

HALF A STORY? MISSING PERSPECTIVES IN THE CRIMINOLOGICAL ACCOUNTS OF BRITISH MUSLIM COMMUNITIES, CRIME AND THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

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An examination of recent scholarly criminological literature concerning British Muslim reveals dominant discursive themes of victimization, discrimination and demonization and a highly politicized discourse, often rhetorical in nature and seldom supported by empirical evidence. Where such evidence is adduced, criminologists rely predominantly on limited qualitative research designs and small non-representative sample sizes. This article presents analysis of British Crime Survey/Crime Survey of England and Wales data and argues that quantitative findings highlight the need for a more nuanced criminological picture of British Muslim communities. It is argued that criminologists should place renewed focus on household crime, the effects of socio-economic factors, crimes involving non-physical forms of violence and Muslim respondents who report positive attitudes towards the police.

Keywords: British Muslims, crime, Crime Survey of England and Wales, quantitative research methods, crime victimization, Islamophobia, economic disadvantage, policing

Introduction

British Muslim citizens have been described as the subject of extensive conjecture, scrutiny and misapprehension within academic and political debates (Chakraborti 2007: 109). This paper identifies misleading generalizations concerning the relationships between British Muslim communities, crime and the criminal justice—generalizations which may be located throughout much of the scholarly criminological literature. These generalizations exist, in part, because of the uncritical acceptance and the repeated rehearsal of the narratives which have come to dominate discourse around Muslim communities in the United Kingdom: victimization, discrimination and demonization.

Much of this discourse is highly politicized and rhetorical in character, rarely rooted in statistical evidence and seldom substantiated by empirical findings. Repeated examples are found in a body of scholarly literature, much of which have been described as journalistic and polemical in nature (Malik 2005). A close examination of the literature reveals a tendency by scholars to employ only limited research designs. Where primary data are collected and analysed, there is an overall preference for qualitative, rather than quantitative, research methods (where a greater balance would arguably be preferable). An over-reliance on these methods, and on politicized and polemical writing, has led to misapprehensions and misleading dominant narratives concerning British Muslims. Findings from the analysis of *Crime Survey* data reported in this paper reveal a criminological picture which is often more complex than that suggested by contributors to the growing number of books, journal articles and reports dealing with criminological issues faced by British Muslims. Instead of capturing the complexity,

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diversity and plurality inherent within British Muslim communities' experiences of and attitudes towards crime and the police, the scholarly literature instead presents a picture which is largely monist and nearly always incomplete.¹

For many criminologists, the gravitational pull of themes such as the victimization and demonization of Muslim communities has become difficult to resist. Accounts of victimization in relation to discrimination and hate crime, and demonization by some British media and state bodies, have seemingly taken precedent over those which consider the role of socio-economic factors such as poverty, housing and employment in shaping crime victimization within many Muslim communities. This paper presents an analysis of *Crime Survey* data and a critical analysis of recent scholarly literature and argues that, whilst such disadvantage should be neither ignored nor downplayed, there is a growing need for criminological issues to be uncoupled from an over-reliance on misleading, and potentially damaging generalizations which seek to cast British Muslim communities *only* as the victims of discrimination and hate crime.

Generalizations in the Literature About Muslim Victimization

Public interest in Muslims and Islam increased at a steady rate in the United Kingdom after events such as the Iranian Revolution in 1979, the Salman Rushdie Affair in 1988 and the First Gulf War of 1991. This increase became exponential following the attacks in New York and Washington, DC on 11 September 2001 and the bombings in London on 7 July 2005 (Allen and Nielsen 2002; Abbas 2005; Sheridan 2006; Lewis 2007; Allen 2010). Influencing, and also perhaps influenced by, this public interest is a growing body of scholarly criminological literature concerning British Muslim communities and their relationships to crime, the state and the criminal justice system (Malik 2009). If bodies of literature may be described as having a repeated motif or refrain, then the one most easily associated with the criminological literature around British Muslims is that of victimization. Scholars have placed particular emphasis on the victimization and discrimination felt by British Muslims (cf. Abbas 2004; Poynting and Mason 2007; Allen 2010). Communities are commonly described as being 'under pressure' (Abbas 2005) and individuals as the victims of 'unfounded hostility' (Runnymede Trust 1997: 4). This refrain echoes across accounts of crime victimization (Ameli *et al.* 2004), disproportionate state interference (Fekete 2009) and, most forcefully perhaps, in discourse around the types of hostility and prejudice described using the concept of Islamophobia (Runnymede Trust 1997; EUMC 2006a; 2006b; Allen 2010; OIC 2013).

Whilst descriptions of crime victimization among Muslim communities may orient around either physical attack or property damage (Spalek 2002), the main focus is on crimes against the person motivated by some form of bigotry (cf. Runnymede Trust 1997; Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia [CBMI] 2004; EUMC 2006a). Although there has been some discussion on the difficulties of distinguishing anti-Muslim or anti-Islamic hatred from more general anti-foreigner, anti-immigrant or racist hatred (Allen and Nielsen 2002) and on the shortage of reliable data (EUMC 2006a), scholarly literature has continued to identify and emphasize the risks and harms caused by targeted physical abuse against British Muslim communities; communities described

¹ This paper refers to variables and data taken from the *British Crime Survey Crime* which is now known as the *Crime Survey of England and Wales* and referred to in this paper, to avoid confusion, as the *Crime Survey*.

as disproportionately affected by these hate crimes (Abbas 2004 2005; Hopkins and Gale 2009; Allen 2010). Violent, physical and abusive crimes form a typology seen as the most relevant to the study of British Muslim communities (Runnymede Trust 1997; Mythen 2012). Scholarly literature asserts or implies the higher risks of physical attack (Schiffer and Wagner 2011; Burnett 2013) and the ‘greater cumulative threat’ of street violence (Lambert and Githens-Mazer 2010: 34). It describes the religious or racist targeting of Muslims, sometimes by gangs of youths who have been described as frequently assaulting, abusing and intimidating Muslims (EUMC 2006a; Lambert and Githens-Mazer 2010). The picture painted of British Muslim communities is bleak. Muslims are frequently depicted as a population blighted by personal crime victimization distinct in nature and extent from that faced by other minority groups in the United Kingdom. These high rates of victimization are described as having left Muslims fearful and in a state of ‘heightened anxiety’ (Spalek 2002: 11), in need of extra police protection and specialized crime reduction strategies. *Crime Survey* data from 2006 to 2010 are analysed here in order to ascertain the extent to which the available statistics support or challenge these assertions.

