



No Place for Hate

Hate crimes and incidents in further and
higher education: religion or belief



national union of students

Acknowledgements

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Foreword

Colleges and universities are traditionally viewed as bastions of free thought and expression, providing students with an environment in which to grow personally as well as academically. They are also viewed as places where students are at liberty to hold different ideas, viewpoints and opinions.

For many students, college and university is also a time where they are able to explore and define their religion and/or beliefs, unrestrained by previous school and family life. Such an environment is destroyed when students are targeted by antisocial behaviour or crime because of their religion or belief. Unfortunately, this report shows that these negative experiences are a reality for some students. Moreover, in many cases, these incidents occur in and around the college or university campus, perpetrated by fellow students.

This NUS report contains some distressing finds. Almost one fifth of hate incidents experienced by students in further and higher education were thought to have an element of religious prejudice, making up 7 per cent of all incidents reported in the survey. Perpetrators of hate crime are often perceived to be hate-fuelled individuals who plan attacks upon their victims, but the reality is that the majority of perpetrators are unremarkable people. Indeed, they are often fellow students who commit these acts within the context of their everyday lives.

While it is vital that further and higher education institutions prevent serious forms of hate crime such as physical assault, it is equally important to address 'low-level' hate activity. Our research found that these incidents, particularly if they are persistent, often have major repercussions on the victim's long-term mental health. And while these incidents may not necessarily constitute criminal offences, the acceptance of these types of behaviour — such as tolerating the use of degrading language — can create an environment in which conduct may escalate from 'mere' words to threats, vandalism and violence.

Hate incidents of all types also have broader implications. They not only affect the individual victim, but also their family, friends and the wider community, both on- and off-campus. These experiences encourage mistrust, alienation and suspicion among student bodies and wider society, resulting in isolation and exclusion.

While our findings are deeply concerning, our report also offers clear and practical approaches for institutions, students' unions and others to make a positive difference to students' lives. Every student has the right to express themselves without fear, whether that is in their lecture theatre, in and around their institution or in broader society.

Pete Mercer
NUS Vice President (Welfare)

Executive summary

This report is one of a series of four reports by NUS, which explore the extent and nature of hate incidents among students in further and higher education across the UK. While this report focuses on the experience of students with a religion or belief, the other reports focus on disability, race and ethnicity and sexual orientation and gender identity. The reports are part of a larger project funded by the Home Office to reduce student victimisation.

Across the four reports we found that 16 per cent of all respondents had experienced at least one form of hate incident at their current institution. Moreover, compared to victims of non-bias incidents, those who experienced hate incidents were more likely to be repeatedly victimised and suffer more negative effects as a result.

Despite this, few of these hate incidents were reported to authorities and consequently the affected students received little support from their institution or law enforcement agencies.

These reports can be downloaded in full at:
www.nusconnect.org.uk/resources/

About the research and respondents

Our research gathered the experiences of 9,229 students from across both higher education (HE) and further education (FE) sectors and is the first nationwide, student-specific research of this scale into hate crime.

Respondents were asked to report their experiences of hate incidents under a range of categories, and were then asked to indicate whether they believed

the incident to be motivated, or partly motivated, by the perpetrator's prejudice against their actual or presumed: race/ethnicity, religion/belief, disability, sexual orientation or gender identity. This allowed us to compare 'bias' and 'non-bias' incidents.

The majority of those surveyed (89 per cent) were studying in England. Six per cent were studying in Wales, two per cent in Scotland, and three per cent in Northern Ireland.

Sixty-eight per cent of our respondents were at university while 28 per cent were at a further education or sixth form college. Smaller percentages were studying at adult and community learning providers, work-based learning providers or specialist colleges.

Seventy per cent of respondents were female and 29 per cent were male. A small minority (0.6 per cent) preferred not to select their gender identity and 0.4 per cent stated that their gender identity was not the same as assigned at birth.

Thirty-eight per cent (3,521) of respondents stated they had no religion, 34 per cent (3,153) identified as Christian and 12 per cent (1,088) identified as Atheist. The remaining respondents listed their religion or belief as:

Other: 5 per cent (465)
Muslim: 4 per cent (326)
Buddhist: 1 per cent (89)
Hindu: 1 per cent (125)
Jewish: 0.8 per cent (70)
Sikh: 0.7 per cent (63)
Bahai: 0.1 per cent (4)
Jain: 0.1 per cent (5)
Prefer not to say: 3 per cent (283).

