

1 Introduction

Objectives of the study

Racial violence and harassment is an issue of widespread public concern. It has been the subject of considerable coverage in the media recently with numerous television programmes and articles in the daily press devoted to describing and understanding the phenomenon. The problem and the measures required to address it effectively have also been the subject of debate within official circles (CRE 1994; Home Affairs Committee 1994; Parekh 1994).

Racial violence and harassment can take several forms, ranging from the relatively rare but serious incidents of murder and serious assaults to the more frequent incidents of racial abuse and threatening behaviour. Any discussion of how racial violence and harassment should be tackled needs to be based on a thorough understanding of the nature and scale of the problem. What sort of incident do members of minority ethnic groups themselves describe as 'racial harassment'? How seriously do they view different types of incident – individually or cumulatively? Whereabouts do these incidents occur, and who are the perpetrators? What, if anything, do the victims try to do about it? To what extent are people's lives affected beyond the actual racial violence and harassment that takes place?

The official figures on the extent of racial violence and harassment are based on police statistics and the British Crime Survey. These have been supplemented by a number of small-scale studies in local areas where racial violence and harassment is known to be a problem. This report reviews the evidence from these various sources, and adds a new one: detailed questioning about the experience of racial violence and harassment among a small sample of African Caribbean and South Asian families. The immediate objective is to understand the various levels and forms of harassment experienced by different minority ethnic groups in Britain.

Our eventual aim is to provide definitive measures of the extent of the problem, and an analysis of the types of incident experienced; to this end, questions have been asked of the sample of 5,000 African Caribbean and South Asian people in PSI's Fourth National Survey of Ethnic Minorities.

The results of that survey will be published in the winter of 1995/96. The purpose of this preliminary report is to describe and identify the various forms of racial harassment, to clarify the issues and to promote discussion and analysis of the problem.

Background to the problem

A number of key developments have contributed to bringing the problem of racial violence and harassment to the centre of public attention recently. The most important has been the concern surrounding several serious acts of racial violence such as that against Quaddus Ali described below.

An Asian student was on a life-support machine after being beaten in what police have described as a racially-motivated incident... Quaddus Ali, aged 17 from Stepney in east London, was with three friends, all young men from the Bangladeshi community when he was set upon by eight young white people... Mr. Ali was punched and beaten about the head by the white group which included a number of skinheads... last night he was said to be critical but stable in the Royal London hospital. (*The Guardian*, 10 September 1993)

People like Quaddus Ali have been attacked because they were seen as being 'different' from the white population by virtue of their colour, ethnicity or nationality. Eight people have died in Britain as a result of what are believed to be racially motivated attacks in 1992 (Black to Black no.1 July 1993; CARF Nos. 1-17 1991-1993). A further three people died in 1993. These were Fiaz Mirza, a taxi-driver in east London, Stephen Lawrence, an 18 year-old schoolboy, stabbed whilst waiting at a bus-stop in Eltham, south-east London and Ali Ibrahim in Brighton (CARF 1994: 5). A recent report highlighted the gravity of the situation faced by minority ethnic communities in parts of Britain:

Reports from monitoring groups, advice centres, and legal officers... told of increasing racist vandalism, graffiti, and personal abuse in the streets, estates and schools. They detailed incidents of black people being forced to leave their homes and businesses because of racist abuse, of families living under self-imposed curfews, and of so-called reception committees springing up to vandalise or deface houses allocated to black families and turn out in force to greet the new tenants. (NCCL 1993: 33)

Recent political developments have served to strengthen such apprehension. Although Britain, unlike parts of Europe, does not have a far-right party of national electoral significance at present (CIRX 1990: 33; Husbans 1994: 563-579), the far-right British National Party (BNP) has managed to secure significant electoral support in a number of socially deprived inner-city wards, particularly in east London.

