

# **BEYOND THE INCIDENT**

**Outcomes for Victims of  
Anti-Muslim Prejudice**



**Executive Summary**

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# **Beyond the Incident: Outcomes for Victims of Anti-Muslim Prejudice**

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**



**23 July 2018**

# Director's Statement

Tell MAMA has become the leading response and support service for victims of anti-Muslim hatred and Islamophobia in the UK. This report outlines a variety of cases in both online and offline (street-based) environments.

In this report we also outline, once again, the substantive numbers of cases which involve institutional prejudice against Muslims, including discrimination in the provision of goods and services, or in the workplace.

Our reports from 2012 onwards have shown a rise in anti-Muslim hate incidents and this is a combination of a rise in public awareness, partly due to our work, and because there are more anti-Muslim incidents taking place. This report looks at the outcomes for victims of anti-Muslim hate and, whilst there are more reports that are being lodged with Tell MAMA, we have real concerns as to outcomes for victims once they gain access to the police or justice service, or report discrimination issues at work.



Our quality control measures mean that we attempt to get outcomes through advocacy and detailed casework for those reporting in, but victims have repeatedly informed us that their journey with police forces has left them ill-informed about the nature of their case and, in some instances, they have felt as if they were a nuisance, which was reflected in the way that they were being treated. This is unacceptable and these experiences chime with the recent report launch<sup>1</sup> by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS). Their findings paint a picture of structural inconsistencies between police forces in the recording of hate crimes, the support offered to victims and, worst of all, victims have been made to feel that their perceptions of why they were attacked were not fully considered.

In a climate where anti-Muslim hate and Islamophobia is being mainstreamed through political discourse, media headlines and organised far-right and so-called 'alt-right' groups, the fact is that manufacturing anti-Muslim hate has become a lucrative business for some, is sadly here to stay and will continue to have real-world impacts in our country. This means that more people will be affected and, if victims experience poor outcomes when they engage with statutory bodies, mistrust will continue to grow.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmicfrs/wp-content/uploads/understanding-the-difference-the-initial-police-response-to-hate-crime.pdf>

Given the importance of positive outcomes, and with large gaps in good quality services for victims of hate crimes, we believe that this report is much needed to highlight these simple but vital facts. In the end, whether hate incidents lead to prosecutions or not, victims want four simple things: to be treated with dignity, to be kept informed about developments in their case, and ensure that other courses of action are made available to them if the Crown Prosecution Service chooses not to prosecute. Finally, they want to be believed when reporting discrimination to their employers, or hate crimes and incidents to the police. Without that, trust is lost.

**Iman Atta OBE**

# Peer Review Statement

This 2017 Review by Tell MAMA documents 1,201 verified incidents of anti-Muslim hatred with 3,005 incidents reported over the last three years. This clearly demonstrates the ongoing need for action to tackle anti-Muslim hatred in the UK. Seventy per cent of incidents in 2017 took place offline and just over half of these involved incidents of abusive behaviour with physical attacks accounting for nearly 20%. It is concerning that 2017 saw a 56% increase in incidents involving discrimination and an 88% increase in vandalism. Most incidents of anti-Muslim hatred took place in public areas and transport networks; however, this year, 12% took place in or around private property or households – a 26% increase from the previous year. These incidents took place across the UK; they are not restricted to specific regions. Most victims of anti-Muslim hatred are women and most of the perpetrators are male. A clear majority (72%) of the perpetrators are white men with younger men – including teenagers – being some of the main perpetrators. The Report presents important recommendations, including those aimed at businesses, at educational institutions and at social media companies. Anti-Muslim hatred is clearly a serious issue that needs to be addressed urgently.

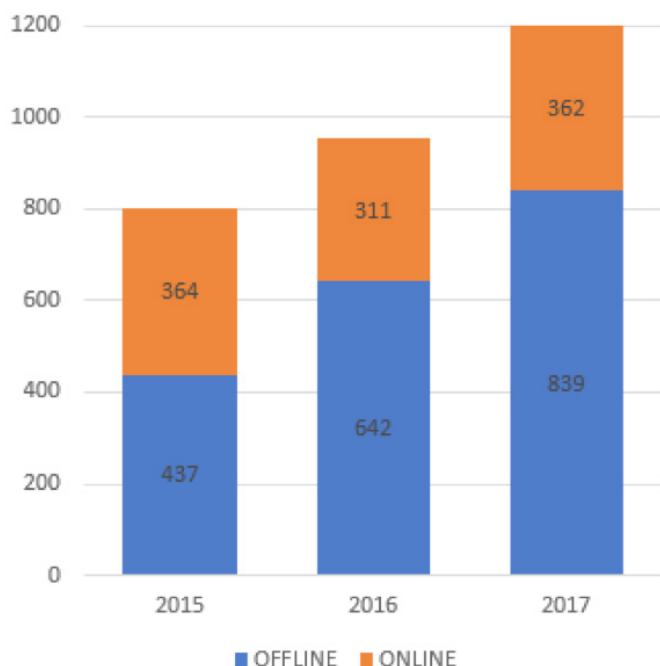
**Professor Peter Hopkins, Newcastle University**

# Executive Summary

In 2017, Tell MAMA recorded a total of 1,380 reports. Of these reports, 1,201 were verified as being anti-Muslim or Islamophobic in nature and as having occurred in the UK between January and December 2017. More than two thirds of verified incidents occurred offline, or at street level (70%, n=839), which represents a 30% rise in offline reports when compared with the previous reporting period (n=642). An 'offline' or 'street-level' incident means that the incident either occurred in person between a victim and a perpetrator, or that the incident involved vandalism, which includes the targeting of Islamic institutions, and the homes of Muslims, or property owned by Muslims.

