Dr Imran Awan is an Associate Professor in Criminology at Birmingham City University. He is an expert in issues related to online hate crime, anti-Muslim hatred, cyber-extremism and counter-terrorism. The following evidence offers a critical review and focus on issues related to the impact of hate crime on victims, the barriers to reporting hate crime and providing a typology of online hate crime offender characteristics based upon my recent study.

1. The Woolwich attack in May 2013, has led to a spate of hate crimes committed against Muslim communities in the United Kingdom. These incidents included Muslim women being targeted for wearing the headscarf and mosques being vandalized. While street level Islamophobia remains an important area of investigation, an equally disturbing picture is emerging with the rise in online abuse.

2. Published in the peer-reviewed journal, ‘Policy & Internet’ the study entitled ‘Islamophobia and Twitter: A Typology of Online Hate against Muslims on Social Media' examined a random sample of tweets from 100 different Twitter users. The study argued that online hate crime must be given the same level of attention as street level hate crimes. Below, is a list of some of the tweets that were captured.

Figure 1. Selection of tweets following the Woolwich attack, which can also be accessed via http://publicshaming.tumblr.com/search/woolwich. All tweets have been anonymized.

3. From the data collected, the majority of tweets (72 percent) were posted by males. The hashtags used helped the author examine patterns emerging regarding online hate crime on Twitter, having appeared on the Twitter search engine as words that had recently “trended” in the United Kingdom. For example, on September 11, 2013, the hashtag #FuckMuslims was trending (Figure 2). Below are some examples of the tweets examined.

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1 Not published
4. This study used a mixed methodology as part of a wider content analysis utilizing qualitative and quantitative data gathering techniques embedded within grounded theory. As noted previously, the overwhelming number of tweets were written and posted by people in the United Kingdom, although there were some tweets from users who were based in Australia and the United States. There were a number of terms that were used to describe Muslims in a negative manner, however some of the most common reappearing words used to describe Muslims in a derogatory way were also examined (Figure 3); these included the words Muslim pigs (9 percent), Muzrats (14 percent), Muslim Paedos (30 percent), Muslim terrorists (22 percent), Muslim scum (15 percent), and Pisslam (10 percent).

5. After examining the tweets, and looking at the use of language to depict Muslims in a negative light, a typology was constructed, consisting of eight different people identified as cyber trolls who acted with a cyber mob type mentality; that is, people who are using social networking sites such as Twitter to produce a sustained campaign of hate.
A Typology of Online Perpetrators: Categorising the Cyber Trolls

6. Over 75 percent of the tweets examined showed a strong Islamophobic feeling, used to stereotype and blame all Muslims on a particular issue, used to justify the abuse. For example, some accounts were open about their anger and hatred for Muslims as a result of recent cases surrounding Asian men convicted of grooming underage girls. Moreover, a number of accounts also used and disseminated anti-Muslim images and literature as a means to defame and caricature Muslims as dangerous paedophiles. Indeed, the word Muslim Paedos was used up to 30 percent of times, reflecting and coinciding with recent cases of Muslim men convicted of grooming offenses. However, in some cases people simply used Twitter as a means to antagonize and create hostility with some accounts using derogatory terminology by referring to Muslims as Muzrats (a demeaning word to describe Muslims as vermin or comparing them to a disease).

7. Some tweets used a number of hostile hashtags to note how #Islamkills and whites would become a minority unless the Muzrats are stopped. Interestingly, the word #Muslimterrorists also appeared high on the list of frequent words used, accounting for 22 percent. In particular, it became part of the September 11 trending words across Twitter where Muslims were being depicted through pictures and videos as extremists and terrorists.
8. On the face of it, a number of offenders shared similar characteristics but were different in their approaches. Using an online content behavioural offender typology, the tweets were grouped into different categories, and at the heart of each of these different categories, it became clear that the users involved had similar motivations. Some of those were based on seeking authority and power as shown by some tweets from users who used their Twitter account to collect and maximize influence. In such a case, this affords some people the motivation to commit the online abuse and as a result, they are able to target specific people. I created the following typology as a means to help social media companies, the police, policy makers, victim support agencies and other key stakeholders with regards consideration of particular behaviours and/or categories of cyber activity. These are examples below:

- **The Trawler**: Someone who has gone through other people’s online profile accounts to specifically target people they believe are an easy target.
- **The Apprentice**: A person who is fairly new to social media but nonetheless has begun to target people with the help of more experienced online abusers.
- **The Disseminator**: Someone who has tweeted about and retweeted messages, pictures, and documents of online hate that are specifically targeting people because of their perceived visibility in the target group.
- **The impersonator**: A person who is using a fake profile, account, and images to target individuals.
- **The Accessory**: A person who is joining in with other people through their conversations via social media to target vulnerable people.
- **The Reactive**: A person who following a major incident, such as Woolwich, or issues on immigration, will begin an online campaign targeting that specific group and individual. These individuals specifically wait for ‘trigger’ events such as Paris or regional events like Rotherham to escalate violence.
- **The Mover**: Someone who regularly changes their social media account in order to continue targeting someone from a different profile.
- **The Professional**: A person who has a huge following on social media and regardless of consequences has and will launch a major campaign of hate against an individual or group of people. This person will also have multiple social media accounts.
Impacts and barriers that prevent individuals reporting hate crime and measures to improve reporting rates

Report - ‘We Fear For Our Lives’: The Impact of Online and Offline Hate Crimes

9. Alongside my colleague, Dr Irene Zempi and I took part in a report for the organisation Tell MAMA (Measuring Anti-Muslim Attacks) that examined the nature and impacts of both online and offline anti-Muslim hate crime. The report concludes with a list of key recommendations that participants suggested to us, which we describe as the ‘victims charter’.