The election of the BNP candidate, Derek Beackon, in a Millwall ward of the London Borough of Tower Hamlets in September 1993, meant the BNP gained their first seat on a local council since the National Front won two seats in May 1976 in Blackburn (CARF No.17 November/December 1993: 9). Although the BNP lost this seat to the Labour Party in the May 1994 local elections, their candidate came second with 2041 votes, 28 per cent of the total votes cast. The other two BNP candidates in Millwall also received over 25 per cent of the votes. Similarly, in the neighbouring London borough of Newham, the BNP received between 24 per cent and 33 per cent of the votes in the five seats they contested in the local elections (cited in the *New Statesman and Society*, 13 May 1994).

The BNP's electoral support is, however, restricted to specific geographical localities. In the May 1994 local elections there were only three seats outside the east London boroughs of Newham and Tower Hamlets in which they gained over 10 per cent of the votes. Indeed Husband (1994: 576) contends that what should be of most concern is not the electoral potential of the BNP but rather their physical presence and activities, which help to 'create a local climate facilitating racial violence, so that some of those otherwise merely disposed to indulge in it acquire the confidence for actual perpetration from the BNP's presence'.

It is precisely this physical presence of the BNP coupled with the volume and alarming nature of racial attacks in east London recently, that has resulted in the minority ethnic community feeling particularly vulnerable. However, it is important to emphasise that intimidation has not been the sole consequence of such vulnerability to racial violence and harassment. Many have actively sought to address the problem using a number of approaches.

These have included making strong demands to local councils and the police to tackle the problem more effectively. There has been some institutional response including in the east London borough of Tower Hamlets, where the council established a 24-hour racial harassment hotline. This confidential information service enables residents to pass on information about racist activities in the local area which can then be investigated by the council (MR and AMA News: April 1994: 29). Similarly, it is commonly believed that the rise in racially motivated attacks reported to the police in east London is an indication, in part at least, of the greater willingness of the victims to report such criminal activity and of the police in recording it. This important issue will be discussed more fully in Chapter 2.

On the other hand, some members of the minority ethnic community have sought redress by going to local anti-racist groups who provide advice

and support to people who have suffered from racial violence and harassment. There are many such groups in east London, reflecting the widespread concern amongst the minority ethnic community about the problem. They include the Newham Monitoring Project (NMP) which has been undertaking such work for the past fifteen years; the Greenwich Action Committee Against Racial Attacks (GACARA); the Campaign Against Racism and Fascism (CARF), an umbrella organisation for several local groups throughout the country. The recent period has also witnessed the establishment of self-defence groups, especially in those localities where the BNP has been active. One such group is Shadwell Community Defence (SCD) which was established to protect local South Asians under threat from racial violence from the BNP in a recent local council by-election in September 1994.

It was the concern felt in some quarters of the wider community at the nature and extent of racial violence and harassment that was taking place, particularly in east London, coupled with the presence of the BNP in this area, and the belief that it may be the precursor to racial violence elsewhere in the country, that played an important part in the establishment of two national anti-racist organisations in 1991: the Anti-Nazi League (ANL) and the Anti-Racist Alliance (ARA). These organisations have adopted different though complementary strategies in addressing the problem in Britain.

The re-established Anti-Nazi League (ANL) has held meetings and established local branches throughout the country comprising all who wish to campaign against fascism and racism. The central objective underpinning this strategy is the belief that only by organising the greatest number of people (including both ethnic minorities and white people) to demonstrate their active opposition to fascism and racism, and thereby creating a climate of public opinion in Britain that is unfavourable to them, can the rise of fascism be prevented. This strategy has been used to mobilise people on several occasions. The demonstration calling for the closure of the BNP bookshop in Welling in October 1993 was organised jointly by members of the ANL and Youth Against Racism in Europe (YRE) – another anti-Nazi group. Similarly, 100,000 people – the biggest anti-racist gathering in Britain since the Rock Against Racism carnival at Victoria Park in East London in May 1978 (Gilroy 1987: 132) – attended a march and festival on Saturday 28 May 1994 to demonstrate their opposition to fascism and racism in Britain (cited in the *Observer*, 29 May 1994).

