

# 'Targeted'

Experiences of Racism in  
NSW after September 11, 2001

Tanja Dreher



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EXPERIENCES OF RACISM IN NSW  
AFTER SEPTEMBER 11, 2001

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## UTS Shopfront: Working with the Community

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Published by UTSePress  
UTS Shopfront Monograph Series No 2  
This monograph series is refereed.

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National Library of Australia Cataloguing-in-Publication entry

Dreher, Tanja [Tanja Ingeborg], 1969 - .  
'Targeted' : experiences of racism in NSW after September 11, 2001.

1. Racism - New South Wales. 2. September 11 Terrorist Attacks, 2001 - Influence. I. Title.  
[Series : UTS Shopfront monograph series ; no. 2].

305.8009944

Bibliography.  
ISSN 1834 2035 (Online) 1834 2027 (Print)  
ISBN 978 1 86365 420 3 (pdf.)

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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I would like to thank the following people for their generous contributions to this project:

The research team included Armanda Scorrano, who completed the statistical analysis, Frances Simmons, who provided invaluable research assistance on interviews and discourse analysis, and Pauline O'Loughlin who was the most patient, efficient and supportive of program managers.

The Reference Group included senior researchers from a wide range of disciplines at UTS. Many thanks to Nicky Solomon for her expert advice on discourse analysis, to Paul Ashton for his detailed editing and thoughtful direction, and to Jock Collins and Andrew Jakubowicz, who conducted additional interviews and background research. Thanks also to Jamila Hussain, Devleena Ghosh and Penny O'Donnell for their advice on contacts and the overall direction of the research.

Narelle Smith provided expert and comprehensible statistical advice. Interviews were transcribed by Kate Deamer and Liz Brownlee. Maggie Tang very kindly finalised the formatting of the report.

I have received helpful advice on research and contacts from Des Cahill, Scott Poynting, Greg Noble, Paul White, and Michael Humphrey. Kevin Dunn has been particularly generous in sharing research findings, and Omeima Sukkariah and Susanna Iliuano have provided highly valuable background and suggestions. Special thanks are also due to Hermine Scheeres, Ruth McCausland, Inderjeet Singh, Amolak Singh, and Lisa Andersen.

I am particularly grateful to the many anonymous interviewees who shared their time and insights for this research. I hope that this report will be a useful resource in their vital work with communities experiencing racism.

This research was funded by the Community Relations Commission For a multicultural NSW (CRC). The Shopfront has been ably assisted by Doreen Wainer and Victor Duranti at the CRC. This monograph is based on a chapter in the report entitled **Building Bridges: Community Relations in NSW After September 11, 2001**, submitted to the CRC. **Building Bridges** also contains chapters on government and community responses to increased tension and crisis. The CRC has expressed some concern with the publication of only one component of the report, therefore, the monograph should be read in conjunction with **Building Bridges**.



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Following the attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York city on September 11, 2001, the Community Relations Commission For a multicultural NSW (CRC) set up a telephone hotline to receive calls relating to racially motivated attacks. This monograph presents an analysis of the data collected by that Hotline, providing a snapshot of a moment of crisis in community relations in New South Wales. During September to November 2001, the CRC Hotline recorded reports of violence, abuse, harassment, discrimination and vilification targeting Muslim, Arab and Sikh communities in New South Wales. These incidents produced a climate of fear and insecurity which continues to impact on experiences of citizenship and belonging among the communities targeted.

The key findings for the impacts of September 11, 2001 on community relations in NSW are:

- In the two months after September 11, 2001, 248 reports were made to the CRC Hotline. These events were predominantly reported by Arab, Muslim and Sikh Australians. Reported incidents included physical assaults, sexual assault, verbal assaults, racial discrimination and harassment, threats, damage to property and media vilification. The most commonly reported incident was a verbal assault in a public place.
- International events can produce crises in community relations in New South Wales. The impacts of international events can be unpredictable, as in the impacts of September 11, 2001 on Sikh communities in NSW. The impacts of international events can also build on existing tensions and prejudice, as in the impacts of September 11, 2001 on Muslim and Arab communities in NSW.
- Racially and religiously motivated incidents produced a climate of fear, distress and insecurity, impacting on both the subjects of individual incidents and the communities targeted. Subjects of incidents and Muslim, Arab and Sikh communities in NSW were made to feel that they are not 'Australian', that they do not belong and are not welcome in Australia.
- General public attitudes indicate a considerable lack of understanding of experiences of racism and discrimination and the rationale for anti-discrimination and anti-racism measures. The widespread assumption that Australia is white, Christian and English-speaking demonstrates a lack of awareness of both the principles and the lived realities of Australian multiculturalism.
- There is a strong link between visible markers of 'difference' such as wearing the hijab or a turban and experiences of prejudice and assault. Attitudes of prejudice and hatred often focus on visible signs of ethnicity, culture or religion.
- The crisis in community relations after September 11, 2001 also produced opportunities for dialogue and support between communities.
- There is a widespread community perception that media reporting is a significant factor in contributing to a climate of heightened community tensions and racist violence.



**'TARGETED'**

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This monograph outlines the impacts of the events of September 11, 2001 in the United States of America on community relations in New South Wales. This research focuses on data collected by a telephone Hotline established by the Community Relations Commission For a multicultural New South Wales (CRC) within hours of the attack on the World Trade Centre in New York. The data includes several hundred reports of violence, harassment, prejudice and discrimination targeting Muslim and Arab Australians, and impacting on communities mistakenly identified as Arab and/or Muslim, such as Australian Sikhs. The analysis provides a snapshot of community relations in crisis in the days immediately following the New York attacks and in the leadup to the 'war on terror'. The upsurge in public expressions of racism and prejudice at that time created a pervasive and ongoing climate of fear in which targeted communities continue to feel insecure, unwelcome and 'under siege'.

**Background**

Cultural and religious diversity is a key feature of Sydney and the state of New South Wales. According to a recent report (State Chamber of Commerce (New South Wales) 2005: 9), Sydney has the seventh highest proportion of foreign-born residents of any city in the world today. Data from the 2001 national census revealed that nearly 30 per cent of Sydney's population of four million were first generation migrants and another 28 per cent of the population were second generation migrants. Migrants have come to NSW from over 180 countries. Sydney's largest migrant groups are those born in the UK, China, New Zealand, Vietnam, Lebanon, Italy, Hong Kong, India, Greece, Korea, Fiji and South Africa. Most – nearly three out of four – of those people with religious affiliations living in Sydney are members of some Christian denomination. Only 2.6 per cent of Sydney's people claimed that they were members of the Islamic faith in 2001. However, while these numbers are small, it should be noted that Sydney is home to around 80 per cent of Lebanese-born Australians while the majority of Arab and Muslim Australians live in Sydney.

This diversity underlies the impact of international events such as those of September 11, 2001 on community relations in NSW. During Australia's involvement in the First Gulf War in 1990-91, Arab and Muslim Australians were subject to racial vilification, abuse and physical attacks (HREOC 1991). A report by the Committee on Discrimination Against Arab Australians (1992) documented racist incidents against Arabs and Muslims in Australia for the period November 1990 to July 1991. Many families reported harassment at their homes and in streets, shopping centres and schools. Many women wearing the hijab reported harassment by passing cars and in parking lots. Physical violence was also widespread, with reports of Arab Australians being spat at and assaulted, including women who had their hijab pulled or torn. In one incident, a car was deliberately run into and damaged, while in another an Arab Australian man died of a heart attack after being racially harassed by a group of teenagers (Hage 1992).

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In 2001, Arab and Muslim communities in Australia were subject to increasing expressions of racism and abuse well before the events of September 11, 2001. Intense media attention and public debate around a series of group sexual assaults in Sydney and asylum seekers arriving in Australia by boat framed these issues in terms of an assumed 'threat' posed by Arab and/or Muslim and/or Middle Eastern communities and cultures (ADB 2003, Manning 2004, Poynting et al 2004). Public discourse positioned Muslims and Arabs as violent, barbaric and less than human (Poynting et al 2004, Hage 2002).