Crimes or incidents that are classified as 'online' occurred on social media platforms such as Facebook or Twitter, or on other Internet-based platforms, were verified as having happened within the UK, and account for a third of reports in 2017 (n=362), which represents a 16.3% rise in reports when compared with the previous reporting period (n=311). This small rise can be partially attributed to the way in which ideologically-motivated social media users felt emboldened by major 'trigger' events and broader anti-Muslim discourses in the public sphere. This figure, however, should be viewed as part of a wider trend in our data sets, where there has been a marked shift towards more serious offline incidents. These include physical attacks, threatening behaviour, discrimination, and abuse more generally. There is also a growing awareness of Tell MAMA among key stakeholders and partners in Muslim communities, resulting in a greater willingness amongst victims and witnesses to report.

## Verified Anti-Muslim Incidents 2015–2017 (N=3,005)



Over the last three years, Tell MAMA has recorded 3,005 verified Islamophobic incidents across the UK. While the number of online incidents has remained relatively constant, we have recorded a steady increase in offline anti-Muslim incidents year-on-year. Between 2015 and 2016, we recorded a 46.9% increase in offline incidents. This trend continued in 2017, with a 30.6% rise in verified offline reports.

## Outcomes for Anti-Muslim Incidents in 2017

In addition to providing a summary of key trends associated with anti-Muslim incidents, this report will go beyond the initial victimisation to explore the outcomes of incidents reported to Tell MAMA in 2017. It will analyse the impact of anti-Muslim abuse and discrimination on victims, particularly as it pertains to the ways in which the incidents were reacted to by different actors, including criminal justice agencies, civil institutions and individuals. This includes both the short and long-term psychological and physical impacts victimisation has had on the overall wellbeing of victims. It is both the initial victimisation as well as the victims' own experience of **Criminal Justice Outcomes**, **Civil Outcomes** and **Informal Outcomes** that contribute to the overall impact that anti-Muslim hatred and Islamophobia can have on Muslims in the UK.

## Causes of Victim Impact



The category of **Criminal Justice Outcomes** refers to the results of actions taken by criminal justice agencies in response to anti-Muslim incidents. This includes results that arise from arrests, convictions, custodial sentences, community sentencing or, in contrast, inaction by the police, along with formal action taken against the victim in the form of counter-allegations.

The category of **Civil Outcomes** refers to the results of actions taken by councils, educational institutions, private companies, or employers in response to anti-Muslim incidents. This may include results that arise from disciplinary procedures for abusive staff, the exclusion of perpetrators of Islamophobic bullying in schools, or a penalty notice for abusive neighbours, along with formal action taken against the victim in the form of counter-allegations.

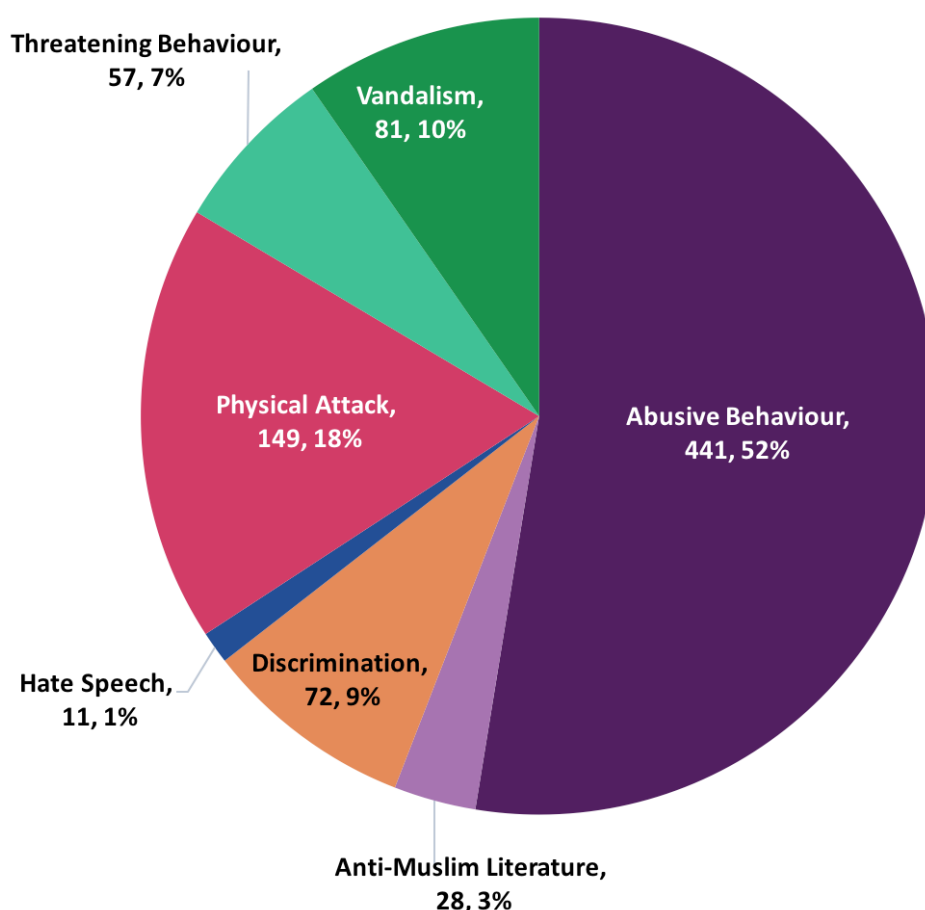
The category of **Informal Outcomes** refers to the results of actions taken by witnesses in response to anti-Muslim incidents, including interventions, along with the results of informal actions taken by individuals in positions of authority, including directing verbal warnings toward perpetrators, or support for a victim. However, this may also refer to results that arise from the inaction of witnesses or authority figures, or their support for, or defence of, a perpetrator of an anti-Muslim incident.