Although outside the scope of this examination of crime data, negative portrayals of Muslim individuals and communities within the British media (cf. Baker 2010; Baker *et al.* 2013) are routinely described in detail by criminologists in an attempt to link media depictions with widespread discrimination and exclusion (cf. Runnymede Trust 1997; Poole 2002; Poole and Richardson 2006; Allen 2010). These factors have been described, although less frequently, as having a causal relationship (cf. Hickman *et al.* 2011; OIC 2013). Factors such as crime victimization and abusive state interference are combined with negative media depictions of Muslim communities and together adduced as evidence for rising Islamophobia (Runnymede Trust 1997; Allen 2010). The concept of Islamophobia, although a contested term (Halliday 2002; Cesari 2006; EUMC 2006a; Meer and Modood 2009; Bleich 2011), provides an analytical tool capable of aggregating issues related to crime, discrimination (both religious and racial), state suspicion, counter-terrorism and the demonization of Muslims and Islam by the British media (Runnymede Trust 1997; Allen 2010; Sayyid and Vakil 2011; Grosfoguel 2012). In this context, Islamophobia is often described as a unique and distinct phenomenon of hostility and prejudice which affects many British Muslim lives (Ameli *et al.* 2004; CBMI 2004; Lambert and Githens-Mazer 2010; Esposito and Kalin 2011; OIC 2008; 2009; 2010; 2011; 2012; 2013). Thus, the emphasis is repeatedly placed squarely on Muslim communities as victims in a sizeable and expanding literature that reinforces and develops these central themes of victimization, discrimination and demonization.

Findings From the Crime Survey 2006–10

The *Crime Survey* surveys around 40,000 respondents per year from households selected by a multi-stage stratified random sample procedure using the Postcode Address File and designed to be representative of the population of households in England and Wales. Respondents are invited to report the number of times they have been the victim of crime over the previous 12 months and the type (or types) of crime suffered. The analysis reported here used merged response data from waves 2006/07, 2007/08, 2008/09 and 2009/10. These waves were selected and then merged so as to create a dataset large enough to be representative of the Muslim population of England and Wales. Merging waves resulted in data corresponding to nearly 190,000 respondents

($n = 188,625$). Of these, nearly 5,000 respondents, when asked by the survey, described themselves as Muslim ($n = 4,841$). Response variables related to victimization were recoded into a series of binary variables indicating either no victimization or victimization by one or more incidents during the time period. This has also been the practice in various *Crime Survey* reports produced by the Home Office (cf. Clancy *et al.* 2001). The research found only small statistically significant differences between the percentages of Muslim and non-Muslim respondents who reported being the victim of crime (29.3 and 26.7 per cent, respectively, $P < 0.01$, variable: *victim*), and similarly small differences between Muslim respondents and respondents from each of the specified religion groups (see Table 1). This initial finding seemed to lend only limited support to assertions and conclusions from the criminological literature describing disproportionate crime victimization among British Muslims. Far less support was offered by the analysis of more specific offences. Here, the statistical evidence appeared to strongly challenge the consensuses underpinning discussion around British Muslim communities and crime.

No statistically significant differences were found between Muslim and non-Muslim respondents in relation to a series of personal offences: those such as violence, wounding (serious or otherwise), assault (both common and attempted), threats and robbery: the types of personal crime described in the literature as being the ones to which British Muslim communities are particularly susceptible. Muslim and non-Muslim respondents shared a broadly similar likelihood of reporting common assault (1.8 and 2.1 per cent, respectively, $P > 0.01$, variable: *commonas*) and a similar likelihood of reporting an offence containing an element of violence (3.3 and 3.4 per cent, respectively, $P > 0.05$, variable: *allviol*). Muslim respondents were no more likely than non-Muslim respondents to report having been threatened (2.5 and 2.3 per cent, respectively, $P > 0.05$, variable: *threat*) and no more likely to report having been the victim of robbery (0.8 and 0.5 per cent, respectively, $P > 0.05$, variable: *robbery*) or the victim of wounding (0.6 and 0.8 per cent, respectively, $P > 0.05$, variable: *wounding*). Only one such statistically significant difference was revealed by the analysis: Muslim respondents were more likely than non-Muslim respondents to report being the victim of mugging (1.1 and 0.7 per cent, respectively, $P < 0.05$, variable: *mugging1*).

Data related to mugging was further analysed to determine whether this difference also existed between Muslim respondents and respondents from other minority religion groups. The analysis revealed no such statistically significant differences between

TABLE 1 Overall victimization

	Muslim	Non-Muslim	Buddhist	Christian	Hindu	Jewish	Sikh
% of respondents from each religion group who reported being the victim of at least one crime (personal or household crime)							
Victim of one or more crime (personal or household crime) (variable: <i>victim</i>)	29.3 ^a	26.7 ^b	25.1 ^b	25.1 ^b	24.9 ^b	32.1 ^a	30.6 ^b

Merged data from BCS 2006/07, 2007/08, 2008/09 and 2009/10; weighted n data; unweighted P data.

^aDifferences between x and *Christian* group significant at the 0.05 level (or lower).

^bDifferences between x and *Muslim* group significant at the 0.05 level (or lower).

Muslim respondents and respondents from each of the Hindu, Jewish and Sikh groups (1.3, 1.7, 1.1 and 1 per cent, respectively, $P > 0.05$, variable: *mugging1*). Respondents from the minority religion groups appeared to share a broadly similar likelihood of reporting being mugged. There were no statistically significant differences found between Muslim and Christian respondents in respect of reporting violence, wounding, assault and threats. For example, Muslim and Christian respondents shared a broadly similar likelihood of reporting being the victim of a violent crime (1.3 and 1.1 per cent, respectively, $P > 0.05$, variable: *violence*) and a broadly similar likelihood of being the victim of wounding (0.6 and 0.7 per cent, respectively, $P > 0.05$, variable: *wounding*). However, Muslim respondents were more likely to report robbery, mugging and theft.