In this context, the events of September 11, 2001 had a profound impact on community relations in NSW and Australia. These impacts were documented in consultations on eliminating prejudice against Arab and Muslim Australians conducted by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) in 2003 (HREOC 2004). The **Isma** consultations included group discussions with 1423 Arab and Muslim Australians and found that the majority of Australian Muslims consulted had experienced escalating prejudice because of their race or religion as a result of the events in New York and the Bali bombings in 2002. The **Isma** report also found evidence of increased reporting to community organisations of discrimination, vilification and prejudice:

The Australian Arabic Council recorded a twenty-fold rise in reports of discrimination and vilification of Arab Australians in the month after 11 September 2001. The Muslim Women's Association of South Australia received a 'significant number of reported incidents, specifically of discrimination and harassment against Muslims', most involving offensive verbal abuse of women. The Al Zahra Muslim Women's Association in Sydney also reported a 'phenomenal' increase in both discrimination and vilification reports.

International research documents similar patterns of increased racism and prejudice against Arabs and Muslims in the USA (Bakalian and Bozorgmehr, nd) and the EU (EUMC).

Existing research clearly indicates that the increased experiences of racism and prejudice against Muslim and Arab Australians after September 11, 2001 produced a climate of intense fear and insecurity among targeted communities. The HREOC report (2004: 4) found that 'the biggest impacts are a substantial increase in fear, a growing sense of alienation from the wider community and an increasing distrust of authority'. Consultations consistently reveal reports of individuals and families afraid to leave their homes, afraid to dress as they choose, fearful of neighbours or colleagues and scared of further violence or abuse (Poynting 2002, Poynting and Noble 2004). The experience of living in fear serves to rob people subjected to racism of a feeling of being 'at home' (Noble 2005) and diminishes the exercise of citizenship and possibilities for participation in social and political life (Poynting and Noble 2004, Dunn 2003, Humphrey 2003).

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The research presented in this monograph both confirms and extends this picture, documenting widespread fear and specific incidents of prejudice and racism. Analysing data gathered immediately after the events of September 11, 2001, the monograph reveals details of violence, discrimination and abuse experienced at a moment of acute crisis in community relations in NSW.

### **The CRC Hotline**

On 13 September, 2001 the CRC established a bilingual telephone Hotline to assist community members experiencing problems resulting from the terrorist attacks in the United States. Initially a 24-hour Arabic-speaking hotline was set up and from 14 November 2001 a Punjabi language line was open from 5pm to 9pm. In October 2002 in response to the Bali bombings and throughout the lead up to and outbreak of hostilities in Iraq, community members again had the capacity to report incidents of abuse, insult or discrimination to the Commission via the following mechanisms:

- Hotline (1800 80 41 41) – this was monitored by Commission staff during business hours, and by bilingual (English/Arabic) counsellors between 5.00 pm and 9.00pm, Monday to Friday. All calls not answered within 15 seconds were diverted to a message bank.
- Language-specific message bank – following the escalation of hostilities in Iraq, the Commission established three additional hotlines (Arabic, Turkish and Indonesian) to facilitate individual reporting incidents of abuse, insult or discrimination.
- Email – an email address ([help@crc.nsw.gov.au](mailto:help@crc.nsw.gov.au)) was also established to enable the recording of complaints.

The Commission had the ability to increase the capacity of the telephone lines if warranted by any escalation in tensions as well as the capacity to hire extra bilingual counsellors to staff the phones on a 24-hour basis if needed. There was a marked decrease in calls once hostilities in Iraq abated. This led to the decommissioning of the language specific hotlines on 19 May 2003. The 1800 80 41 41 hotline and [help@crc.nsw.gov.au](mailto:help@crc.nsw.gov.au) are both monitored by Commission staff on a daily basis and remain as permanent features at the Commission.

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## Conducting the research

The analysis presented here is based on an examination of CRC Hotline log sheets and consultations with affected communities. In conducting the research, UTS Shopfront researchers:

- prepared quantitative and qualitative (discourse) analyses of the data collected by the CRC Hotline
- conducted interviews with former Hotline staffers
- canvassed existing and ongoing research on experiences of prejudice and discrimination in Australia, particularly among Arab and Muslim Australians
- conducted interviews with representatives of communities that have been under-represented in previous research, such as Sikh, Indonesian and South Asian communities and
- conducted interviews and consultations with community organisations and community workers involved in projects responding to the climate of increased fear and hostility.

In addition to the statistical analysis of incidents reported to the CRC Hotline, the feelings and opinions reported by callers were analysed. Through discourse analysis 147 calls were identified that recorded the feelings or emotional responses of callers. Discourse analysis involved close reading of the telephone log sheets which were transcribed and entered in to an electronic data table. This data was grouped under categories including: feelings, subject responses, naming and events. Analysis of this data identified commonalities and patterns across the calls logged by the Hotline. Data was also analysed for 'coda'. Coda are generic comments made by the caller about the state of the world such as: 'I couldn't believe it happened to me'. Codas place the caller's complaint in a broader context and show how the caller understands their experience in relation to the world. Of the 248 calls, 73 coda were identified. Both coda and feelings indicate the ways in which a crisis in community relations can have far-reaching effects.

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## **Format of the Monograph**

The monograph quotes extensively from the log sheets completed by staff on the bilingual CRC Hotlines in order to highlight the detail of experiences of racism and prejudice as reported at the time. The log sheets were transcribed retaining the translations, terminology, spelling, abbreviations and punctuation used by Hotline staffers.

Chapter One provides an overview of incidents of assault, abuse and harassment targeting Muslim, Arab and Sikh Australians with examples of reported incidents drawn from the Hotline transcripts. Chapter two outlines the wider impacts on targeted communities, including impacts on feelings, belonging and security. The third chapter presents the findings on broad public attitudes, including support for affected communities and anti-racism measures as well as considerable evidence of racism and prejudice. Chapter three also details individual responses to racially motivated incidents. The conclusion links these findings to the body of existing research, arguing that the experiences of racism and prejudice reported to the CRC Hotline continue to have far-reaching effects. The incidents detailed in this report are a part of general trends in community relations and public discourse which have contributed to profound feelings of insecurity and exclusion leading to a diminished experience of citizenship among communities under scrutiny during the 'war on terror'.





## INCIDENTS REPORTED TO THE CRC HOTLINE, SEPTEMBER – NOVEMBER 2001

During the two-month period from 12 September, 2001 to 11 November, 2001, 248 incidents were logged by the CRC Hotline. This group of calls is analysed in the first section of this chapter. In addition, there were 129 general complaint calls that did not refer to a specific incident. This second group of calls is analysed in Section Two.

### Overview of Reported Incidents

#### Categories of Incident

Table 1 is a multiple response table. This means that some reports are counted under more than one category of incident. Physical assaults often occurred in conjunction with verbal abuse and threats, all described within the one phonecall. For example:

Blacktown Train Station – man threw a punch at caller and perpetrator said he wished he had a knife. Man went to block punch and grocery bag split and all groceries fell out. Man is a Sikh and an American – wears traditional dress.

The 248 reports involved a total of 320 incidents. For the purposes of analysis and clarity reference is made to the number of incidents (320) when discussing categories of incidents (Tables 1, 6, 7, 8, and 9) and to the number of reports (248) for all other statistics.

Seven categories of attack or assault have been analysed: physical; sexual; verbal; threat; discrimination or harassment; damage to property; and media attack. The most commonly reported incident was of verbal assault (139 or 43.4% of incidents) followed by racial discrimination or harassment (56 or 17.5% of incidents); physical assault (42 or 13.2% of incidents); media attacks (33 or 10.3% of incidents); and threats (33 or 10.3% of incidents).