## Key Trends in Offline Anti-Muslim Incidents

Consistent with previous reports, the two most common incident categories were **Abusive Behaviour** and **Physical Attack**: 70% of verified offline incidents included directly abusive, violent, or threatening behaviour (**Abusive Behaviour** 52%, n=441; **Physical Attack** 18%, n=149).

In 2017, we recorded a 56% increase in cases of **Discrimination** and an 88% increase in **Vandalism** when compared with the previous data set.

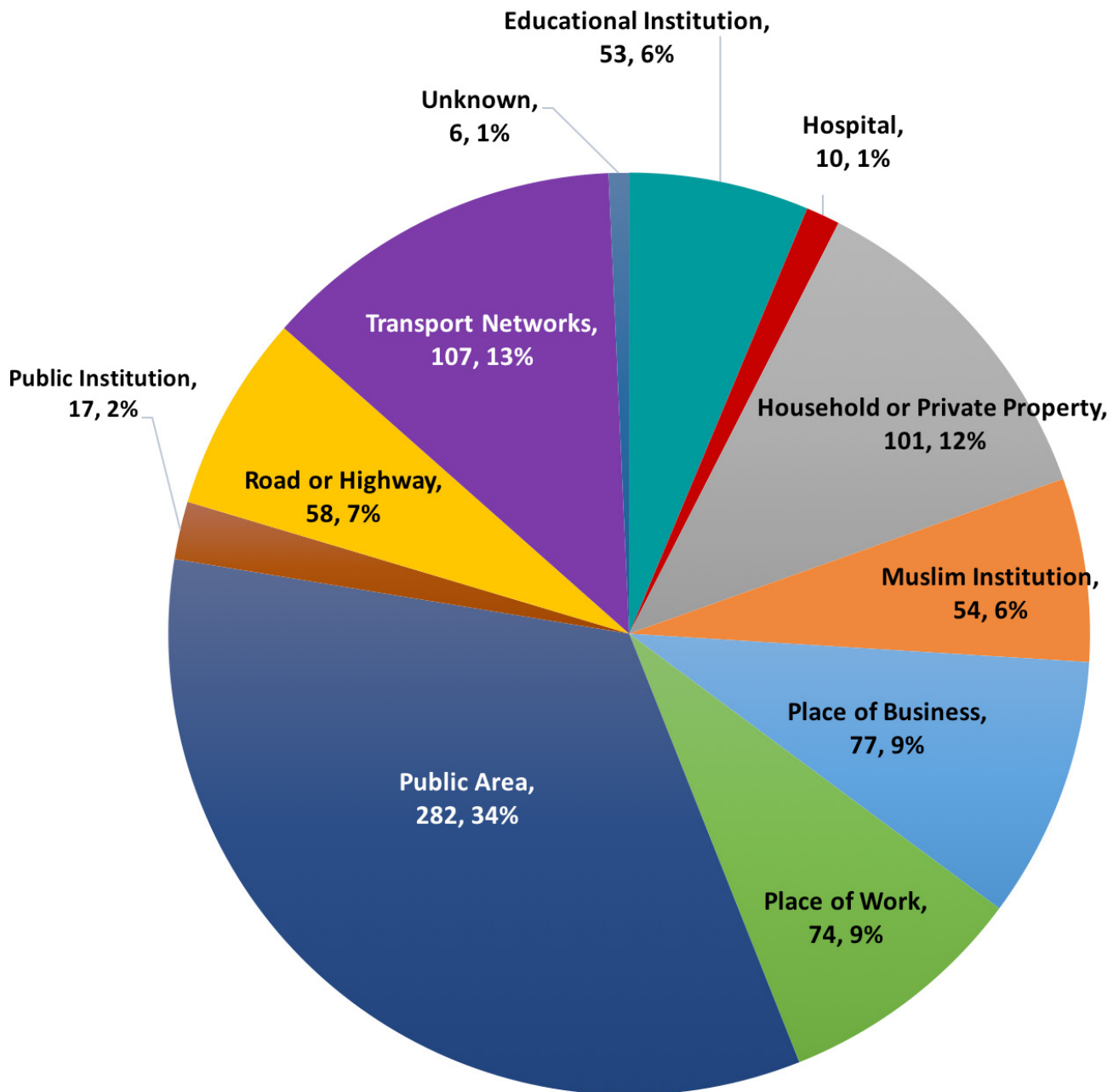
Verified Offline Anti-Muslim Incidents 2017 by Category (N=839)