It is important to note, there is currently a lack of data across the further and higher education sector on the religion and belief of students. Furthermore, this survey was not intended to be statistically representative – the respondents to our survey were self-selecting. Readers should therefore not attempt to extrapolate figures and percentages given in this report across the whole student population.

Key findings

The following summarises the headline findings of our research into students who have experienced hate incidents, or are worried about experiencing hate incidents, because of prejudice against their religion and/or belief.

Fears of victimisation

The level of students' worries about being subject to abuse because of prejudice against their religion or belief depended on the religion or belief of the student surveyed.

More than a third of Muslim (52 per cent; 676), Hindu (35 per cent; 166), Sikh (33 per cent; 85) and Jewish (32 per cent; 90) respondents were very or fairly worried about being subject to abuse because of prejudice against their religion or belief, compared to 4 per cent (166) of respondents who were Atheist and 4 per cent (467) of respondents who identified as having no religion.

Substantial numbers of respondents reported that they changed their behaviour due to fears of victimisation due to their religion or belief. Forty-three per cent Jewish (30), 37 per cent Hindu (47), 36 per cent Buddhist (32) and 36 per cent Muslim (111) students surveyed stated that they altered their behaviour, personal appearance or daily patterns due to worries about prejudiced abuse.

At least a fifth of all respondents, across each category (including Atheist respondents and respondents who identified as having no religion) altered their behaviour, personal experience or daily patterns in an attempt to reduce their exposure to hate incidents.

Students had a limited understanding of when they should report a hate incident and to whom, and most were not aware of any hate crime services provided at their college or university.

The extent and nature of hate incidents

Hate incidents on the basis of prejudice against peoples' religion or belief are relatively rare, affecting a small minority of the students' surveyed. However, our findings show that these hate incidents are not exceptional occurrences, indicating that colleges, universities and students' unions need to take action.

Almost one fifth of hate incidents were thought to have an element of religious prejudice, making up 7 per cent of all bias and non-bias incidents reported in our survey.

Respondents identifying as Jewish (30 per cent; 21), Muslim (16.6 per cent; 54) or Sikh (12.7 per cent; 8) reported considerably higher rates of incidents motivated by prejudice against their religion than students from other religious or belief groups.

Our findings also captured evidence of multiple-bias. We found that, in addition to the religion or belief of the respondent, the incidence of hate-related behaviour varied according to the race, nationality, gender and sexuality of the respondent.

Twenty-one per cent of Jewish respondents, 17 per cent of Hindu respondents, 17 per cent of Muslim respondents and 14 per cent of Sikh respondents reported a racially motivated incident. By comparison, six per cent of Christian respondents, five per cent of Atheist respondents and five per cent of those with no religion reported a racially motivated incident.

Eighteen per cent of the total sample (1,639) had experienced at least one incident of verbal abuse and threats of violence. Of these, 10 per cent (164) believed that the most serious incident they experienced was motivated by a prejudice against their religion or belief.

Location of incidents and perpetrator profiles

In the majority of instances involving direct contact with the perpetrator/s the victim identified the incident as a hate incident because of the perpetrator's overt prejudice.

The most common reasons students believed incidents were motivated by prejudice, in whole or in part were:

- the perpetrator/s made statements and/or gestures before, during or after the incident which displayed prejudice against a religion or belief (62 per cent of incidents)
- hate words or symbols were present (50 per cent)
- the victim had a feeling, instinct or perception without specific evidence (27 per cent)
- the victim believed the perpetrator was a member of a group known to have committed similar acts (18 per cent).

Incidents most commonly took place in and around students' educational institution (31 per cent); at or near the victim's home (16 per cent); in the learning environment (13 per cent); on the street, road or alley (13 per cent).

The majority of incidents motivated by a prejudice against the victim's religion or belief took place during daylight hours. Thirty-five per cent of incidents motivated by a prejudice against religion or belief took place when the victim was on their own and 65 per cent when they were with at least one other person.

Strangers committed the majority of incidents reported in our survey. Perpetrators were typically white males, aged 16–24. Significantly, 71 per cent of incidents involved more than one perpetrator.

Reporting of hate incidents

In 13 per cent of religiously motivated incidents, the victim reported the event to an official within their institution, a slightly lower reporting rate than non-bias motivated incidents (17 per cent). These incidents were most commonly reported to academic staff (48 per cent). Only 8 per cent of respondents reported a hate incident to the police.