	Physical assault	Sexual assault	Verbal assault	Threat	Racial discrimination or harassment	Damage to property	Media attack
Public space	30	1	65	11	23	2	
Public transport			6	1			
School / educational institution	3		15	5	17		
Work			11	3	8	1	
Residence / neighbourhood	5		25	9	2	9	
House of worship			1	2		4	
Media			2				33
Mobile phone			3	1			
Shops	4		10	1	6		
Not specified			1				
<b>Total</b>	42	1	139	33	56	16	33
<b>Percentage</b>	13.2%	0.3%	43.4%	10.3%	17.5%	5%	10.3%

TABLE 1: TYPE OF INCIDENT AND REPORTED LOCATION

**Gender and age of victims**

Incidents were reported affecting children, women, men, young people and the elderly. In some incidents age and gender were not applicable, as in damage to property, or were not stated by the caller.

	Frequency	Percentage
Female	125	50.4%
Male	110	44.4%
No response	6	2.4%
Not applicable	7	2.8%
Total	248	100%

TABLE 2: GENDER OF VICTIM

Half of all victims were female and 44.4%, were male. For seven calls, gender was not applicable, meaning the attack was against a house of worship or other property without an identifiable victim. Where an attack involved damage to the property of an individual person, then their gender was recorded and the attack listed as 'damage to property'. Six people did not give their gender.

Seven in ten victims were adults. Again, in some cases the age of the victim was inapplicable, for example where the attack was against a house of worship or a nursing home. This occurred in seven or 2.8% of cases. In 11, or 4.4% of cases, the caller did not give his or her age bracket.

	Frequency	Percentage
Child	13	5.3%
Adolescent	22	8.9%
Adult	181	73.0%
Elderly	14	5.6%
No response	11	4.4%
Not applicable	7	2.8%
Total	248	100%

TABLE 3: AGE OF VICTIM

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## **Religion and ethnicity**

The collection of data regarding religion, 'race' and ethnicity by the CRC Hotline was inconsistent. For the purposes of data analysis we have been able to produce only general findings based on this incomplete data.

The data indicates that 74 or 29.8% of the victims were identified as Muslim while 174 or 70.2% were not. The two largest language groups to use the hotline were Arabic – 130 or 52.4% of calls – and English, with 86 or 34.7% of calls. Next came Punjabi – 7 or 2.8% of calls. Other languages were listed in only one or two calls each.

Through analysis of the content of the Hotline log sheets it was possible to further clarify the religion of callers. Religion has been inferred from descriptions made by the caller (wearing scarf, veil, hijab) or the reported abuses (where the subject has been abused as a Muslim) recorded in call details. Using this methodology the religion of 130 callers was identified. Of these, the overwhelming majority – 89 – were Muslim; 37 were Sikh; one Jewish; one Hindu and one Christian. In addition, one caller was identified simply as religious. The religion of 118 callers was not identified.

## **Location of incidents**

The CRC Hotline call record included a list of six possible locations where an incident may have occurred: in a public space; on public transport; in a school or educational institution; at work; in a residence or neighbourhood (at home, in the neighbourhood of home, or in a community organisation/environment); or 'other'.

Almost half (47.2%) of all events occurred in a public space, including in or near shops and shopping centres and on the road or while driving. The next most common location reported to the CRC Hotline was in the victim's residence or neighbourhood (15.3%), followed by incidents in the media (13.7%).

Location	Number of reports	Percentage of reports
Public space	117	47.2%
Public transport	6	2.4%
School or educational institution	27	10.9%
Work	16	6.5%
Residence or neighbourhood	38	15.3%
House of worship	6	2.4%
Media	34	13.7%
Mobile phone	3	1.2%
Not specified	1	0.4%
Total	248	100%

TABLE 4: LOCATION OF INCIDENTS

The frequency of events was highest in the suburb of Lakemba, where eleven reports were recorded. Next highest were Liverpool and Parramatta with eight reports each. Bankstown and Rockdale each reported seven reports. Bathurst, Blacktown, and Revesby had six reports each. The CBD and Hurstville had five reports each. Campbelltown, Guildford, Kogarah and Lidcombe had four reports each. Auburn, Chester Hill, Granville, Homebush, Hornsby, Mt Druitt, Penshurst, Punchbowl, Randwick, Riverwood, Sefton and Strathfield each recorded three reports.

### Date of calls reporting incidents

The highest number of calls, 41, was received on 13 September 2001, followed by 32 calls on 14 September 2001. During the first week of operation (12 – 18 September, 2001) the Hotline logged 147 calls reporting incidents. Two hundred and five calls reporting incidents were logged during September 2001 (12 – 30 September) while 36 calls reporting incidents were received during October 2001 and two calls were logged between November 1 and November 11, 2001. The date of call is unclear in five cases. The majority of all calls reported an incident on the day of the incident or within three days of the incident.

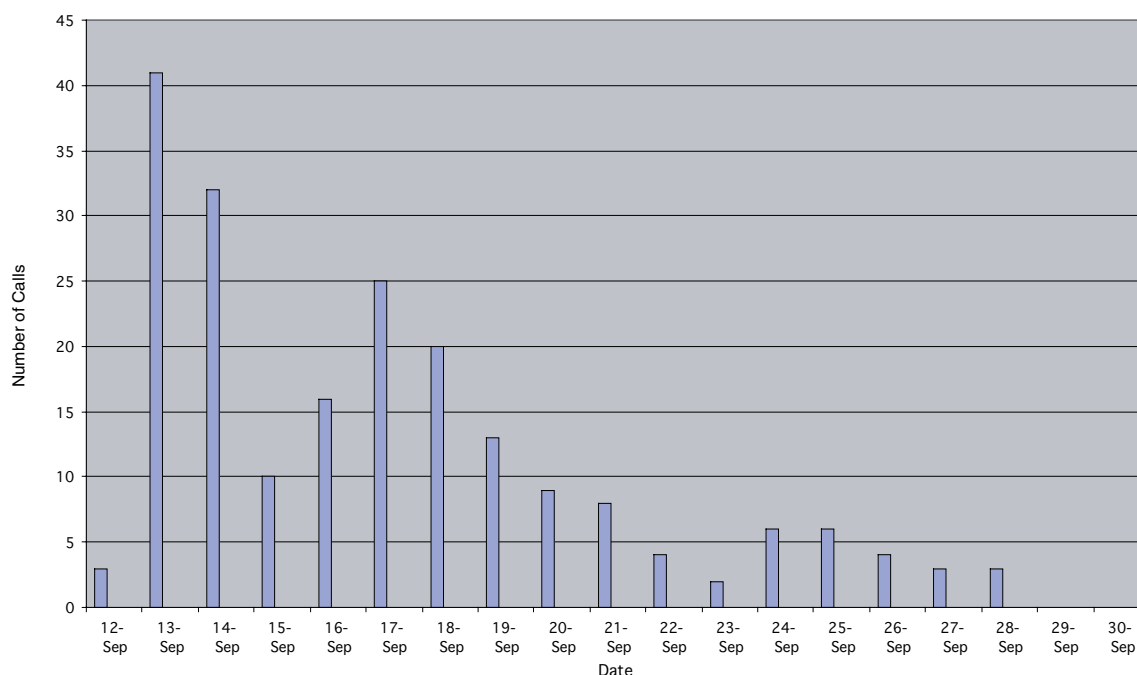


TABLE 5: DATE OF CALLS REPORTING INCIDENTS

## Types of Incidents reported to the CRC Hotline

### Physical assault

Callers to the CRC Hotline reported 42 incidents of physical assault (13.2% of all incidents). Most physical assaults occurred in a public space. Most reported physical assaults were against females (66.7%). Incidents of physical assault were reported against all age groups: children (7.2%), adolescents (14.3%), adults (61.9%) and elderly people (16.7%).

	Number of incidents of physical assault	Percentage
Public space	30	71.4%
Shops	4	9.5%
Public transport		
School or educational institution	3	7.2%
Work		
Residence or neighbourhood	5	11.9%
House of worship		
Media		
Mobile phone		
Total	42	100%

TABLE 6: LOCATION OF INCIDENTS OF PHYSICAL ASSAULT

The following excerpts from some of the Hotline call records indicate the nature and severity of the physical assaults. There were a number of calls reporting physical attacks on women wearing the hijab, including incidents in which the attackers ripped off the hijab.