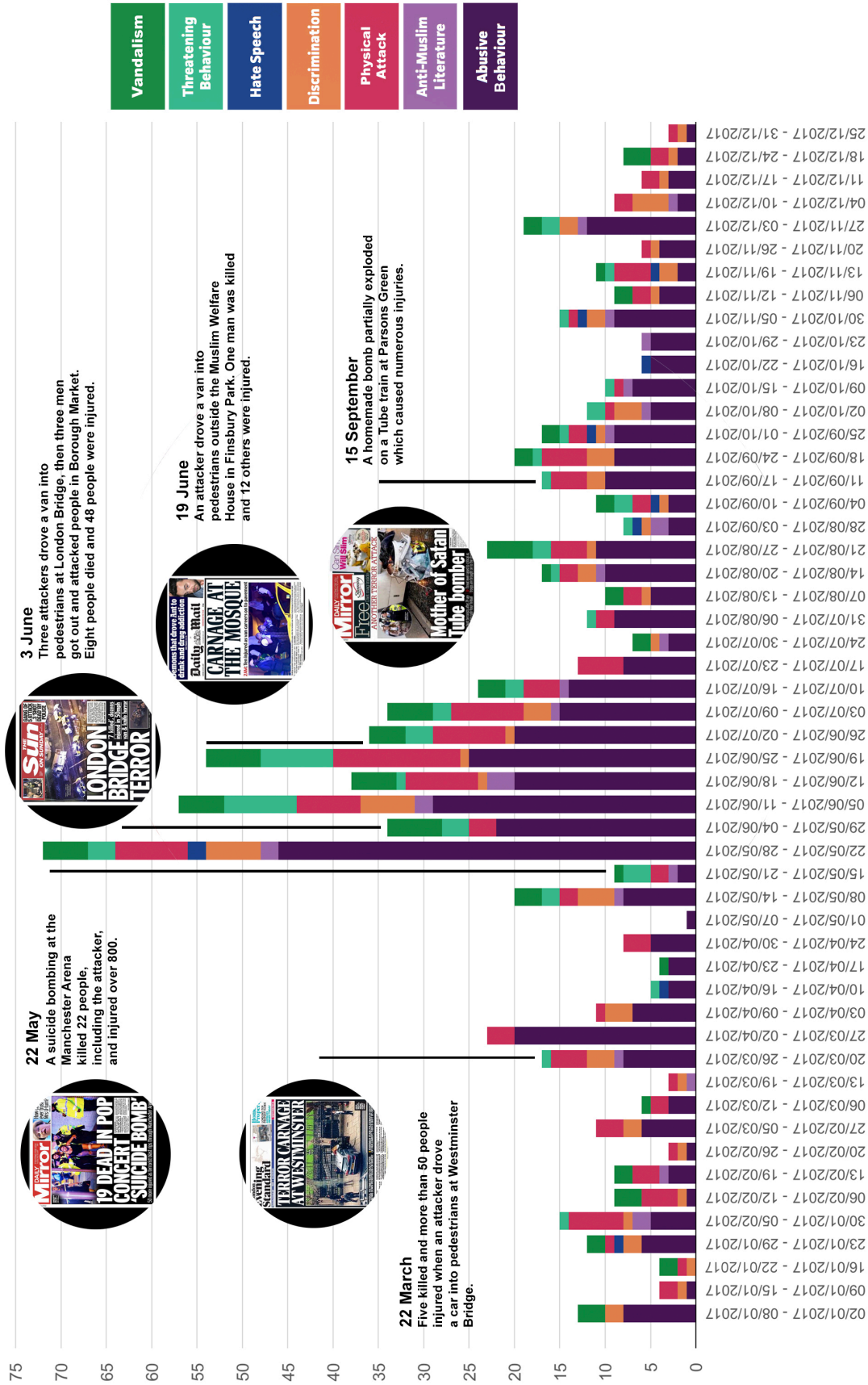
The two most common locations for incidents were busy public spaces or transport networks (**Public Area**, 34%, n=282; **Transport Networks** 13%, n=107).

The third most common place for incidents to occur was in or around a **Household or Private Property** (12%, n=101), which is a 26% increase over the previous year.