Analysis of *Crime Survey* data revealed many statistically non-significant differences between Muslim respondents and respondents from each of the other minority religion groups in respect of personal crime victimization. Hindu, Muslim and Sikh respondents shared a broadly similar likelihood of reporting being the victim of violent crime, wounding, robbery, theft and threats (variables: *violence*, *wounding*, *robbery*, *theft* and *threats*). Jewish respondents were more likely than Muslim respondents to report all violent crime (5.3 and 3.3 per cent, respectively, $P < 0.05$, variable: *allviol*). These comparisons contrast sharply with descriptions in the scholarly literature. Evidence from the *Crime Survey* appears to undermine the argument that British Muslim communities are, among other minority religion groups, disproportionately challenged by such offences.

As shown in Table 2, it is not possible to identify a personal offence within the *Crime Survey* (or any group of personal crime types) for which Muslim respondents are the most likely to report victimization. Rather, victimization by a specific offence among Muslim respondents seems to reflect the experiences of Christian respondents in all cases except that of mugging, robbery and theft where Muslim respondents had broadly similar victimization experiences as other minority religion groups. Hindu respondents appeared to report less overall personal crime than the other groups (including the Christian group), in part due to the lower likelihood of reporting assault-related crime. Elsewhere, and for most other specific offence types, Muslim respondents reported broadly similarly rates of crime victimization as Hindu, Jewish and Sikh respondents.

Household Crime

Another example of the incomplete nature of the scholarly literature concerning British Muslims is the infrequency with which household crime is analysed and discussed; the subject has been over-shadowed by a proliferation of research into personal crime and hate crime. In fact, it is difficult to identify a single reference to Muslim communities and offences such as burglary or car crime within any of the criminological literature reviewed for the purposes of this research project. Thus, the analysis of household crime with the *Crime Survey* presented here aims to fill a gap in the existing research. The findings revealed a correlation between household crime victimization and the socio-economic disadvantage suffered by many British Muslim communities—a relationship seldom, if ever, mentioned in the literature. ‘Household crime’ in the *Crime Survey* includes criminal damage (to the home or to a motor vehicle), burglary and motor vehicle theft (both theft *of* and theft *from* a vehicle). It should be noted that crimes against properties such as mosques are not recorded by the *Crime Survey* (nor are they collected nationally); such crimes necessarily, although very regrettably, fall

TABLE 2 *Personal crime victimization*

	Muslim	Non-Muslim	Buddhist	Christian	Hindu	Jewish	Sikh	Total
% of respondents from each religion group who reported one or more incidents of personal crime								
Total personal crime (not including sexual offences) (variable: <i>totalper</i>)	6.3 ^a	6.2	6.3	5.5 ^b	4.6 ^b	9.4 ^{a,b}	7.6 ^a	
All violent crime (variable: <i>allviol</i>)	3.3	3.4	3.3	2.8	2.8	5.3 ^a	4.1	
All assault crime (variable: <i>allasau</i>)	2.3	2.8	2.6	2.3	1.4 ^{a,b}	3.7	3.3	
Common assault (variable: <i>commonas</i>)	1.8	2.1	1.9	1.8	1 ^b	2.9	2.9	
Mugging (variable: <i>mugging</i>)	1.1 ^a	0.7 ^b	0.6	0.6 ^b	1.3	0	0.1	
Theft (variable: <i>theftper</i>)	1.6 ^a	1.2	1.2	1.1 ^b	0.8	2.3	1.9	
Robbery (variable: <i>robbery</i>)	0.8 ^a	0.5	0.6	0.4 ^b	1.3	1.6	1.0	
Robbery and wounding (variable: <i>violence</i>)	1.3	1.3	1.5	1.1	1.6	2.4	1.5	
Wounding (variable: <i>wounding</i>)	0.6	0.8	0.9	0.7	0.4	0.8	0.5	
Threats (variable: <i>threat</i>)	2.5	2.3	2.5	2.1	1.7	3.3	2.5	

Merged data from BCS 2006/07, 2007/08, 2008/09 and 2009/10; weighted *n* data; unweighted *P* data.

^aDifferences between *x* and *Christian* group significant at the 0.05 level (or lower).

^bDifferences between *x* and *Muslim* group significant at the 0.05 level (or lower).

outside the ambit of this study. Analysis of the *Crime Survey* data revealed that Muslim respondents were more likely than non-Muslim respondents to report being the victim of a range of household offences. Muslim respondents were more likely than non-Muslims to report household crime; this difference was statistically significant (20.8 and 17.4 per cent, respectively, $P < 0.001$, variable: *totalhh*). Muslim respondents were more likely than non-Muslim respondents to report being the victim of one or more of the vehicle crimes listed in the survey; again, this difference was statistically significant (12.1 and 9.7 per cent, respectively, $P < 0.001$, variable: *allmvcri*). Further, Muslim respondents were more likely than non-Muslims to report being the victim of burglary—again, a statistically significant difference (4 and 2.4 per cent, respectively, $P < 0.001$, variable: *burglar*). Finally, the data suggested that Muslim respondents were more likely to report burglary and car theft than respondents from other minority religion groups (see Table 3). Low *n* numbers in relation to Jewish and Sikh respondents made significance testing between all minority religion groups difficult, although statistically significant differences were found between Muslim respondents and Christian and Hindu respondents (4, 2.2 and 2.8 per cent, respectively, $P < 0.05$, variable: *burglar*).