2 guys ripped her scarf off, bashed her up. Friend of woman, witnessed the attack. Had not yet contacted the police. (female attacked can not speak English well). Nationality of victim – Iraqi.

Callers reported being kicked to the ground, being beaten with sticks, having their hair pulled and being spat on. Callers reported injuries to themselves and to family members, including cuts, bruises, a broken arm and broken ribs.

3 days ago approached by a tall Australian boy demanding she takes her scarf off. She obviously did not respond to this so the Australian boy physically abused her, by pushing her on to the ground. She now is suffering from back pain.

Fight at school involving 6-7 people (school children). Started in classroom, carried on in playground. 6-7 ganged up on 12 year old boy. Caller (mother) was highly stressed, low trembling voice, crying. Caller claims teacher in playground ignored fight. The victim came out all bruised. Her son is Arabic Muslim. Attackers Anglo-Saxon descent.

**Verbal assault**

Verbal assault was the most commonly reported type of incident (139 or 43.4% of incidents). This is the one category of assault that was reported in every location. More than half of all verbal assaults took place in a public space. Verbal assaults were reported against all age groups: adults (78.4%), adolescents (10.1%), children (4.3%) and the elderly (4.3%). More than half (63.2%) of all verbal assaults were against females.

	Number of incidents Verbal assault	Percentage
Public space	65	46.8%
Shops	10	7.2%
Public Transport	6	4.3%
School or Educational Institution	15	10.8%
Work	11	7.9%
Residence or neighbourhood	25	18%
House of worship	1	0.7%
Media	2	1.4%
Mobile Phone	3	2.2%
No response	1	0.7%
Total	139	100%

TABLE 7: LOCATION OF INCIDENTS OF VERBAL ASSAULT

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Callers to the CRC Hotline reported verbal abuse including being called 'dirty Arabs' by a neighbour and 'Osama bin Laden' by passengers on a train. Callers were sworn at while in their cars, on the street and in shopping centres.

Caller wears hijab, went to buy some clothes for her children. While parking her car, someone approached her and attacked verbally by saying to her 'you Muslim, you are terrorist, go back to your bloody country, we do not want you in Australia'. Caller was very angry and frightened.

Elderly lady crossing road ... Man in vehicle stops and screams: 'Go back to your own country, you Osama bin Laden'. Old Lady left feeling very frightened – approached nearest shops for security – they contacted the Hotline immediately.

The victim said at work, his colleagues have been making jokes like: 'What have you been doing on your weekends – raping?? Learning how to fly planes?? He says he tried to use these opportunities to educate and open people's minds.

Caller was in her van, she is 8 months pregnant. Then suddenly, someone on her left started swearing at her; spitting and yelling 'f... you wogs'. He had his fingers out the window. Caller was scared he would crash. She was wearing a headscarf. Everyone there seemed stunned. She started panicking as his car was really close to hers.

A caller reported that her child was afraid to go to school after being verbally assaulted. Callers to the Hotline were described as 'distressed and crying' and many told of the pain caused by verbal assaults.

Caller is a Kurd. He has a disability. He lost one eye as a result of torture and is on crutches. He was verbally abused in a shop. The manager yelled and shouted and shook his fingers, telling him to get out of the shop. Caller said to manager 'if you want to hit me, hit me but don't abuse me because I can forget the physical violence, but not the verbal violence'. Caller was tortured in Iraq and this experience triggered memories of the torture.

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### Sexual assault

One sexual assault was reported to the CRC Hotline, involving a young (adolescent) Muslim woman who was assaulted in a public space.

Man menaced her into a corner. Pushed her against a wall in George Street Sydney. Said that he had threatened her with sexual attacks. Tried to kiss her. His comments/threats were directed to her as a Muslim woman. Was not able to tell her family because her family would stop her from leaving the house. Was a young Muslim woman wearing hijab.

### Threat

Thirty-three incidents of threat were reported to the CRC Hotline during the sample period. The most common location for threats to occur was in a public space. The majority of threats (63.6%) were against females. Threats were reported against all age groups: adults (69.7%), adolescents (18.2%), children (6.1%) and the elderly (3%).

	Number of incidents of threat	Percentage
Public space	11	33.3%
Shops	1	3.0%
Public transport	1	3.0%
School or educational institution	5	15.2%
Work	3	9.1%
Residence or neighbourhood	9	27.3%
House of worship	2	6.1%
Media		
Mobile phone	1	3.0%
Total	33	100%

TABLE 8: LOCATION OF INCIDENTS OF THREAT



Callers to the CRC Hotline reported incidents of threat directed at individuals, at communities and organisations and at houses of worship. Threats were communicated verbally, in letters, over the phone or through menacing gestures. Most callers reported threats of physical violence.

Caller reported that at least two of her clients have been threatened and assaulted verbally. A female client was threatened with being run over by a car. She has since been afraid to go out and afraid to report it.

Received a threat letter in the mailbox. It had Osama Bin Laden’s photo and swear words. The letter said ‘Arabs must die’. Lives by herself and doesn’t feel secure. Lives in a housing commission. Thinks she was targeted because she is an Arab person.

Community Council received threat to throw bombs at Muslim shops and mosques.

**Discrimination or harassment**

Fifty-six incidents of discrimination or harassment were reported to the CRC Hotline between September and November 2001 (17.5% of all incidents). Most incidents of discrimination or harassment occurred in a public space. Males (55.4%) were more likely than females (42.9%) to suffer discrimination or harassment. Racial discrimination or harassment was reported against all age groups: adults (64.3%), adolescents (23.2%), children (8.9%) and the elderly (3.6%).

	Number of incidents of discrimination or harassment	Percentage
Public space	23	41.1%
Shops	6	10.7%
Public transport		
School or educational institution	17	30.4%
Work	8	14.2%
Residence or neighbourhood	2	3.6%
House of worship		
Media		
Mobile phone		
Total	56	100%

TABLE 9: LOCATION OF INCIDENTS OF DISCRIMINATION AND HARASSMENT

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Several callers reported harassment and discrimination at work, including being 'told to put his Koran in the bin' and being refused time or space to pray.

Has been trying to open a prayer room for one month – was rejected and told to go pray in the garden. 40% of the students are Muslim. Admin finally agreed to a prayer room in the college, but in the last days since the US incident – the tensions between the admin/security staff have tried to prevent him from accessing the room. They have refused to publicise the room as a prayer room even though there has been several requests; they are hostile and in the last days it has been difficult. The guard told him 'religion is the cause of all the wars in the world'.

Another caller was 'told to stop praying at work'. Callers also experienced discrimination when looking for work.

Caller said that one of her clients attended a job interview last week. During the interview he was asked about his cultural background. When he said he was Lebanese the interview came to a quick end, and the interviewer/s left without even shaking the hand of the applicant. Caller fears that more discrimination is in store for the innocent.

Callers also reported harassment from students and teachers in school.

Students were in class, the topic was brought up by the teacher, she said to the caller 'did you know the one responsible for the attacks in the US, his name is Mohamed, and so is yours. I'll call the police and have them take you away'. When student said that he was going to tell the principal, she began to laugh and said tell her. Young person felt embarrassed and described feeling depressed as he was put down in front of his school mates.

Others reported harassment in the neighbourhood such as waking up to find 'for sale' signs on both their cars or disputes with co-tenants.

Caller shares a house. Woman has continued to harass me since Sept 11. Accused me of theft – of being a terrorist. I have been there for six months. And since September 11 she has threatened to call police to tell them that I am a terrorist. I am scared. I went to leave but she won't give me my bond money. She has also harassed the other man in the house. She also wants me to go to church with her and she always gives me Christian literature to read.