**Verified Offline Anti-Muslim Incidents 2017 by Place Category (N=839)**



# High-Profile Events 2017: Verified Street Based Incidents by Week



## High-Profile Events and Anti-Muslim Incidents

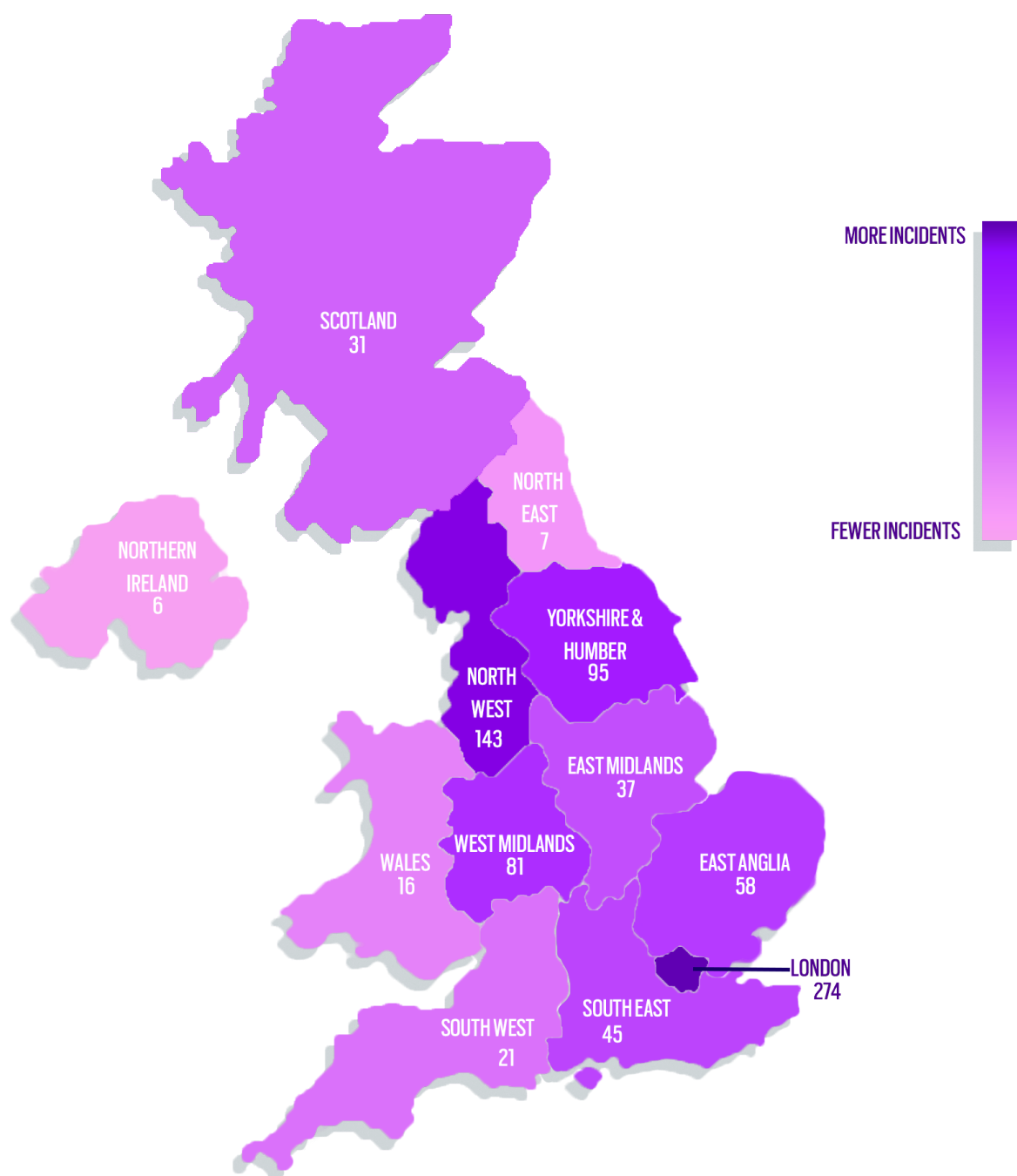
In 2017, there were several high-profile domestic terrorist incidents in the UK. As documented within our 2016 Annual Report, events which stimulate public discourse on immigration and Islam can correspond with a demonstrable 'spike' in anti-Muslim hate crimes and incidents. It is vital to note, however, that these events are not the underlying cause of anti-Muslim incidents, but rather, as the term implies, act as triggers, where people with latent racial prejudices feel emboldened to act on their views, violently or otherwise. Perpetrators often reference mainstream discourse concerning immigration and terrorism alongside broadly Islamophobic and dehumanising language to abuse their victims.

Tell MAMA recorded a 475% increase in the number of offline anti-Muslim incidents reported in the week following the UK 2016 EU referendum. However, this spike was dwarfed by the 700% increase recorded in the week following the Manchester Arena attack on 22 May 2017, with 72 reports recorded seven days after the terror attack, compared with 9 reports in the previous week.

Conventional wisdom would suggest that incidents of Islamophobic abuse are more prevalent in areas with higher Muslim populations. However, as discussed in our 2015 report, *The Geography of Anti-Muslim Hatred*, there may also be regional factors to consider when analysing hate crime trends, which include issues of deprivation, population density, variations in the density of transport networks, local policing and public awareness of Tell MAMA in that location.