A possible explanation for the relatively high levels of burglary and car crime within Muslim communities concerns the effects of socio-economic disadvantage. The Multiple Deprivation Index (MDI) variable was used to examine crime and socio-economic disadvantage within Muslim communities represented in the *Crime Survey*. The MDI variable collates information related to factors including income, employment, housing, education and then assigns respondents to one of ten deciles representing overall socio-economic deprivation. Using this variable, household crime was observed as clustering in the lower deciles. Over 40 per cent of all household crime (42.3 per cent, variable: *totalhh*)

TABLE 3 *Household crime victimization*

	Muslim	Non- Muslim	Buddhist	Christian	Hindu	Jewish	Sikh	Total
% of respondents from each religion group who reported one or more incidents of household crime								
All household crime (variable: <i>totalhh</i>)	20.8 ^a	17.4 ^b	16.0 ^b	16.4 ^b	17.6 ^b	19.4	21.7	
Comparable household crime (variable: <i>tohhcltd</i>)	19 ^a	14.8 ^b	13.2	13.9 ^b	16.3 ^b	17.6	20.8	
Burglary (variable: <i>burglar</i>)	4.0 ^a	2.4 ^b	2.2	2.2 ^b	2.8 ^b	2.6	3.1	
All motor vehicle crime (variable: <i>allmucvi</i>)	12.1 ^a	9.7 ^b	7.9	9 ^b	11.8	12.4	14.9	
All motor vehicle theft (variable: <i>allmvthf</i>)	6.8	5.0 ^b	3.4	4.7	5.9	7.4	7.3	
Theft of a motor vehicle (variable: <i>theftomv</i>)	1.2 ^a	0.6 ^b	0.3	0.5 ^b	0.6 ^b	1.1	0.3 ^b	
Theft from a motor vehicle (variable: <i>theftfmv</i>)	4.6	3.5 ^b	1.9	3.3	4.0	4.7	5.1	
Motor vehicle vandalism (variable: <i>mv.vand</i>)	6 ^a	5.2	4.7	4.8 ^b	6.1	5.5	7.9 ^b	
Vandalism (variable: <i>vandalis</i>)	7.9	7.3	6.1	7	7.7	8.0	10.8 ^b	
Other vandalism (variable: <i>homevand</i>)	2.5 ^a	2.5	1.7	2.5 ^b	2.0	2.7	4.3 ^b	

Merged data from BCS 2006/07, 2007/08, 2008/09 and 2009/10; weighted *n* data; unweighted *P* data.

^aDifferences between *x* and *Christian* group significant at the 0.05 level (or lower).

^bDifferences between *x* and *Muslim* group significant at the 0.05 level (or lower).

occurs in the lowest three deciles (the most deprived 30 per cent of England and Wales). These three deciles together have approximately 40 per cent more household crime than would be observed if such crime were distributed equally across all deciles. Muslim respondents were observed as being even less evenly distributed. Two thirds of Muslim households within the survey (66.2 per cent) were distributed among the lowest three deciles. This finding corresponds with analysis by Peach (2005; 2006) who described widespread socio-economic disadvantage as a key finding from his research of Muslim respondents within the 2001 Census. Analysis of *Crime Survey* data revealed statistically significant differences in the number of Christian and Muslim respondents residing in the lowest three deciles ($P > 0.001$) but *no* statistically significant differences in relation to their experiences of total household crime (variable: *totalhh*), comparable household crime (variable: *tohhcltd*) and burglary (variable: *burglar*) between Christian and Muslim respondents living in the *same* deciles. Analysis using logistic regression confirmed these findings. Once socio-economic factors were controlled for, household crime appeared to be relatively stable across the religion groups. Arguably, living in areas suffering from socio-economic disadvantage is a far more reliable predictor of certain types of crime victimization (in this case household crime) than religion alone. Muslim respondents are more likely to live in areas with socio-economic disadvantage and are therefore more likely to report suffering household crimes such as burglary and vehicle theft.

Attitudes Towards the Police

Relations between British Muslim communities and the police are often described in the scholarly, criminological literature as a cause for concern (Chakraborti 2007) or

worse, as having created a crisis of civil liberties (Pantazis and Pemberton 2009). The rehearsal of victimization and discrimination themes in this civil liberties context centres on allegations of abusive and disproportionate interference by state agencies and is directly linked, as might be expected, to issues of national security and counter-terrorism. Given the effect of events such as 9/11 and 7/7 upon raising the profile of issues around Muslim communities in the United Kingdom, it is perhaps unsurprising that the topic of counter-terrorism occupies such a prominent position. Commentary on the effects of counter-terrorist measures and related community policing models represents a large and still-growing theme in the literature (see Fekete 2004; Hallsworth 2006; Brittain 2009; Fekete 2009; Kundani 2009; Choudury and Fenwick 2011; Innes *et al.* 2011; Mythen 2012). For some, Muslim communities have become ‘a suitable enemy’ for the harmful and sometimes unlawful actions of state agents (Fekete 2009). Stop and search measures are described as racial targeting and social control (Hallsworth 2006). British Muslim citizens are depicted as having become to the police and security agencies a ‘suspect community’ (Pantazis and Pemberton 2009) and subsequently the subjects of ‘over-zealous surveillance’ in a ‘precarious environment’ (Mythen 2012: 409). Counter-terrorism measures are described as creating ‘criminalized communities’ and the experiences of British Muslim citizens is sometimes likened to Irish terror suspects caught by anti-terror legislation passed in the United Kingdom between 1974 and 1989 (Weller 2006; Peirce 2008; Pantazis and Pemberton 2009; Hickman *et al.* 2011). It is argued that counter-terrorism has produced discrimination, marginalization and exclusion among many within British Muslim communities: effects described as deep-rooted and far-reaching (Fekete 2004; Van Driel 2004; Fekete 2009). Mythen *et al.* (2009: 744) interviewed young male British Pakistanis living in the North-West of England and found negative sentiment towards counter-terrorism regulation, policing and the criminal justice system, described as being articulated in terms of an ‘interchange’—a symbiotic relationship between governmental and media discourse and the actions of state agencies. The research revealed that concerns and complaints were raised most commonly over the disproportionate use of stop and search measures granted by section 44 of Terrorism Act 2000 and the distrust generated by excessive scrutiny and surveillance.