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## **Damage to property**

Sixteen incidents of damage to property were reported to the CRC Hotline between September and November 2001 (6.5% of all incidents). Damage to property was reported against family homes (56.3%), places of worship (25%) and in public spaces (12.5%).

Callers reported attacks on property including arson. In some instances physical assault and damage to property were combined.

A Caring Centre was fire bombed on 4th October, late at night. 4 young people in balaclavas threw several Molotov cocktails into the hostel, burning an older woman confined to a chair and a staff member who helped her.

Homes and cars were attacked with rocks and eggs.

On Sunday the 21st October, Caller was in his home with his wife having just put his daughter to bed. Then he heard a loud explosion. He went to investigate and found his windows smashed in and an egg smashed against the wall.

Callers also reported graffiti.

Caller reported that she had noticed several graffitied houses. Outside one house, graffiti sign reading 'Arabs out'; outside another, on road sign, 'Leb Scum', outside another 'Muslim terrorists/rapist pigs'.

## **Media attacks**

Thirty-three incidents of media 'assaults' were reported to the CRC Hotline during September – November 2001 (10.3% of all incidents). Media attacks were primarily reported by members of the Sikh community. Media comments are the one category of incident in which male callers (72.7%) predominate.

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On 13 September, 2001 **The Daily Telegraph** published a front-page photograph of a man arrested in the United States in conjunction with the attacks on the World Trade Centre. The headline was 'First Arrest' and the man pictured wore the turban and beard required by the Sikh religion. On 13 September and in the days following, Australian Sikhs rang the CRC Hotline to report both the newspaper coverage and incidents of abuse and assault associated with it.

Complaining about photo of a Sikh. 13th September **Daily Tele** afternoon edition. Nothing inside that says why he was on the cover. Didn't feel good about the photo. Upset about it. 'Not good without evidence to publish this photo'. Concerned about the impact it will have on her community. Didn't know how to explain it to her children.

Member of the Sikh community has been getting verbal abuse his community has been threatened as trouble makers. Everybody has been telling him to go back home 'Arab ' mistaken for an Arab as a result of a **Daily Telegraph** afternoon edition.

Callers also reported incidents of vilification and irresponsible comment on talkback radio.

Female host taking calls from the public: A Muslim woman phones and says that she had her headscarf/hijab ripped off in a racial attack... female radio host tells caller that her call is not appropriate and hang up on her. Listener deeply offended.

Caller is concerned about media tendencies to 'blow things up'. Particularly concerned about talk back host who doesn't present balanced views and continuously puts callers to air who express racist tendencies etc: Monday 20/9 3.10am – allowed Mary to express her hatred towards Muslims. Monday 17/9 2.50am Allowed a caller to say that Muslims are hiding guns under Mosque floor.

In addition to the 33 calls reporting specific media incidents, many callers referred to the media as a contributing factor in other incidents. These comments are analysed in the following chapters of this report.

Chapter Two details the wider impacts of September 11, 2001 on community relations in New South Wales, including the impacts on feelings and belonging and the impacts on targeted communities.

## WIDER IMPACTS OF SEPTEMBER 11, 2001 ON COMMUNITY RELATIONS

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In this chapter the CRC Hotline data and comments from community consultations are further analysed in order to understand and outline the wider impacts of September 11, 2001 on community relations, focusing on more generalised effects and the impact on attitudes and interactions between individuals and communities. Firstly, the impact of the event and the reactions to it on feelings and belonging of Australian Arab, Muslim and Sikh communities is considered. The most common impact was fear coupled with feelings of insecurity or isolation, although the increased tensions also created an interest in anti-racism activities and opportunities for dialogue between communities and religions.

### Impacts on feelings and belonging

#### Fear for family and for self

Fear and distress were the most common affect following September 11, 2001. A significant number of callers expressed fear for both themselves and their family members, such as 'it was awful, scary', 'feel very afraid to get out of their home', 'family are scared' and 'children are very upset and parents are fearful'. Hotline log sheets describe callers as 'crying', 'distressed', 'doesn't feel safe' and 'feels helpless'. Fear was reported in relation to all types of incidents. The fear of physical and verbal abuse sometimes manifested itself as a fear of reporting or a fear of leaving home. For example:

After being verbally assaulted on street 'Caller ran out of the way in total fear and got home'. Does not want to report any of this to police. Distressed about her entire situation in Australia and her living conditions.

Caller was frightened, too afraid to discuss it with anyone. Did not want to give names or take it to police

Caller was very scared. Caller has been staying indoors with her kids for the past few days. Caller has been in Australia for 20 years, first time this has ever happened

Person is worried and very worried about his wife and children to the extent of not letting his wife leave the house on her own.

Community members also feared further attacks and expressed concern about how the community would cope with attacks.

- Caller is fearful there will be more attacks on her daughter and young people. She is worried about her daughter's safety getting to and from school. She is concerned Muslim young people do not respond with violence.
- Fearful there will be more attacks on Muslim young people.
- I'm afraid of what will happen to my children at school.

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### **Targeted communities: 'It's not our fault'**

A significant number of calls expressed frustration, anger and disbelief at particular communities being blamed for the events of September 11, 2001. Comments ranged from anger that the caller no longer felt safe to disbelief at the racism callers were experiencing. Examples include:

- Angry about the fact can't feel safe in her own country.
- Sick of hostile racist treatment.
- Community is vulnerable, under attack and unprotected.

Callers also expressed disbelief or incomprehension about the reported incident.

- 'What do I have to do with it?'
- Depressed and ashamed and never thought I would be in a situation like that [wrongly targeted by police as criminal].
- Fears for family. Doesn't understand the reasoning underlying the attacks on ordinary/innocent Australian Muslims. 'We don't deserve this'.

Members of the Sikh community reported that they were mistakenly targeted as Arabs or Muslims.

- Sikh distressed about being targeted and stated no community in Australia should be targeted.
- Most Indians are not Muslims and therefore should not be targeted.

### **Concerned callers**

As well as incidents reported to the CRC, the Hotline also received calls reporting more general complaints or concerns. Four callers to the Hotline reported fear and distress which had impacted on their movements and their wellbeing.

Caller is a Muslim woman with hijab. Caller just wanted to let us know that she is feeling very scared, she has NOT left her home for the past 4 days, except to drop her children off at school. Caller said that this has been caused by the focus and blame being placed on the Muslim community. She also reported hearing stories of women who have been verbally and physically abused. Caller was very distressed and feared for her children safety.

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Nine callers rang offering a general comment on the impacts of September 11, 2001, such as 'complains about the media as being the main encouragement to the incidents that is happening' and 'people are lighting candles for the dead in America – that's beautiful BUT what about the people who are dying in Iraq EVERYDAY and in other parts of the world???'

The Hotline also received reports of six serious incidents which were not in New South Wales, including a call about a physical assault in Brisbane, discrimination at work in Brisbane, police harassment in Victoria and denial of service in Melbourne.

### **'Looks' and visibility**

The feelings of a significant number of callers reflected the perception that they were 'looked at' with disgust, or as criminals. For example:

- Caller has been in Australia for 43 years. 'I can't change the way I look. 'It almost came to physical blows'.
- Anywhere she is going people are looking at her like she is a criminal.

This research demonstrates a strong link between visible markers of 'difference' such as wearing the hijab or a turban and experiences of prejudice and assault. An analysis of the ways in which the subjects of assaults were described or named supports these findings, indicating that attitudes of prejudice and hatred often focus on visible signs of ethnicity, culture or religion that is 'different' to what is assumed to be a white, 'Anglo' Australian 'mainstream'. Callers reported being told to 'take that thing off your head', referring to the hijab; others described being identified by 'Islamic objects', a turban, beard or 'headpiece'. Hijab were referred to as 'that f\_\_\_ing thing' and a Sikh man reported being harassed by a security guard for wearing a small ceremonial sword in a shopping centre. Of the forty miscellaneous calls which demonstrated public attitudes of racism and hostility towards Arab and Muslim Australians, one in five referred specifically to markers of visibility including clothing (referring to the hijab or a 'tea towel' or 'thing' worn on the head), to the lights of a mosque or to Arabic writing on shopfronts.