Most often incidents weren't reported to the police because the victims felt the incident was not serious enough to warrant a report or that the police could not, or would not, do anything as a result. However, a significant minority expressed a lack of faith in the criminal justice system and personal concerns or fears as a reason for not reporting. Our findings suggest that local authorities and police are to some extent failing in their duty to record and monitor hate incidents, regardless of whether they are criminal offences because of their attitude to those who do report hate incidents, and partly because the general public doesn't understand the importance of reporting incidents.

Of those who did not report the incident, many respondents indicated they would have been encouraged to report the incident had they been able to do one of the following:

- complete a self reporting form
- remain anonymous
- report to a third party who would pass details on to the police
- speak to a police officer who was a member of their social group.

The impact on victims

The report found that victims suffered a range of psychological and emotional responses, from lowered self-confidence and insecurity to depression, isolation and anxiety.

Twenty-two per cent of religiously motivated incidents, compared to 4 per cent of non-bias motivated incidents, negatively affected the victim's acceptance of other social groups. Twenty-one per cent of religiously motivated incidents, compared to 12 per cent of non-bias motivated incidents, affected the victim's mental health.

Thirteen per cent of religiously motivated incidents had a negative impact on the victim's studies — nearly twice the number observed in non-bias incidents (7 per cent).

Recommendations

The following 10 recommendations are aimed at further education (FE) and higher education (HE) institutions and organisations working with them. However, they may be of interest to law enforcement practitioners and agencies as well as students' unions. We hope that these recommendations will be considered by all colleges and universities and will help in the development of a cross-sector strategy to tackle hate and prejudice experienced by students across the UK. The recommendations are listed again at the end of the report in more detail.

1. Demonstrate a firm commitment to equality and diversity

FE and HE institutions should demonstrate a strong commitment to equality and diversity and work to celebrate these values through clear and widely publicised codes of conduct, equality and diversity policies and complaint and reporting procedures. Institutions should consider setting a specific objective on tackling hate crime as part of their public sector equality duty.

2. Develop preventative and educational activity on prejudice and hate

Colleges and universities should work to foster good relations among students and raise awareness of what constitutes a hate incident and the negative impact of this behaviour on the victim and others. This needs to include the impact that low-level incidents might have on individuals and their mental health. This might include discussion and interactive work within the classroom, as well as through events that celebrate diversity and encourage integration.

3. Stop or mitigate against hate incidents

FE and HE institutions must make it clear that hate-related behaviour is not acceptable, through the active enforcement of student codes of conduct and the institution of zero-tolerance policies.

4. Establish multi-agency, joined-up approaches to tackling hate

Colleges and universities should work to establish partnerships with local police authorities, voluntary sector organisations and local authorities to develop a cross-sector strategy to reduce hate within, as well as outside, the institution.

5. Strengthen existing support services

FE and HE institutions should ensure that those working in their counselling and advice services are aware of the mental health impact of hate incidents and recognise that even low-level incidents can have serious implications for victims' long-term mental well-being and self-confidence.

6. Establish strong support networks

Faith societies and chaplaincy teams often act as a support network for students who may be, or may have been, victims of hate incidents or hate crimes. These groups should therefore be provided with support, to ensure open access to their services. Colleges, universities and students' unions should also ensure that faith societies are well connected to wider support services within their institution and local community.

7. Encourage reporting of, and maintain systematic records on, hate incidents

Many respondents did not report incidents because they believed them to be too trivial, or thought that reporting would not make a difference. Students need to know that hate incidents are taken seriously and that reporting them influences preventative work within institutions and in wider society, as well as potentially leading to disciplinary action against perpetrators.

8. Provide flexible options to report hate incidents

Colleges and universities should establish a variety of mechanisms for reporting hate incidents. This might include self-reporting online and on-campus reporting and advice centres, as well as publicising third party reporting through other agencies.

9. Promote greater confidence in reporting mechanisms

Better protocols for interviewing and debriefing people who have experienced hate incidents are needed, together with assurances of confidentiality for victims, who often fear reprisals. Victims should be assured that their reports will be taken seriously and will be consistently and thoroughly investigated and recorded.

10. Provide clear guidance on the law

It is vital that guidance on what constitutes a hate crime, the rights of victims, and the criminal justice procedure itself, is developed and made available to students and their support networks.



National Union of Students
4th Floor
184 –192 Drummond Street
London NW1 3HP
t. 0845 5210 262
f. 020 7383 0794
w. www.nus.org.uk

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