The map overleaf provides a regional breakdown of the number of anti-Muslim incidents reported to Tell MAMA. The highest proportion of anti-Muslim incidents occurred in London (34%, n=274, where location data was available). North West England had the highest number of incidents outside London (18%, n=143). Yorkshire and Humber (12%, n=95), along with West Midlands (10%, n=81), also had a significant proportion of reports.

**Verified Anti-Muslim Incidents reported to Tell MAMA in 2017 by Region  
(N=839) (Unknown location= 25)**



## 2017 Victims and Perpetrators of Anti-Muslim Incidents

We identified 978 victims and 1,161 perpetrators in 839 incidents in our 2017 data set. Our previous annual reports have evidenced that Islamophobia is heavily gendered:

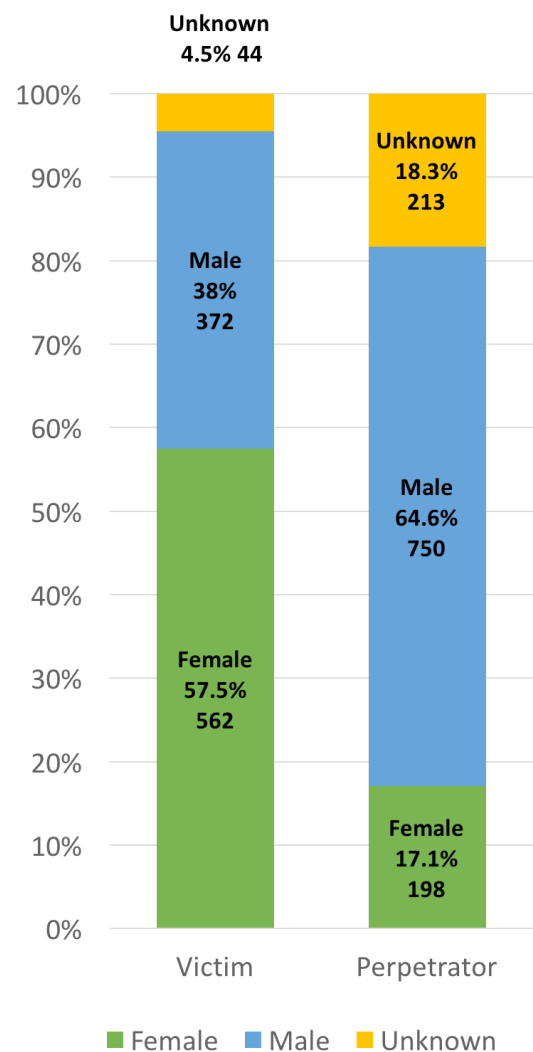
- Most victims are female (57.5%, n=562) while most perpetrators are male (64.6%, n=750).
- 72% of the perpetrators are white men (518) where ethnicity and gender data is available (n=724).
- Over half of the victims are visibly Muslim women (53%, n=353) where data is available (n=669).

### Gender of Victims (N=978) and Perpetrators (N=1,161)

Victims and perpetrators of Islamophobic incidents can be of any age. However, the most common age range of victims was **26–35** and the most common age range of perpetrators was **13–18** (where the data was available). Given that many cases involve low-level abuse, harassment or violence, victims understandably are sometimes unable to recall the precise age of the perpetrator. The age range of perpetrators may reflect a wider problem of Islamophobic bullying in educational institutions.

There is a much higher proportion of victims who were **under 12** (15%, n=85) than perpetrators **under 12** (4%, n=24), where age category data was available.

However, it can be argued that a high proportion of perpetrators are aged **13–18** due to the prevalence of so-called ‘thrill-seeking’ hate crime which McDevitt (2002) defines as the most common form of hate crime whereby perpetrators abuse their victim for their own entertainment.<sup>2</sup>



<sup>2</sup> McDevitt, J., Levin, J. and Bennett, S. 'Hate Crime Offenders: An Expanded Typology', Journal of Social Issues 58 (2002).