### **Discrimination and rising racism**

Some callers named the events reported as discrimination, while others complained of rising levels of racism. For example:

- Feels discriminated against because of hijab.
- Voice concern at rising level of racism. The Australia we once knew will never be the same.
- It's been happening for a while but it's increased since September 11.
- There is tension between Muslim and Christian communities.

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Callers also described the incidents as 'a racist attack' and named perpetrators as 'prejudiced' or 'racist'.

Reports of incidents included dozens of examples of abusive, offensive and obscene language. Callers were told 'Muslims are dirty' and 'you're rubbish', another was called a 'dirty Arab', still others were called 'bloody wogs', 'Leb scum', 'rapist pigs' and 'fucking Muslim bitch'. Insults and threats were also directed at specific communities, such as 'fuck all you Middle Eastern pricks', 'Arabs must die' and 'we will wipe you out'.

Some callers expressed concern that responses to allegations of racist behaviour were inadequate. Other callers commented that although events were not explicitly racist they could see no other reason for the incident other than the issue of race.

- Dissatisfied with employer's response to racism in the workplace and wants employers to understand the problem.
- It was a racist attack and police didn't acknowledge this.
- There can be no other reason for the dispute than the issue of race.

Some callers felt dissatisfied with police responses to allegations of racial vilification and violence in particular. Other incidents were not reported to police because of negative perceptions about the police. For example:

Subjects of incident chose not to go to police because they believe it is pointless – have a negative perception of the police and don't have confidence that anything will be done to assist.

## **Belonging**

Discourse analysis of the ways in which the subjects of assaults were described or named indicates that both perpetrators of racist incidents and callers to the CRC Hotline described Arab and Muslim Australians in terms which inferred that they do not 'belong' or are not welcome in Australia. Of the forty miscellaneous calls which expressed concern or abuse against Muslim and Arab Australians, almost half (18) mention Australia or 'Australians' as white, 'Anglo', Christian or English-speaking. This is contrasted to the perceived 'threat' of 'Muslims' (17 mentions), Arabs or Arabic (11), Lebanese (7), and 'Middle Eastern' communities or cultures (5). Callers were told to 'go home, you animal', 'to go back where I came from and learn English' or to 'your own country' and 'we do not want you'. These comments assume that 'Australia' is monocultural and that Arab and Australian and Muslim and Australian are mutually exclusive categories. They also assume the speakers' right to determine who does and does not 'belong' in Australia. These assumptions did indeed impact on the sense of belonging expressed by callers to the CRC Hotline. One caller explained that she 'can't feel safe in her own country'. Another lamented for 'the Australia we once knew'. Yet another wanted to defend 'ordinary, innocent Australian Muslims'.



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## **Anger and frustration at the media**

The analysis identified significant anger at the media in both the feelings expressed by callers and in their general comments. One caller 'felt irate with the media'. Another was 'angry about what he [was] hearing on 2GB and 2UE'. Other examples include:

- Wife is scared to go out. Complained about media and unconditional support for what is happening.
- The media are inciting people to racial violence and something has to be done about that.
- Fed up at reports that constantly blame the Arabic community for the incident in the USA.
- Media tends to blow things up and allow racist views to be expressed..

In community consultations, interviewees also expressed anger at the media and at politicians for inflaming prejudice and fear against targeted communities.

This fear was induced fear. It was induced by the media and the politicians, the politicians themselves were inciting this, were actually inflaming it, creating an environment of mistrust. It was a media induced thing and it was inflamed to some extent by comments from political leaders.

## **Impacts of September 11, 2001 on targeted communities**

### **Communities 'under siege'**

The rise in incidents motivated by racism or prejudice impacted on the communities targeted as well as individuals involved in specific incidents. Interviewees described Muslim, Arab and Sikh communities in New South Wales as 'under siege, under attack', 'threatened', 'under the spotlight' and 'targeted', creating a 'climate of fear'. The events of September 11, 2001 and the subsequent 'war on terror' also impacted on 'Afghan women', on 'Arab young people', 'the Lebanese community', 'Bangladeshi women', 'Indonesians' and 'refugees'. The racialised nature of incidents robbed members of targeted communities of a sense of security and belonging.

A common impact is a feeling of dislocation. When people are told to go home simply because they are Arab, they think 'where do we belong'? Even though they have been here for years, they have no sense of belonging.

This sense of alienation affected young people in particular.

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Kids feel that their life chances and daily treatment have been severely marred by September 11. People see Arab and think terrorist. I spoke to one young man, with a job, married, doing all the right things. He said 'I don't believe in heaven or hell, we are living in hell'.

September 11 had a really long-term effect on those kids in terms of their own self-esteem and the way that they knew that they were perceived by society.

Impacts were felt to be strongest among people who are in some way visibly 'different' to Anglo-Celtic Australians.

Yeah we were the people who hid the bombs underneath our scarves and if we went within 10 metres of the harbour bridge we were going to cause some sort of dilemma for them.

I know Sri Lankan women, Bangladeshi women who were attacked because they wear non-western dress. There was no discernment: most people couldn't tell the hijab from the turban, a Muslim from a Sikh and that shouldn't surprise anyone because I think people are very ignorant of the diversity within the community.

Some members of targeted communities felt compelled to hide visible markers of their identity, in particular Muslim women and Sikh men.

Women were scared to practice their religion, took off their scarves. Women question whether to wear the scarf, in terms of employment is it worth it?

People have been cutting their hair and removing the turban. It is very sad. It will happen until there is a supportive and empowering atmosphere for Sikhs. Cutting the hair is sacrilege. It is against the Code of Conduct, it is the Sikh identity.

Interviewees also reported that the increased sense of threat and fear had particularly affected people with previous experiences of trauma.

In the St George area many Arab-Australians are from South Lebanon, they have experienced war and trauma. Feeling persecuted brought back traumatic memories, brought back the trauma.

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Many interviewees explained that Arab and Muslim communities in Australia had previously experienced racism and discrimination, and that September 11, 2001 exacerbated that trend.

Racism in accessing employment, the issue of distorted media coverage and representation – these are the issues that communities have to constantly deal with. September 11 confronted those issues head on. The lack of education, the lack of understanding, the ignorance of things Islamic came to the forefront which ultimately meant that the community at the grassroots level had to bear the brunt of the increase of racism in the attacks directed at women, children on buses, mosques being torched.

The need to respond to racism and to the demand for anti-racism education also impacted on community organisations.

Racism generates a lot of work for the communities affected – everyone wants a piece of you, everyone wants you to come and visit. You are under attack and also bombarded with requests.

Two representatives of non-Arab Muslim communities felt that the impacts on their communities had been limited.

The main impact was feeling sorry. Many Pakistanis were killed – it was a very sad incident. There were a couple of incidents after September 11 but actually not a great impact.

### **Impacts on Sikh communities in NSW**

While these findings are broadly consistent with previous research on Arab and Muslim communities in Australia, and the HREOC **Isma** project in particular, there is little research that documents the experiences of Sikhs in Australia after September 11, 2001. Research accruing from this study demonstrates that newspaper reporting in the days immediately after the event had a significant impact on Sikh communities in New South Wales. In the data collected by the CRC Hotline general comments reflected Sikh community anger about the **Daily Telegraph's** reportage and accompanying photo of a Sikh man arrested in the United States as the first September 11 suspect (see page 17). Callers reiterated that the Sikh community is innocent and deserves an apology.

- **Daily Telegraph** photo of 1st arrest could cause lots of threats.
- People in Sikh community are really scared, fear retribution attacks.
- The Sikh community should not have to go through this media coverage.

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The consultations with Sikh community organisations indicate that there were many subsequent racially motivated incidents.