While the ANL mainly seeks to tackle the threat from organised fascism, the Anti-Racist Alliance (ARA) has a wider remit – tackling everyday racism as well as organised fascism. The organisation lays

particular emphasis on black self-organisation, a strategy which, they believe, allows African Caribbean and South Asians to take the lead in setting the agenda in how the problem ought to be addressed. In addition to organising demonstrations against racism and fascism, ARA have also devoted their energies to pressing Parliament to introduce legislation to deal with racial violence and harassment. A recent report by the Anti-Racist Alliance national conference in Greenwich (1993) highlighted the case for a racial harassment bill as one way of curbing the problem.

The roles of the ANL and ARA have come under some criticism. There has been some concern about the relationship between these single-issue campaigns and both mainstream and militant political parties. Concern has also been expressed about whether violence should be confronted with violence whilst nevertheless recognising that a response is needed.

Several parliamentary committees and government departments have also undertaken initiatives to address the problem. Since the problem was first placed on the policy agenda in 1981, it has been the subject of several reports. In 1986, the House of Commons Home Affairs Committee report on racial attacks and harassment (1986) noted that 'the most shameful and dispiriting aspect of race relations in Britain is the incidence of racial attacks and harassment'. It recommended that a multi-agency approach be adopted, that is, one which co-ordinated the efforts of all the different agencies having an interest in tackling the problem. A major report by the Inter-Departmental Racial Attacks Group (1989) then laid down extensive guidelines on how best to move towards using such a co-ordinated approach. This initiative was quickly followed by a second report by the Inter-Departmental Racial Attacks Group in 1991 which evaluated how far its recommendations had been implemented and also provided examples of best practice.

The Department of the Environment published a good practice guide for local authorities on tackling racial violence and harassment of council tenants (1989). In 1991, they followed this up by undertaking a postal survey of all local housing authorities in England and Wales to examine to what extent racial violence and harassment was seen as a problem locally and to assess the impact and effectiveness of the good practice guide produced by the department and the first report of the Inter-Departmental Racial Attacks Group, both of which had been sent out to local authorities in 1989. Thirty-eight of the 85 local authorities that responded thought that racial violence and harassment was a 'serious' or 'very serious' problem in their area. The Department of the Environment also found that most authorities had seen and acted upon the department's good practice guide. The report went on to make a number of recommendations including

encouraging all local authorities to review their policies and procedures on racial violence and harassment to ensure they were in line with the department's good practice guide. They also encouraged local authorities to adopt a common definition of racial violence and harassment to ensure the effective working of the multi-agency approach (Love and Kirby 1994).

The European context

The public concern surrounding the problem of racial violence and harassment (and the resultant reaction to it amongst certain quarters) in Britain cannot be divorced from the context of recent developments in parts of Europe. According to the European Parliament, '*the number of racist attacks across the 12 community states rose by between 5 and 10 per cent in the late 1980s*' (cited in Skellington and Morris 1992: 61). Many people in Britain watched on television the events that unfolded in Rostock, Germany, in August 1992 when bands of nazis, armed with petrol bombs, launched an orchestrated attack against reception centres for asylum seekers.

Germany, partly as a result of its recent historical past, has been the country where concern surrounding the issue of racial violence has been particularly highlighted with extensive coverage in the German media of serious racial attacks directed against minorities in the past three years. There were 2600 recorded racially-motivated attacks on 'foreigners' in the period from January 1991 to October 1992 of which 1200 took place during the first month of 1992 (Kohl 1993: 151). Twenty-five people died in 1992 (CARF No. 18 1994 Jan/ Feb. p.4) and a further 12 people died in the first three months of 1993 'in incidents that can either be proved to be racially motivated or where a racial motive cannot be ruled out' (Fekete 1993: 163).