## General Recommendations

- Anti-Muslim incidents frequently occur in busy public spaces. These include public areas such as shopping areas, in and around public transport networks, roads or highways, and restaurants. Perpetrators are more likely to act in spaces where they feel they can act with impunity. Therefore, existing preventative measures, where appropriate, should be utilised, and where such measures are lacking or absent, steps should be taken to address such inadequacies.
- High-profile events, along with associated media coverage, stimulate public discourse on issues such as terrorism, religious expression, and immigration can legitimise racist, xenophobic and Islamophobic prejudice. Individuals with underlying prejudice may feel emboldened to victimise those they feel to be deserving of abuse so as to defend the status of the dominant 'in-group'. The government and media outlets must consider how their choice of language influences wider public discourse.
- Perpetrators often target victims who are in a vulnerable position relative to themselves, whether that be physically or socially. This may be related to age, gender, disability, class, and racial or religious identity.
- Those in authority, including representatives of law enforcement agencies, and civil authorities such as teachers, council officials and employers, should be aware of any potential power imbalance when responding to a report of identity-based abuse or discrimination. Those in a privileged position due to their social status will invariably have an advantage when it comes to negotiating their case with the appropriate agencies.
- Individuals with vulnerabilities may need additional support and, therefore, resources need to be allocated within institutions, organisations, and private companies to train staff accordingly. Cultivating a better institutional knowledge of the situations in which such individuals can be scapegoated for broader social ills, and ultimately marginalised, would enable this.
- We should not underestimate the power of public statements condemning and combating Islamophobia within the media. It is important that judges, politicians, and representatives of law enforcement continue to convey a strong stance. Conversely, the inclusion in the media of mitigating statements from judges, excusing abusive and violent Islamophobic behaviour undermines the impact of victimisation and sends the wrong message.
- In addition to formal criminal justice and civil outcomes, informal responses to incidents are also important. Victims appreciate frequent and accurate updates from the police. However, victims are often not aware of the process for reporting to the police and what to expect. Many victims reported to Tell MAMA to share their negative (though sometimes positive) experiences of interacting with the police. An initial lack of communication is frequently compounded by lack of follow-up along with unsupportive comments from officers.

- Members of the public should not underestimate their role in challenging Islamophobia and showing support for victims. If individuals can safely show solidarity with victims during or following an incident, this can create an environment in which abuse and identity-based discrimination are unacceptable.
- We must not underestimate the far-reaching impact that anti-Muslim prejudice and Islamophobia has on individuals. Low-level ongoing abuse can escalate with serious consequences. Guaranteeing the safety of individuals is of paramount importance.

### **Recommendations for Employers and Businesses**

Almost one in ten cases in 2017 concerned discrimination issues, which demonstrates that the work in countering Islamophobia and anti-Muslim prejudice goes beyond just hate crime. Often 'low-level' abuse can be a daily occurrence that shapes significantly the everyday lives of victims, especially when there is a gendered dynamic to the abuse and victims are in close proximity to their abusers. In one case, a Muslim woman was persistently bullied by a male colleague who referred to her hijab as a 'tea towel'. She did not report the abuse, however, out of fear that management would react negatively, and that reporting it might serve to increase the Islamophobic bullying rather than reduce it. Our recommendations would therefore include:

- Employers have a moral obligation to ensure that all employees feel respected and that differences in belief, religious or otherwise, are welcomed and respected. Encouraging staff to embrace diversity and to learn about each other's backgrounds can help encourage empathy, which may discourage the normalisation of Islamophobic attitudes and cultural stereotypes that are perceived to be negative.
- Employers and all members of staff should be reminded of their liability for acts of unlawful discrimination, bullying, harassment, and victimisation of their fellow employees, members of the public, or customers. Such a reminder may help to address issues concerning structural or institutional forms of Islamophobia, where the life chances of Muslims are harmed at the recruitment or career advancement stages.
- Employers should take complaints from staff seriously and create an environment where people are aware of internal grievance processes. Moreover, HR officers who are independent and, therefore, neutral about any underlying and systemic prejudicial attitudes, should be made available to employees who have grievances against other employees or management.
- Reminding staff that acts of victimisation may amount to gross misconduct and subsequent automatic dismissal may encourage others to come forward and report abuse and/or bullying.
- Employers should educate all staff about their rights under the Equality Act 2010 and make greater efforts to foster an environment of religious and cultural tolerance which would include reasonable adjustments to, for example, allow staff the time to pray in a multi-faith prayer room or space during work hours.

- Informing employees of their legal rights pertaining to workplace discrimination should be considered a priority, and information regarding such rights should be made more readily available, whether that be through third-party agencies or specialised services which can advocate on behalf of victims and signpost them where necessary.
- Employers should be encouraged to refer staff who are experiencing bullying or harassment to specialised services such as Tell MAMA, which may help to reduce absenteeism or presenteeism and improve staff retention rates.

### **Recommendations for Educational Institutions**

A wide-ranging study published in 2008 found that perceptions of fairness in local schools drew from personal or vicarious experiences. It found that a key driver of perceptions of discrimination concerned the mismanagement of racist and religious bullying. Some Asian parents in the study had withdrawn their children following incidents of Islamophobic bullying.<sup>3</sup> The disproportionate exclusion of minority ethnic students remains a problem, as data for 2015/16 found that 'Black and Mixed ethnicity pupils had the highest rates of both fixed period and permanent exclusions'.<sup>4</sup>

Parents who contact Tell MAMA have also frequently raised concerns or expressed dissatisfaction with how their child's school dealt with complaints of bullying, especially when it involved those in authority.

The misuse of safeguarding policies in educational institutions is another point of concern for some service users; notably, there was the case of Mr Gulfraz, who suffered the indignity of having the police visit his home after his 7-year-old son expressed his happiness about a toy water pistol when at school in June 2017.<sup>5</sup>

Given that one in three Muslim students surveyed reported living in fear of anti-Muslim attacks on university campuses, a fear which is more pronounced among those who wear Islamic clothing, anti-Muslim hate incidents in educational institutions require a robust response. This is especially true where there is a lack of trust involved in the process by which incidents are reported to university staff, given how many Muslim students admitted to censoring their views after citing concerns about the current Prevent duty.<sup>6</sup> Our recommendations would therefore include:

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3 Gervais, M. 'The drivers of Black and Asian people's perceptions of racial discrimination by public services: a qualitative study.' Department for Communities and Local Government (2008), pp. 55-59.