Sikhs were mistaken for Muslims (Al Qaeda) and faced racial abuse, discrimination, children having a hard time in schools. My son was called Osama in school. Sikh cab drivers were abused.

The photo of the first arrest coloured the perceptions of the Australian community against anyone who keeps beard and wears a turban. Anyone who wears a beard and turban became associated with terrorist organisations (ie Al-Qaeda).

Sikh restaurant owners had people stop visiting their restaurants, people threw eggs and tomatoes at Sikh homes, there were incidents of road rage and people screaming at Sikhs on the footpath. It happened to me, a few times at Central station, irrespective of my western dress or carrying a business briefcase (obviously it was due to the fact that I keep my beard and wear turban).

These events have also impacted on Sikh children. They wear turbans but don't know how to respond when other children bully them. There has been (and is) a lot of pressure on them; it has made a significant impact on their self-confidence, which is shattered resulting in poor school performance and social / sporting skills.

People threw beer bottles, stones and broke the glass at the Sikh place of worship. People screamed past in cars yelling obscene words and strong language against members of the Sikh community who were visiting the Gurdwara for a religious service.

Being targeted 'came as a shock' to members of Sikh communities, 'you are in the middle of something that you are not even a part of'. While consultations with Arab and Muslim communities often placed the impacts of September 11, 2001 in the context of ongoing hostility and prejudice, the impacts on Sikhs in New South Wales were more unexpected.

Chapter Three details responses to increased racism and prejudice after September 11, 2001, including public attitudes registered by the CRC Hotline and individual responses to the reported incidents.

## RESPONSES TO INCREASED RACISM AFTER SEPTEMBER 11, 2001

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### Public attitudes after September 11, 2001

An analysis of the 'miscellaneous' calls logged by the CRC Hotline provides an indication of broad public attitudes in the days and weeks following September 11, 2001. These include both supportive attitudes, expressed by callers interested in or supportive of the CRC Hotline and targeted communities, and attitudes of prejudice, hatred and concern directed at the Hotline and at Muslim and Arab Australians.

### Supportive attitudes

The CRC recorded six calls that expressed support for the Hotline and/or for affected communities. For example:

- Feels distressed by what is happening. Feels concerned. Wants to express support towards this CRC initiative.
- School teacher called to express her outrage over the way in which Arab and Muslim Australians have been targeted in response to the terrorist attack in the US.
- Caller knows no Muslims and would like to get to know some – have a cup of tea. She says they're being demonised and nobody knows any.

In addition, 38 calls enquired about the Hotline and its functions, indicating an interest in antiracism measures in response to the events of September 11, 2001. Many callers rang in order to provide support for friends or clients:

- People asked her about the phone number and service availability.
- Caller has several Arab friends – both Muslim and non Muslim – who had recently informed her that they are being racially taunted / abused in workplaces and in public spaces. She undertook to find out if they can get assistance anywhere and called this line.
- Staff from organisation phoned wanting to confirm Hotline number (as the centre wants to distribute the number amongst clients). Some clients have indicated that they have been racially vilified in the street.

Most of these enquiries were to confirm the availability of the Hotline. These calls indicate substantial support for services assisting individuals and communities experiencing racism.

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## Concerns about the Hotline and Muslim and Arab communities

In addition to enquiries and general support for the Hotline and for communities affected by racism, the CRC also logged 31 calls which complained about the Hotline and/or about Arab and Muslim communities in Australia.

Caller says that Muslims are not the victims. All NON-Muslims are in fact the victims because Muslims are the cause of discrimination. They're 'eye sores', there are too many of them, and they make others feel uncomfortable. Why do they go around displaying they're Muslim? Other groups don't do that. And if you say anything to them, they scream. They have 'Allahu Akbar' stickers in their shopfront windows. There's too many of them on the street. I give them bad looks with my eyes.

Callers also expressed fear about Muslims in Australia:

Anglo woman called and said that she heard a Muslim from work saying she thought the incident in the US was deserved by the US. She said she doesn't feel safe. Feels fearful of Muslim people. 'People need to respect it's a Christian country'. 'What about the racism against Australians.' 'Scared I might be abused for wearing a cross'.

Caller is very frightened to deal with Muslim culture and the Muslim people. Referred to the Islamic Council, will make an effort to visit one of the mosques and get more information so he can be familiar about the culture.

Others wanted to complain about the Hotline itself, describing it as 'discrimination' or 'racism'.

Australian, abusing Muslims/Arabs. Thinks it's ridiculous to open up this line especially for them and blames the Arab/Muslim population for crime in Australia. Wanted to press a complaint against this Hotline and its service to help 'the troublemakers'.

Expressing concern that he believes this Hotline is 'reverse racism'. 'Where was the CRC when Australian women were being racially and sexually assaulted? No Hotline was set up for them because they are Australian.' 'Hotlines should be open to all Australians, not just certain sections of the community'. 'You must be living in a hole if you don't know that Middle Eastern men target Australian women.'

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Caller asked operator to explain why the Hotline had been set up and by whom? Just saw the **Leader** newspaper – saw CRC’s advertisement. Is concerned. This is an English speaking and Christian country. Why has a Hotline like this been set up for only certain communities? This country has lost the plot: we should have 1 flag, 1 leader. We’re one people, one country. Caller saw some Arabic writing on a shopfront window – she thinks this is racism.

Some callers also asked ‘why there wasn’t a Christian line, because its racist to have a Muslim line and that this racist thing is getting out of hand. She said that it’s the white people who are feeling oppressed now’. Another caller felt she was discriminated against as people in her neighbourhood speak Arabic and Cantonese among themselves rather than English.

These comments indicate a significant level of prejudice against Muslim Australians in particular, as well as fear and misunderstanding of Islam and of Arab cultures. Complaints about the CRC Hotline also indicate a lack of understanding of the experiences and the extent of racism in Australia coupled with confusion about discrimination and anti-discrimination measures.

Half of the callers complaining about the Hotline explicitly mentioned advertisements or discussions of the Hotline in the news media as the trigger for their call (four radio, ten local newspaper) and of those which did not, at least half could be assumed to be responding to media coverage and promotion of the Hotline.

### **Abusive calls**

The Hotline also logged nine abusive calls. These calls included vicious insults and threats against Arab and Muslim communities in Australia. For example:

- You dirty filthy scum, I hope you die. You are not Australian. I don’t care if you were born here or how long you’ve lived here you are not Australian, Australia is a country. You filthy scum. I hope you fucking die. Take your stupid clothes off and that stupid shit off your head. You’re an Australian, be an Australian. They all have sex with their own children. They have sex with pigs and animals. You filthy, dirty, Afghanistan scum.
- F\_\_ Lebo \_ F\_ C- Arabs I hope U all can die.

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## Individual responses to racially motivated incidents

This section provides an overview of the responses and activities of individuals involved in specific incidents reported to the CRC Hotline. The analysis emphasises that people subjected to racism and discrimination are not passive victims, but rather engage in a range of activities to address prejudice and assaults.

Subjects of the incident who contacted the CRC were responding to the events they experienced by calling the Hotline. Callers were often not the subject of the incident but calling to report incidents on behalf of someone else or because they believed the incident impacted on the community. Incident reports by community workers who contacted the CRC on behalf of community members suggest the subjects of incidents were sometimes too frightened to report the incident.

### Immediate responses

Some callers did not respond to incidents of racist abuse or assault or if they did their response was not recorded. 'Shock' at what was happening was repeatedly cited as a reason for not responding at the time of the incident. Callers sometimes took active steps to protect themselves such as 'approached nearest shops for security', 'attempted to speak to train guard' and 'lied about religion'. Sometimes this involved leaving the site of the incident: One caller who 'left site of incident, advised to take off veil but won't do this'. If the incident occurred in cars, callers sometimes recorded or attempted to record the number plate of the perpetrator's vehicle.

