 'race', ethnicity or skin colour.

Of the 288 religiously aggravated crimes recorded by Lancashire Constabulary between January 2011 and June 2013 the largest single category were against Muslims with most involving abuse and invective in which the word "Muslim" was used.

- In a number of cases Muslims were associated with terrorism in the invective that was used.
- The shouting of the word "Ninja" at veiled Muslim women characterised some of the incidents.
- Some instances of anti-Muslim invective were combined with racist invective, with the word "Paki" being employed as a term of abuse.

When it comes to the **policing of religiously aggravated incidents**, the research found that many incidents were not reported to the police. The reasons most commonly offered by victims were that:

- The experiences have become so normal they are not seen as crimes.

- The normality of victimisation leads to feelings of resignation that nothing can be done by the police and hence there is no point in reporting incidents.
- The fleeting nature of verbal abuse and the absence of trace evidence after the incident leave the impression that nothing could be done even if incidents were reported to the police.
- Some also believed that the police have other pressing priorities and hence they would not be interested or bothered about verbal abuse as it would be seen to be trivial.

Tackling hateful invective - some recommendations

Public awareness campaign

As many victims of verbal abuse will be unsure about what they have experienced is a crime, a public awareness raising campaign could be used to better inform victims. This might encourage more reporting of incidents to the police. Such a campaign should focus specifically on verbal abuse, sending a message that words hurt, words can be a crime, and they will be taken seriously by the police and the rest of the criminal justice system. The message will also be sent to potential abusive name-callers, that their behaviour will not be tolerated.

Bystander training

Bystander training for public sector employees and for employees of commercial organisations who come into contact with the public would potentially provide support to victims immediately following incidents and might encourage reporting to the police.

Publicising prosecutions

Successful prosecutions of offenders should be publicised to demonstrate that there can be positive outcomes and that it can be worthwhile for victims to report incidents.

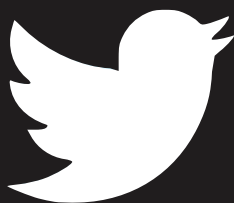
Part of our aim at CASS is to make Corpus Linguistics accessible, which is why we have created our **free online FutureLearn course**. With the course, we aim to demonstrate that corpus approaches can offer researchers from all disciplines unique, valuable insights into the use and manipulation of language in society. We provide all you need to start 'doing' Corpus Linguistics yourself.

This briefing should act as an introduction and companion to the course where you will begin to apply the concepts and methods mentioned here in a practical way relevant to your field of interest.

The course is free, can be done from home, and comes with a whole range of content and support from world-leading scholars in the field of Corpus Linguistics. For more, visit:

futurelearn.com/courses/corpus-linguistics

For more about CASS and our
freely available resources, please
visit: **cass.lancs.ac.uk**



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CASS: Briefings is a series of short, quick reads on the work being done at the ESRC/CASS research centre at Lancaster University, UK. Commissioning work from internationally recognised academics in the field of Corpus Linguistics, *CASS: Briefings* set out to make cutting edge research easily accessible, providing a good introduction to the variety of vital and exciting research going on in the area of Corpus Linguistics.