Given the scholarly literature around these issues, the findings reported here from analysis of the *Crime Survey* data in relation to attitudes towards the police were extremely surprising. Overall, all attitudes towards the police were positive. For example, 61.2 per cent of Muslim respondents rated their local police as being either *good* or *excellent* (variable: *ratpol2*). In sharp contrast to the literature, a majority of Muslim respondents reported positive attitudes towards police reliability, police fairness and the police’s relevance to the community. The differences between the positive attitudes of Muslim respondents and the image portrayed by the literature appear even more acute when the attitudes of Muslim and non-Muslim respondents are compared. In many cases, Muslim respondents were *more* likely than non-Muslim respondents to report positive attitudes towards the police (and where this was the case, differences were statistically significant). For example, Muslim respondents were more likely than non-Muslim respondents to agree that the police are dealing with things that matter to this community (59.7 and 52 per cent, respectively, $P < 0.001$, variable: *polatt6*). Where differences between Muslim and non-Muslim respondents were not statistically significant, it was still the case that a sizeable majority of Muslim respondents reported positive attitudes.

For example, Muslim and non-Muslim respondents shared a broadly similar likelihood of expressing agreement with the statement *The police in this area would treat you with respect if you had contact with them* (81.8 and 83.5 per cent, respectively, $P > 0.05$, variable: *polatt2*). Further, Muslim respondents were *more* satisfied than Christian respondents with the police in respect of most of the responses. For example, there were statistically significant differences between Muslim and Christian respondents in relation to reporting confidence in the police (71.3 and 67 per cent, respectively, $P < 0.001$, variable: *polatt7*). Muslim respondents were less likely than Christian respondents to view the police positively in only one case: whether it was felt the police treat people with respect. Even here, however, large majorities of both groups described positive attitudes towards the police (81.8 and 84.7 per cent, respectively, $P < 0.001$, variable: *polatt2*).

The research compared response data from Muslim respondents with respondents who describe themselves as being Black *and* affiliated to one of the non-Muslim religion groups. It is well documented that relations between African and Caribbean communities and the police have often been poor and there is an established literature concerning events from the Brixton Riots in 1981 through to the Macpherson Inquiry report into the Stephen Lawrence murder published in 1999 (cf. Rowe 2004; McGhee 2005; Home Affairs Committee [HAC] 2009; Bowling *et al.* 2012). Some of the scholarly criminological literature in this area seeks to locate Muslim communities within this contextual framework (cf. Chakraborti 2007; Sharp and Atherton 2007). However, analysis of the *Crime Survey* revealed that Muslim respondents were more likely to be satisfied with the police in their local area than Black non-Muslim respondents. For example, Muslim respondents were more likely than Black non-Muslim respondents to agree that the police treat people fairly (68.8 and 56 per cent, respectively, $P < 0.001$, variable: *polatt3*). Again, these quantitative findings highlight the apparent disparity between the scholarly literature and statistical data concerning criminology around British Muslim communities. Such findings clearly challenge the dominant narrative within the criminological literature which describes all or most Muslim people as having a deep-rooted sense of police dissatisfaction. It would appear that analysis of *Crime Survey* data *together* with the types of qualitative research, highlighted here, are capable of observing a much broader spectrum of public opinion than observed when qualitative research methods are used in isolation or when the discourse is limited to an overtly rhetorical or polemical style (Table 4).

Explaining the Discrepancies Between Literature and Crime Survey Data

Possible explanations for the demonstrable discrepancies between the scholarly literature and statistical evidence may be found by re-examining the literature and focusing on the research methodologies and the modes of discourse employed by scholars and commentators. As discussed, criminological literature concerning anti-Muslim hostility and discrimination rarely includes findings from empirical research. Research in the field is dominated by descriptions of British Muslim communities which appear to eschew the use of large, nationally representative data samples. Emphasis is placed instead on research methods such as interviews and focus groups and on describing the *nature* of anti-Muslim hostility and discrimination rather than on quantifying the *scope and extent* of any problems. Qualitative research is used to support the types of politically motivated and rhetorical arguments described here. Criminological research

TABLE 4 *Attitudes towards the police*

	Muslim	Non-Muslim	Black non-Muslim	Christian	Total
	% of respondents from each religion/ethnicity group who answered 'excellent/good or strongly agree/tend to agree'				
How good a job are the police in this area doing? (variable: <i>ratpol2</i>)	61.2	53 ^a	57.2 ^a	53.6 ^a	
The police in this area can be relied on to be there when you need (variable: <i>polatt1</i>)	63.4	47.7 ^a	58.1 ^a	47.6 ^a	
The police in this area would treat you with respect if you had contact with them (variable: <i>polatt2</i>)	81.8	83.5 ^a	75.3 ^a	84.7 ^a	
The police in this area treat everyone fairly regardless of who they are (variable: <i>polatt3</i>)	68.8	63.7 ^a	56 ^a	64.9 ^a	
The police in this area can be relied to deal with minor crime (variable: <i>polatt4</i>)	56.2	44.0 ^a	52.7 ^a	44.4 ^a	
The police in this area understand the issues that affect this community (variable: <i>polatt5</i>)	65.0	63.7	61 ^a	64.7	
The police in this area are dealing with the things that matter to this community (variable: <i>polatt6</i>)	59.7	52 ^a	55.2 ^a	53.1 ^a	
Taking everything into account I have confidence in the police in this area (variable: <i>polatt7</i>)	71.3	66.1	64.6	67 ^a	

Merged data from BCS 2006/07, 2007/08, 2008/09 and 2009/10; weighted *n* data; unweighted *P* data.

^aDifferences between *x* and *Muslim* group significant at the 0.05 level (or lower).

undertaken in the last decade or so has provided a rich source of information about the historical background and political consequences of anti-Muslim hate crime, but a less fertile source of information concerning the quantification of individuals and communities affected. Descriptions of the lived experiences of Muslim victims of crime have, undoubtedly, provided an invaluable contribution towards developing understanding of the nature and impact of victimization within these communities (understandings which reflect the lived experiences and subjectivities of Muslim respondents to a higher degree than is possible through the use of large-scale social survey data alone). However, the political nature of the discourse, the emphasis on qualitative research methods and the usage of small, non-representative sample sizes have led to the displacement of certain perspectives (e.g. those around police fairness and effectiveness). Analysis of *Crime Survey* data reveals a far more complex relationship between British Muslim communities, crime victimization and the criminal justice system than is conveyed by the literature. It would seem that, within the literature, anti-Muslim hostility and discrimination are phenomena which are frequently evoked but less frequently evaluated.