Some callers responded to racist abuse by challenging the views of the perpetrator or requesting someone else speak to the perpetrator. For example:

- replied to comment that wearing hijab in Australia was rude by saying 'its not rude but normal'.
- 2 subjects of incident tried to calm down perpetrators talking about peaceful resolutions.
- caller confronted colleague reported incident to acting manager.
- twice asked security guard what was wrong.
- caller confronted perpetrator.
- caller approached manager about racist abuse in workplace. Contacted GP due to high blood pressure.



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Other callers felt the best response was no response:

- girl ignored [racist abuse] kept walking.
- said nothing to fuel abusive caller.
- did not retaliate to abuse from passing cars/people. Didn't report incident to police. Left camp site.
- did not retaliate when attacked, left house and went for a walk with a caretaker.
- didn't report incident just kept walking.

Some callers became the subject of racist incidents through intervening to protect the original target, including a caller who 'attempted to help an elderly woman being bashed by men and was injured herself' and another who 'tried to protect husband during physical/verbal assault'.

### **Contacted police**

Contacting police was a common form of response to incidents reported to the CRC, and almost 13% of callers had contacted the police prior to ringing the CRC Hotline (32 calls). Contacting police was often part of a response which included a number of actions. For example, a caller 'told her husband they spoke to the manager in the hospital, filled in a complaint form. Contacted police.' However, it should be noted that callers were sometimes reluctant to contact police or dissatisfied with the police responses. Contacting police was not always useful, for example: 'when referred to police caller stated she had contacted police but was informed they could do nothing to protect her'. Sometimes police contact was initiated to make a complaint about police behaviour, such as a caller who 'contacted police [re complaint about police behaviour]' and another caller who 'reported incident [complaint about police] to police but dissatisfied with response – feels more should be done'.

### **Contacted other agencies or support services**

Many callers who contacted the CRC Hotline had previously contacted other government departments, legal services, community organisations or support services. Callers had contacted the NSW Department of Community Services, the NSW Department of Education and Training, a trade union, the Ethnic Communities Council, lawyers and a barrister, health and counselling services and Arabic and Muslim community organisations.

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Responses often took the form of complaints to school authorities by students (or parents of students) suffering abuse. For example:

- subject of racist comment said he would tell the principal. Has a meeting with the principal which he will attend with father. Father wants an apology in front of class.
- contacted deputy principal; awaiting principals reply.
- told other students not to swear at Muslims and Islam.

Although callers were often unaware of the result of their complaints, one caller reported a positive outcome of 'Anti-racism awareness being taken up at college where incident occurred'.

### **Requested action**

Ten callers requested direct action by the CRC. Requests for action included:

- wants CRC to present Muslim men on the media to defend Islam and Muslims from such abuse.
- provided CRC with mobile ph no of alleged abuser and requested action otherwise would take matter into own hands.
- requested CRC follow up matter with police.
- wants CRC to speak directly to the manager regarding racist harassment in the workplace.

Callers were often specific about the action required but non-specific about what organisation, agency or person should initiate the action. For example:

- wants someone to call the radio station to stop them broadcasting such nonsense.
- School has reported threats to police. Someone needs to assure the parents that they are safe, someone needs to go to the school.
- Should be a meeting that gathers Muslim young people together and briefs them what to do in case of attack.

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### **Media related responses**

Although there were a large number of complaints which mentioned the media, subject responses suggest that callers rarely actively engaged the media. Only one caller was recorded as saying 'she would like to voice her opinion in media', although another caller 'contacted radio' and another 'threatened to call talkback radio or police about alleged offensive behaviour'.

### **Other Responses**

Some callers resolved to take further action in response to the incident(s). Following CRC contact, five callers expressly decided to contact police and three callers decided to contact other agencies including the Anti-Discrimination Board and a real estate agent. Other callers had already resolved to take further action, such as distributing the Hotline number. While the feelings recorded show the emotional response to the incidents, the fear created by the incidents sometimes resulted in callers changing their daily behaviour, and five callers had not left the house because of fear or worry.



## FEAR, BELONGING AND CITIZENSHIP

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This monograph has provided a snapshot of the crisis in community relations in New South Wales following the attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York on September 11, 2001. The Hotline established by the CRC received reports of assaults, vilification, threats, discrimination and harassment targeting Muslim, Arab and Sikh Australians in particular. Callers to the Hotline reported being punched, pushed to the ground and having the hijab ripped off; others reported a firebombing and having windows smashed and eggs thrown at their home. Callers also reported being denied prayer facilities at work and vilification in the media. These incidents produced a widespread and enduring climate of fear and insecurity among the targeted communities.

This snapshot raises important issues beyond the reported incidents. Callers to the CRC Hotline consistently reported fear as a direct and ongoing impact of the incidents described. Callers were 'very scared', 'in total fear' and often reported fear of reporting the incident or fear of leaving their home. One caller was 'distressed about her entire situation in Australia and her living conditions'. The prevalence of feelings of fear and concern echoes existing research on the impacts of September 11, 2001 on Arab and Muslim Australians (HREOC 2004, Poynting and Noble 2004) and highlights the profound impacts of specific incidents. In addition to individuals and families who found themselves living in fear, targeted communities were described as 'under siege', and community organisations reported being overwhelmed by the need for both community work and for anti-racism education and advocacy. The impact of specific incidents and the climate of intense fear were particularly acute for people with previous experience of trauma - including refugees.

This research has shown that targeted communities have every reason to feel afraid and insecure. The CRC Hotline recorded significant evidence of hostility towards Muslim and Arab Australians and a lack of understanding of experiences of racism and the rationale for anti-racism measures. Callers rang to say, 'You dirty filthy scum, I hope you die' and 'there are too many of them [Muslims]'. Callers cited shop signs in Arabic and the Hotline itself as evidence of discrimination in which 'all NON-Muslims are in fact the victims'. In the majority of incidents and hostile comments recorded by the Hotline, Muslim and Arab Australians were described or treated as a problem, a threat and above all as not 'belonging' in Australia. Callers were told 'you Muslim, you are a terrorist, go back to your country, we do not want you in Australia' and to 'go home, you animal'. These practices serve to exclude targeted communities from the category of 'Australian' and from the experience of social belonging. Arab and Muslim Australians have been robbed of experiences of 'comfort' and of being 'at home' in Australia (Noble 2005), at least in part by being dehumanised or not recognised as 'fully human' (Poynting et al 2004, Poynting and Noble 2004).

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Research on racism after September 11, 2001 suggests that exclusion from belonging produces differentiated citizenship as 'a pervasive landscape of fear and incivility fundamentally alters the social opportunities for Australian Arabs and Muslims to function as citizens' (Poynting and Noble 2004: 19). Callers to the CRC Hotline described many ways in which their freedom of movement was impacted, such as 'caller has been staying indoors with her kids for the past few days'. Members of targeted communities also felt restricted in their choice of dress - 'women were too scared to practice their religion, took off their scarves' and 'people have been cutting their hair and removing the turban'. Callers also experienced key institutions such as schools and the police as complicit in or indifferent to racist incidents. The media in particular were identified as a source of vilification and abuse. These reports suggest pervasive experiences of exclusion from freedoms and participation which many Australians take for granted.

This monograph highlights two key concerns within the overall context of differentiated citizenship and precarious belonging produced by incidents targeting Muslim and Arab communities. Firstly, community consultants and callers to the Hotline have stated that racially-motivated incidents have been underreported. Existing research in this area has also found consistent patterns of underreporting, often due to a distrust of state authorities and institutions among communities experiencing racism (HREOC 2004, Poynting and Noble 2004). The experience of the CRC Hotline demonstrates the importance of detailed data collection on experiences of racism and prejudice, including recording information on feelings and the wider impact of specific incidents.

Secondly, the prevalence of complaints about various forms of media in both calls and in consultations indicates that media reporting is seen as one of the most important factors in community relations. Media – including newspapers and talkback radio – emerge from this monograph as a central social institution contributing to experiences of fear and exclusion among targeted communities. This report demonstrates that communities living in fear are unable to enjoy a sense of belonging or to fully exercise the rights and freedoms of citizenship.

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