10. Our report found that participants had a range of anti-Muslim hate experiences from online abuse where they were threatened with violence to offline abuse where they suffered verbal and physical abuse. In the online world, their experiences were shaped by hostile comments, racist posts, fake ID profiles, messages and images used to harass and incite violence against them. For example, in one case, a female participant had an image of her redistributed on Twitter with the caption ‘You Burqa wearing slut’. In another case, the perpetrators found the address of the victim and threatened her with violence. In addition, some of the offline examples included incidents where a young girl was punched, kicked and had her headscarf pulled off. She was then threatened with someone wanting ‘to blow her face off’. Similarly, we found disturbing accounts of how Muslim men had also suffered anti-Muslim hostility in the workplace - although in most cases they were too scared to report it to the police in case people perceived them as being ‘weak’. For example, one interviewee described how his work colleagues had locked the room where he was praying and on another occasion had his beard pulled.

11. In a globally connected world, the actions by one terrorist group such as ISIS can lead to counter-reactions and impacts on Muslims in the UK. We found that participants pointed out that they were ‘bombarded with online abuse and offline threats’ with the prominence of ISIS, especially following the release of videos showing beheadings carried out by ISIS or when there was a terror threat made
against the UK from ISIS members. Sophie stated ‘I keep my Facebook account private but I get a lot of abuse on twitter especially if something has happened like when ISIS killed Alan Henning’.

12. We found that many of our participants suffered short, medium and long term impacts. Indeed, research has also demonstrated that anti-Muslim prejudice can be a factor in support for extremist groups and has acute impacts women (Awan 2012, Poynting and Mason, 2006).

The reports principle findings are as follows:

- Both online and offline incidents are a continuity of hate and thus should not be examined in isolation.

- Participants described living in fear because of the possibility of online threats materialising in the ‘real world’.

- The prevalence and severity of online and offline anti-Muslim hate crimes are influenced by ‘trigger’ events of local, national and international significance.

- The visibility of people’s Muslim identity is key to triggering both online and offline anti-Muslim hate crime.

- Muslim women are more likely to be attacked in comparison to Muslim men, both in the virtual world and in the physical world.

- Victims of both online and offline anti-Muslim crime suffer from depression, emotional stress, anxiety and fear.

- The victims of online anti-Muslim hate crime remain less ‘visible’ in the criminal justice system.

- Muslim men are unlikely to report an incident of anti-Muslim abuse for fear of being viewed as ‘weak’.
Recommendations

- **Hate crime must be challenged from within communities.**
The report found that participants would like the community to speak out against the hate crimes that they suffer.

- **Media training around reporting stories to do with Muslims.**
The media must portray a more balanced viewpoint when discussing Muslim stories as this could impact upon the way they are viewed by wider society.

- **The police can improve the way in which they handle cases of anti-Muslim hate crime.**
Participants who reported incidents to the police felt that they were not taken seriously.

- **The public should intervene and assist victims of hate crime.**
Victims do not necessarily want physical action but just a phone call to assist the police.

- **Hate crime awareness and visibility.**
Better awareness of what a hate crime is and what people can do to help reassure them and build confidence.

- **Social media companies should make their systems of reporting hate crime more user friendly.**
Social media companies can do much more to help tackle online prejudice and bigotry through specific systems that help victims report hate crime.

- **Diversity in the criminal justice system.**
A more diverse criminal justice system with people of all backgrounds could help break down the barriers that might exist for victims reporting hate crime.

- **Challenging the language and engaging schools in the debate.**
To tackle prejudice seriously, we need to start with schools and begin challenging the language, and engaging schools in the debate.

Concluding Remarks
13. Cyber hate remains a complex problem and with the emerging rise of online hate, prejudice, discrimination, and threats there is an urgent need to examine this area in more depth. As a result, a new international and national online cyber hate strategy should be adopted, that highlights online abuse and ways in which the police can deal with such incidents.

14. Perhaps a further strengthening of cyber hate regulation and protocols could also be used to tackle online threats made against people of all backgrounds, including anti-Muslim abuse, and at the same time ensuring free speech is protected.

15. The reporting of online abuse must also be taken seriously; improved relations between the police and community may help to achieve that. A more robust and clearer definition of what is online hate crime should also be adopted.

16. The typology created of online abusers shows that offenders presented some key characteristics and motivations behind their actions. We need to begin a process of evidence-based research to help create a safer online space for users; including innovative ways that policymakers, police forces, third sector organizations, and social networking sites (such as Twitter and Facebook) can best respond to online hate crime. This should hopefully result in an improved dialogue between the different stakeholders and ensure that online hate incidents are taken more seriously.

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Further Reading