The purported discrepancies between crime data reporting and the lived experiences and subjectivities of minority communities have been the subject of criminological debate (Phillips and Bowling 2003). Legitimate concerns have been raised over the subsuming of the diversity and plurality inherent within minority communities by the use of ethnic social survey categories such as 'Asian' or 'Black' (Garland *et al.* 2006).

Of course, large-scale social survey data cannot capture the unfolding contexts within which victimization occurs, nor can it reflect accurately the varying impacts of crime felt by different social groups, nor can it answer questions about the structural dimensions to victimization and the criminal justice system (Matthews and Young 1992). For research questions such as these qualitative and theoretical perspectives are needed. However, the arguments contained in this paper are underpinned by the assumption that an uncritical reading of the literature is at least as undesirable as the uncritical use of statistics and it is submitted that the main methodological weaknesses in the scholarly literature are:

- (1) an absence of empirical evidence; this has been admitted by several leading scholars and contributors within the field (EUMC 2006a; Allen 2010; Lambert and Githens-Mazer 2010);
- (2) a clear and demonstrable imbalance between qualitative and quantitative research methods (i.e. findings are rarely triangulated);
- (3) an over-reliance on political, rhetorical discourse and an under-reliance on analyses of empirical findings;
- (4) (where empirical findings are used) a reliance on low *n* numbers and non-representative sample sizes too small to support convincingly generalizations about *all* British Muslim communities.

Some scholars and commentators recognize the lack of available evidence around anti-Muslim hostility and Muslim crime victimization, yet many of these same experts contribute or support generalizations. Allen (2010) argues that there is a little statistical evidence to accept (or reject) a hypothesis that Islamophobia is a distinct and widespread social phenomenon affecting British Muslim communities. Notwithstanding this admission, Allen asserts the importance of considering violence and discrimination against Muslim communities in this way (i.e. as both distinct and widespread). A EUMC report states that criminal justice authorities are working ‘without informed knowledge about the number and nature of incidents against Muslims’ (EUMC 2006a); yet a near-contemporaneous report from the same organization states that European Muslims have been ‘seriously affected’ by ‘an increasingly hostile social climate’ (EUMC 2006b: 5). An earlier EUMC report (Allen and Nielsen 2002) adduces no statistical (or indeed empirical) evidence in its description of anti-Muslims discrimination and hostility in the United Kingdom; the report instead focuses on insights into the media depictions of Muslims. Lambert and Githens-Mazer (2010) blame under-reporting and inadequate police procedure in creating insufficient official data to establish the scale of anti-Muslim hate crimes, yet offer conclusions which generalize about the physical dangers and increased risks faced by *all* British Muslim communities. Criminologists elsewhere have lamented this dearth of empirical work and have argued for an increase in the use of empirical data such as large-scale social survey data (cf. Sheridan 2006; Bleich 2011).

Whilst there is demonstrable bias towards the products of qualitative research methods such as interview data and focus groups (cf. Anwar and Bakhsh 2003; CBMI 2004; Githens-Mazer and Lambert 2010; Lambert and Githens-Mazer 2010), not all literature around British Muslims, crime and discrimination orients around qualitative research methods (cf. Sheridan 2006; Field 2007). However, much of the notable quantitative

research tends to be related to media representations of British Muslims (cf. [Poole 2002](#); [Baker et al. 2013](#)) and tends, as a whole, to be cited far less frequently than the type of research represented by the Runnymede Trust report, EUMC reports and other similar literature. Quantitative research is thus less common, and therefore less influential, in shaping the current scholarly consensus around anti-Muslim hostility and Muslim victimization.

Criminological debates around British Muslim communities may be located within wider debates around ethnic minorities and crime. Such discourse, and especially that emanating from state sources, has not remained stable over recent decades. Earlier negative portrayals of African Caribbean communities by Lord Scarman following the Brixton riots in 1981 ([Rowe 2004](#)) were replaced with charges of ‘institutional racism’ ([Carmichael and Hamilton 1967](#)) from the Macpherson Inquiry report ([Macpherson 1999](#); [HAC 2009](#); [Stone 2013](#)). Much of the current discourse around British Muslim communities may be viewed as an attempt to defend multicultural Britain against the failings of politics past: a corrective discourse against previous analyses of ethnic minorities by state bodies. Issues around British Muslim communities are often linked to wider issues related to British society: tolerance, social exclusion and multiculturalism (cf. [McGhee 2005](#); [Modood 2007](#); [Hopkins and Gale 2009](#)) and criticisms of state practices and policy ([Anwar and Bakhsh 2003](#); [Pantazis and Pemberton 2009](#); [Mythen 2012](#)). As the analysis of Crime Survey data highlights, highly politicized and rhetorical discourse around British Muslim communities is capable of creating bias, distortion and misapprehension.

The emphasis on qualitative research methods, and in particular on interview data, leads to many assertions being made on the basis of generalizations derived from data samples too small to be nationally representative. Despite this, these generalizations are relied on elsewhere as good secondary data. The Runnymede Trust report and its follow-up ([Runnymede Trust 1997](#); [CBMI 2004](#)), both central texts in the conceptualization of Islamophobia (cf. [Halliday 1999](#); [Allen 2010](#); [Esposito and Kalin 2011](#)), rely on short quotes from only a small number of contributors and research participants. Data from larger samples are used to describe demographic features of Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities (e.g. population numbers), the Muslim population in prison, academic attainment and to describe racially motivated crime ([Runnymede Trust 1997](#): 40). These figures provide extremely useful background information but largely fail to support assertions concerning the widespread targeting of British Muslims. Two popular edited collections of essays ([Spalek 2002](#); [Esposito and Kalin 2011](#)) provide readily accessible examples of the bias towards the use of small unrepresentative sample sizes (they also further highlight the primacy within the scholarly literature of qualitative research methods used to underpin political writing). In *Islamophobia* ([Esposito and Kalin 2011](#)), only 1 of 11 chapters ([Zebiri 2011](#)) presents primary data generated by research participants: 30 semi-structured interviews explore topics related to gender, violence and foreignness in relation to the concept of Orientalism ([Said 1978](#)). In *Islam, Crime and Criminal Justice* ([Spalek 2002](#)), eight substantive chapters explore criminological issues around British Muslim communities. Small sample sizes used to support descriptions of crime among Muslim communities are favoured throughout: 12 short extracts of interview data from Muslim men in Bradford ([Macey 2002](#)); extracts from an undisclosed number of in-depth interviews with Muslim women ([Spalek 2002](#)); data collected from 14 Muslim police officers ([Sharp 2002](#)) and 9 Imams ([El-Hassan](#)