Similarly, France has also been witness to serious cases of racial violence. Indeed, a new word 'Arabicide' has been coined to describe the widespread violence against North Africans that resulted in the death of eight people in 1992 (Fekete 1992: 162). The 1989 report of the '*Commission Nationale des Droits de l'homme*', distinguishing between 'actions' covering assault, shooting, arson and damage to property, and 'threats' covering graffiti, leaflets and telephone calls, found that 'actions' had remained fairly stable at 46-70 reported incidents a year in the past decade. On the other hand, 'threats', which had been stable throughout the mid-1980s at 100 reported incidents per year, had increased to 135 in 1988 and to 237 in 1989 (cited in Oakley 1992: 24). However, the extent of the problem has not been fully reflected in the number of racially motivated incidents reported to the police. An alternative picture of racial violence and harassment in France in the past decade was shown by a poll undertaken

by the anti-racist organisation MRAP, which found that 7 per cent of ethnic minorities had been physically attacked; 6 per cent had been pushed about and 30 per cent had been verbally abused in a public place (cited in Oakley 1992: 24).

Such acts of racial violence and harassment in Europe have not been restricted to people of colour alone. The 'old racisms' have also re-emerged recently: several Jewish cemeteries have been desecrated with racist graffiti in both France and Germany (Oakley 1992; ICCLA 1993 and the Institute of Jewish Affairs 1994).

It should be noted that comparison of the nature and scale of the problem across the various European states is difficult for two related reasons. Firstly, definitions as to what constitutes an act of racial violence and harassment differ markedly between countries and sometimes within countries: in Germany, the security service collect data only on physical attacks whereas in Britain, the police use a broader definition that in theory seeks to capture incidents of 'low level' harassment that are reported to them. On the other hand, in Sweden, data is collected only on what are referred to as 'terrorist attacks'. The second difficulty relating to comparison across the European states is that the targets of such racial violence and harassment are different in each country. Hence, in Britain, the overwhelming majority of victims tend to be South Asians and African Caribbeans whereas in Germany they are people of Turkish origin. On the other hand, in eastern Europe, the victims of such violence tend to be white ethnic minorities like Jews and Gypsies. (For a fuller discussion of these issues, see Bjorgo and Witte 1993: Chapter 1.)

Nevertheless, accounts of racial violence and harassment are to be found in most other countries of western Europe and are regularly reported in the daily press (for more information, see Fekete 1993; CARF Nos. 1-22, 1991-1994; *The Guardian*, 6 February 1993 and *Race and Class*, Vol.32 No.3 1991). The Campaign Against Racism and Fascism (CARF) (1994: 5) counted 59 racially-motivated murders in Western Europe in 1993 and claimed to have found evidence that the far-right had been directly implicated in 43 of them.¹ Of these 59 racially-motivated murders, 17 were of children under the age of 15 (CARF 1994: 8). Oakley (1992: 40) has concluded that 'there is prima facie (if often anecdotal) evidence that racial violence and harassment occur in all countries of Europe in which visible minorities of post-war immigrant origin are settled'.

The problem has been recognised by the European Parliament which has published three major reports on the rise of racism and xenophobia in Europe in the past decade. These include the report by the Committee of Inquiry into fascism and racism in Europe, commonly referred to as the

Evrigenis report of 1985; a report by the Committee of Inquiry into Racism and Xenophobia (CIRX) in 1990, commonly referred to as the Ford Report; and a report by the Committee on Civil Liberties and Internal Affairs (CCLIA) in 1993. In addition, the Council of Europe has also published a report looking at racial violence and harassment in Europe (Oakley 1992).