4 Pupil Exclusions.' GOV.UK Ethnicity Facts and Figures. Available at: <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/education-skills-and-training/absence-and-exclusions/pupil-exclusions/latest> (retrieved 18/06/2018).

5 Kerbaj, R. 'Alert over Muslim boy's water pistol.' The Times and The Sunday Times. Available at: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/alert-over-muslim-boys-water-pistol-w0hmmjg6b> (retrieved 18/06/2018).

6 Busby, E. 'Living in fear: One in three Muslim students attacked on campus as Islamophobic hate crime surges.' The Independent. Available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news/muslim-students-universities-islamophobic-national-union-students-nus-prevent-duty-a8260176.html> (retrieved 18/06/2018).

- Proactive strategies tackling discrimination and ‘casual’ abuse in educational environments require input from specialist third parties and external institutions equipped with the knowledge to educate both pupils and staff.
- Parents often mention that their complaints are undermined or dismissed. Teachers and senior members of staff should be reminded of their legal obligations to handle complaints sensitively and should do more to ensure transparency about their formal and informal complaints procedures, especially if complaints are made against staff.
- Schools and educational institutions should provide training to their staff or seek expert advice on how to deal with issues of identity-based victimisation or discrimination.
- Building trust between pupils and teachers may encourage young people to report instances of Islamophobic bullying. One way to build trust can be informal sessions where students feel safe and empowered to challenge stereotypes about Islam and Muslims amongst their peers.
- Teachers can also set an example by reminding students that bullying, racism, Islamophobia, and other forms of hatred will not be tolerated; such statements may help victims feel less isolated.
- Teachers should be encouraged to take more of an interest in the lives of their Muslim students given that many Muslim students believe that teachers have stereotypical or low expectations of them.<sup>7</sup>
- Muslim students need guidance so schools should do more to accommodate more Muslim role models, and foster a teaching environment where students should not fear going to staff for advice and support.
- Promoting religious literacy outside formal lessons may help facilitate meaningful dialogue and constructive debate amongst students.
- Educational institutions must do more to ensure that safeguarding referrals to the police or other agencies are proportional and not misused. This would build trust, and help to ensure that individuals do not feel targeted because of their Islamic identity.
- The Department for Education (DfE) should engage with specialist support agencies such as Tell MAMA to better understand issues around anti-Muslim hatred and Islamophobia in educational institutions.

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<sup>7</sup> ‘Young Muslims in the UK face enormous social mobility barriers.’ GOV.UK. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/young-muslims-in-the-uk-face-enormous-social-mobility-barriers> (retrieved 18/06/2018).

- The Office for Students (OfS) funded eleven universities to tackle religious hate crime and improve religious literacy, to the sum of £480,000 in April 2018 which, moving forward, should be encouraged, and developed with more universities.<sup>8</sup>

### **Recommendations for Social Media Companies**

Social media companies continue to make incremental progress in dealing with Islamophobic hate speech and abuse on their respective platforms. But an unfortunate rise in online reports to Tell MAMA in 2017, with 362 verified reports, which is roughly a 16.3% rise in reports when compared with the previous year (n=311), means that more work is needed. Our recommendation would therefore include:

- Following major trigger events, social media companies and the police should be mindful of potentially criminal incitement made on such platforms. In 2017, we saw several high-profile stories of individuals who were jailed after calling for the mass murder of Muslims on social media following the terror attacks in Manchester and London.
- Members of the public have a role to play in documenting such hateful and violent speech online, and in reporting it to the police and/or services such as Tell MAMA.
- Twitter should be more proactive in preventing users from creating multiple accounts following any account suspension and thereby minimising the harm some individuals intend online.
- Facebook must do more to suspend the accounts of individuals convicted of racially or religiously aggravated offences online; we have found evidence of racist hate speech still online after criminal convictions.
- Social media companies have clear rules and community standards regarding hate speech and racist content, but as the conviction of the terrorist Darren Osborne shows, the far right has become more adept at utilising online platforms for propaganda purposes. It is no longer sufficient to remove verification badges or impose geographic location blocks on content. Account holders found to be in multiple breaches should have their accounts suspended or have the content removed if found to be spreading hateful or racist content.
- We continue to observe how some far-right and broadly Islamophobic accounts breach Twitter's spam policy on 'aggressive' retweeting. Suspending account holders for this breach will send a positive message to other users, and potentially limit the reach of harmful automated bots and/or 'cyborg' accounts.

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<sup>8</sup> Universities receive £480,000 to tackle religion-based hate crime and harassment'. Office for Students. Available at: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/news-blog-and-events/news-and-blog/universities-receive-480-000-to-tackle-religion-based-hate-crime-and-harassment/> (retrieved 18/06/2018).

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