2002). Taken individually, each of these essays makes a valuable contribution; but when assessed together, they further demonstrate how our knowledge about the scope of anti-Muslim hate crime is limited. Other studies used similarly small sample sizes: four respondents living in the United Kingdom (EUMC 2006b); data from a single interviewee used to describe widespread Muslim victimization and discrimination (Lambert and Githens-Mazer 2010; Burnett 2013), or from larger groups of research participants, or secondary data sources with larger sample sizes, that are, however, illuminating they may be, still too small to be nationally representative (Anwar and Bakhsh 2003; EUMC 2006a; 2006b; Githens-Mazer and Lambert 2010; Ameli *et al.* 2011; Mythen 2012).

A recent publicly funded project aimed to support victims of anti-Muslim hate crime and provide nationally representative large-scale data. Known as Tell MAMA (Measuring Anti-Muslim Attacks), the project was established in 2012 by the inter-faith organization Faith Matters as a reporting service for victims of anti-Muslim hate crime (Tell MAMA 2014). Although the Home Office removed funding for the project in 2013 (Gilligan 2013), it has been widely considered a success. Data captured by the project has been used as evidence as to the rise of anti-Muslim hate crime in the United Kingdom (Copsey 2013). Further, findings support assertions concerning the under-reporting of hate crimes by Muslim victims (Tell MAMA was established specifically to encourage the reporting of such incidents). However, data related to online expressions of anti-Muslim sentiment—74 per cent of all incidents reported to Tell MAMA (Copsey 2013)—reveal the overall limitations inherent within this type of data collection and reporting. It is difficult to ascertain whether the numerous reported online incidents involved words used to target directly individual victims or whether, instead, were comments made more generally about all Muslims and Islam. Any words expressing anti-Muslim sentiment are capable of causing harm and distress to anyone encountering them, regardless of whether used directly or indirectly (and regardless of whether or not the reader is part of an intended readership). However, the presenting of data related to online comments, especially within the context of victim support, raises questions about the appropriateness of the label ‘incident’ (especially if such comments are found following a pre-meditated search). Further, although Tell MAMA data contribute towards remedying the lack of available statistics, they are not generated by a nationally representative sample design. They provide evidence which is attractive rather than compelling, indicative rather than conclusive. Findings from the Tell MAMA project remind us that the under-reporting of crime within British Muslim communities remains a significant problem for both victims and police, and that there is still an urgent need for nationally representative data.

The discrepancies between the findings from qualitative research focusing on stop and search among British Pakistani and British Bangladeshi communities and the reported levels of satisfaction with the police reported by respondents in the Crime Survey are not easily explained without further research and thus we may only speculate as to underlying causes. However, it is possible that the (very understandable) anger and frustration directed towards counter-terrorism legislation and police stop and searches reported by young Muslim men and other more positive attitudes towards the police are not mutually exclusive. It may be that Crime Survey data subsume negative attitudes towards counter-terrorism measures within more positive attitudes towards more ‘everyday’ forms of policing. Other research has revealed similar discrepancies between quantitative and qualitative data in this regard. Discrepancies have

been found between the under-reporting of anti-Muslim hate crime incidents (caused by victims perceiving the police to be ineffective in tackling verbal abuse) and general levels of satisfaction towards the police held by other Muslims living in the same region (Iganski and Lagou 2014). Muslim respondents may wholly disapprove of the various counter-terrorism measures enacted by the police and yet hold positive views towards their effectiveness in tackling street crime for instance, or increasing safety at night. It is also possible, as anecdotal evidence has suggested, that older Muslim people born outside the United Kingdom consider the local police here to be more favourable than similar local police forces in their country of origin. British Pakistani respondents in research undertaken by Mythen *et al.* (2009) described Muslims as the most law-abiding of groups (2009: 743). Is it not perhaps unsurprising that such a law-abiding group might report largely positive views of the police when asked survey questions not designed to capture sentiment related to counter-terrorism or hate crime measures? Whatever the underlying causes, it is clear that Crime Survey data reveal a greater range of attitudes towards the police than is commonly asserted in the literature: attitudes which deserve more focus by researchers.

A further possible explanation for the reliance on the dominant narratives described by this paper is that for many criminologists, discussion related to victimization by crime and state agencies, the risks of racist attack and demonization by the British media is perhaps less troublesome than those which assert socio-economic disadvantage within Muslim communities. There is an obvious danger of implying a (deeply racist) link between religion, ethnicity and culture and a propensity to live in poor housing conditions, be unemployed or lack higher education. It may, therefore, be less dangerous to blame the racist bigot, oppressive state apparatus or the British media. Scholarly literature thus over-emphasizes victimization and discrimination whilst largely ignoring the rather thornier issue of how socio-economic inequality is shaping lives within many British Muslim communities. This paper has been critical of scholarly, criminological literature containing assertions which are unsupported by statistical evidence. But such assertions are perhaps unsurprising, given the previous lack of available crime statistics and the expense of collecting large-scale social survey data. The *Crime Survey* introduced a question about religious affiliation only in the 2003/04 wave. Prior to that, and as shown, criminological research (including that by the Home Office and Runnymede Trust) used the label 'Asian' or 'Pakistani' as a proxy for 'Muslim'. Perhaps criminologists ought to be forgiven for not having the access to *Crime Survey* data. Arguably, however, the greater recent availability of pertinent crime data should be embraced more often as providing an opportunity to revise and reorient narratives so as to include previously missing perceptions and experiences within Muslim communities.

