

The TRUTH about the 'wave of attacks' on Muslims after Woolwich killing: Most of the incidents recorded were offensive messages on Facebook and Twitter

- More than half of incidents reported to hotline were internet comments
- Questioned raised about the way Tell Mama project presented figures

By Vanessa Allen

Claims that large numbers of Muslims were attacked in the aftermath of the Woolwich murder were questioned yesterday.

A Government-funded project warned it had received more than 200 reports of Islamophobia following Drummer Lee Rigby's murder, including attacks on mosques and Muslim women.

Project director Fiyaz Mughal said the figure represented a 'substantial spike' in hate crimes and warned of 'a sustained wave of attacks and intimidation' against Muslim communities across Britain.



Two men, both reportedly soldiers, have been arrested in connection with a petrol bomb attack on the Grimsby Islamic Cultural Centre since the killing of Lee Rigby

But more than half of the incidents reported to the Tell Mama (Measuring Anti-Muslim Attacks) hotline related to offensive messages on Twitter, Facebook or online blogs, and only a tiny minority were physical attacks, it has emerged.

The claims raised questions about the way Tell Mama presented its figures in the days after Drummer Rigby's murder, amid repeated calls for calm to avoid reprisal attacks.

Mr Mughal said Tell Mama had received 162 reports of anti-Muslim prejudice in a 48-hour period.

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Between four and eight incidents are normally reported daily to the charity, which receives £214,000 a year in funding from the Department for Communities and Local Government to provide data and reports on attacks against Muslims to combat hate crime.

A total of 212 incidents were reported between the Woolwich murder on May 22 and the end of last week.

The attacks received widespread coverage alongside warnings from Mr Mughal of a 'cycle of violence' against Muslims which had led to 'a sense of endemic fear'.

But while they included a petrol bomb attack on a mosque in Grimsby and in another incident in Essex where a man entered a mosque armed with a knife, only 17 cases involved individuals being physically targeted, a Sunday newspaper reported.



Target: Charities said there had been a 'substantial spike' in hate crimes against Muslims since the Woolwich killing. This Bolton mosque was vandalised on the evening of Lee Rigby's death



Criminal damage: This mosque in Gillingham, Kent, was the target of vandals on the night after Lee Rigby's death. But figures show a tiny minority of reported incidents were physical attacks

Six people had things thrown at them and most of the other 11 incidents related to attempts to rip off women's headscarves or other items of Islamic dress.

More than half – 120 – related to offensive or abusive messages on social networking sites including Facebook and Twitter.

Contacted by the Daily Mail, Mr Mughal refused to discuss the figures, which he said would be independently checked by Birmingham University for a report next month.

Any attempt to downplay the significance of verbal or online abuse was 'an affront to hate crime reporting', he said.

He was also challenged on the figures during an interview on Radio 4's Sunday programme, when he conceded that the number of physical attacks was 'quite small'.



Tensions: Although there have been angry booze-fuelled EDL marches since Drummer Rigby's death, figures show most reported anti-Muslim 'attacks' have been comments on the internet

He said: 'We are talking mainly about generalised abuse, targeted comments said at a street level as well as targeted comments online.

'So most of it is generalised abuse, thankfully it is not extreme violence.

'This is not just an issue of attacks, physical attacks against individuals, this is about looking at the whole picture.'

In a statement on the Tell Mama website, the project said verbal and online abuse were 'recordable hate incidents' along with violent assaults and attacks on mosques.

It said it was working with the Metropolitan Police to ensure that hate crimes against Muslims were reported correctly.

David Green, director of the think-tank Civitas, said it was vital that such cases were not exaggerated or reported carelessly.