Criminological research described in this paper has established a welcomed corrective discourse for earlier racist, Euro-centric or Orientalist accounts of ethnic minority groups in general and British Muslim communities in particular. In doing so, it has had a crucial role in the further development of existing critical perspectives which have aided our understanding of structural inequalities and issues around power and powerlessness. However, politicized discourse is not without problems. There are difficulties created for researchers who wish to make spatial or temporal comparisons of the levels of prejudice or discrimination across different groups in society. Such comparisons are difficult, given the lack of available evidence. Further, arguments that are rhetorical and polemical in nature and which seek to describe communities in ways

that are not properly supported by evidence create risks for those communities (regardless of religion, ethnicity or minority status). To assert by unfounded exaggeration the victimization of an individual or a community is to risk the unnecessary creation or reinforcement of a negative stereotype. All negative stereotypes carry the propensity to be the source of a prejudice which may lead to the exclusion of an individual or community. Therefore, it is conceivable that the types of discourse dominant within criminological descriptions of British Muslim communities may lead, albeit unwittingly, to negative stereotyping, to the removal of a sense of agency among some Muslim communities and to an increase in prejudice, discrimination and exclusion against those communities. Criminological depictions which depict large sections of the population primarily as victims may also risk the unnecessary creation or reinforcement of negative views of self within the subject community. These views of self may induce another type of exclusion which lessens within an individual or community the desire or ability to contribute towards a more tolerant and cohesive society. However, it is equally harmful to wrongfully dismiss as exaggerated destructive social phenomena. To do so is to risk the unnecessary prolonging of the disadvantage caused by that phenomenon to an individual or community. Therefore, research which combines quantitative and qualitative methodological approaches may be conceived, in this instance at least, to be the one able to yield most utility for researchers and practitioners.

Analysis of the *Crime Survey* still leaves unanswered many criminological questions about British Muslim communities. Excluded from the survey are businesses and institutions. Thus, attacks against mosques, madrasas and small businesses such as shops, restaurants and takeaways are not recorded. Also excluded from the survey are incidents of hostility against people under 16 (now addressed by the Crime Survey of England and Wales in the recently introduced 10- to 15-year olds survey). This has two consequences for criminological research into Muslim communities. First, and given that the Muslim population is relatively young (Peach 2005; 2006), excluding respondents under 16 negates the opportunity to analyse crimes against a significant proportion of the population. Second, excluding respondents under 16 limits our understanding of attacks against Muslim respondents occurring in schools. Also likely to be underrepresented by *Crime Survey* data are many offences under the Public Order Act 1986 and the Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006 which do not require a direct victim but which may represent crimes featuring overt anti-Muslim sentiment and hostility (e.g. the promotion of anti-Muslim slogans or the chanting of anti-Muslim abuse—the types of crime reflected in Tell MAMA data). Similarly, it is entirely plausible that many instances of hate crime (especially in the form of verbal abuse) are not recognized or remembered as criminal offences by respondents and thus not reported as such to the survey. The current conceptualization of anti-Muslim hostility relating to harassment, particularly of Muslim women in the street, describes verbal abuse as frequently occurring phenomena. So frequent, in fact, that it is described as leaving victims with the perception that such abuse is a mundane component of everyday life (cf. Spalek 2002; Lambert and Githens-Mazer 2010; Chakraborti and Zempi 2012). Such victimization may well inform the lives of many, possibly even most Muslim communities (cf. Sheridan 2006). Alternatively, experiences of hate crime may be too traumatic to share with strangers such as agents of the Crime Survey. Notwithstanding this however, the failings of current research to adequately quantify such abuse and harassment contributes towards the missing perspectives this paper has described. Three possible solutions are offered. First, the Crime Survey of

England and Wales could consider revising the methods by which crimes involving verbal abuse and harassment are recorded (including a revision of survey questions so as to better elicit the reporting of such crimes by victims). Second, a fuller criminological understanding of verbal abuse and harassment could be created by detailed statistical analyses of survey data concerning discrimination and harassment in at work and in other everyday situations (the types of response data collected by the British Election Study Ethnic Minority Study and the Citizenship Survey). Third, a renewed focus on surveying larger numbers of British Muslims in relation to experiences and attitudes of verbal abuse and harassment (akin to the research undertaken by Sheridan) would greatly improve our criminological understanding of Muslim victimization in this area.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings of analysis of the criminological literature and statistical data reveal that, while the literature successfully captures *some* of the details about British Muslim crime victimization and attitudes towards the police, the overall picture is largely and demonstrably incomplete. This paper has argued that there is an over-reliance within criminological literature on the themes of victimization, discrimination and demonization and on qualitative research methods which use small, unrepresentative sample sizes. This over-reliance serves to under-represent similarities shared between British Muslims and other minority groups. This paper has also argued that there is need for criminologists to reflect more frequently on household crime and its effects on British Muslim communities and a need to consider more often the role played by socio-economic factors in shaping crime victimization (of all types) within such communities. Criminological research in this area needs more often to include the consideration of sociological factors such as housing, unemployment and economic inequality and their effects on crime victimization. Elsewhere, there is a need for research to explore a wider range of views and attitudes towards the police and the criminal justice system and not just those which fit into certain established arguments and perspectives: e.g. those that are critical of counter-terrorism measures (even where such criticisms are wholly justifiable). Criminological research needs to move beyond an assumption that negative views towards the police are held by all within British Muslim communities.

In summary, there is a need to promote a more nuanced criminological picture of British Muslim communities and their relationships to crime victimization and the criminal justice system. One which relies less on rhetorical, polemical and journalistic writing and more on empirical evidence, statistical data and a more measured approach to analysis and reporting. Research needs to reflect the range of experiences and attitudes within Muslim communities, not just those which fit into the mould of current criminological thinking, or those which conform to the expectations of a sympathetic audience.

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