Such racial violence and harassment, although not always directly attributable, cannot be divorced from the growth of far-right electoral parties across some countries of western Europe for the first time since the end of the second world war. It is evident that the far-right is now a significant political force in many countries. A report by the Committee on Civil Liberties and Internal Affairs (CCLIA) in 1993 on the resurgence of racism and xenophobia in Europe and the danger of extremist far-right violence recognised this fact and sought to draw

attention to the proliferation in the Member States of extreme right-wing groups, parties and movements – some of which are organised and maintain links with each other – which have in common an ‘ideology’ based on racist and anti-Semitic attitudes, leading them to commit acts of violence, acts of vandalism of every kind against Community and non-Community citizens, refugees, asylum-seekers, gypsies, Jews, and other minority groups and exploit a situation of social discontent and disarray to incite others particularly young people – to racial hatred by blaming ‘foreigners’ for current economic problems and the rise in unemployment (CCLIA 1993: 5)

A brief review of recent electoral results in some of the key countries of western Europe demonstrates the relative strength of such far-right parties. It shows that electoral support for the far-right is uneven and varies across countries with some having quite substantial support whilst in others it remains minimal.

In France, the far-right party, the Front National, has been an important political force for almost a decade. It received 12.5 per cent of the vote in the March 1993 general election although no seats in Parliament. It had 239 councillors elected across France since the 1992 local elections. The report by the Committee of Inquiry into Racism and Xenophobia (CIRX) in 1990 estimated that the FN had a membership of 100,000 and a further 200,000 sympathisers. The recent European elections held in June 1994 showed that although its vote had declined slightly from 12 per cent to 10 per cent they had held on to all their 10 seats in the European Parliament.

However, it is in Italy that the far-right have scored their biggest success to date. The general election in Italy in March 1994 resulted in the victory of the far-right in the form of the Freedom Alliance. The three parties that made up this alliance, Silvio Berlusconi’s Forza Italia, Umberto Bossi’s Northern League, and Gianfranco Fini’s National Alliance, won over 50 per cent of the vote and a majority of seats in both houses of Parliament

(cited in the *New Statesman and Society*, 1 April 1994, p.10). The victory of this coalition meant that the fascists, in the form of Fini's National Alliance (formerly the Movimento Sociale Italiano (MSI), Mussolini's party) won a share of power for the first time since the fall of Mussolini in 1943. This coalition government has since fallen. The June 1994 European election confirmed the strong support for the Freedom Alliance with the fascist National Alliance doubling its share of the vote from 6 per cent in 1989 to 13 per cent. This meant that it now had 11 seats in the European Parliament compared to four in 1989.

In Belgium, the far-right Vlaams Blok, campaigning on the slogan of 'our own people first', won 12 seats in the Chamber of Representatives, five seats in the Senate, and 6.6 per cent of the national vote in the 1991 elections. The June 1994 European election results suggested that the Vlaams Blok had further consolidated its support. It received 7 per cent of the vote and two seats. A second far-right party in Belgium, the National Front, received 3 per cent of the vote and gained its first European parliamentary seat.

On the other hand, some far-right parties have witnessed a decline in electoral support. In the immediate two years that followed German re-unification, the far-right Republikaner Party succeeded in gaining a significant share of the electoral vote. In the April 1992 elections, they gained 11 per cent of the total vote and 15 seats in the state government. However, the June 1994 European elections saw their share of the vote decline from 7 per cent in 1989 to 4 per cent. In terms of seats, this meant they lost all six seats they had previously held from the 1989 European elections.

Similarly, in the Netherlands, the far-right party, Centrum Demokraten, has failed to achieve an electoral breakthrough. It received only minimal electoral support and its vote fell from 3 per cent in the last European elections in 1989 to 1 per cent in 1994.

The appearance of far-right electoral parties has not been restricted to parts of western Europe. The rise of ethnic-specific political parties has accompanied the 'ethnic cleansing' going on in the former nation state of Yugoslavia. Elsewhere in eastern Europe, the collapse of Stalinism has been accompanied by the growth of political parties that are increasingly and openly anti-semitic and anti-Gypsy. The CCLIA report (1993: 5) highlighted

that the countries of Eastern Europe, whose young, still fragile democracies are particularly susceptible to the dangers of an authoritarian backlash, have also witnessed the emergence of extreme right-wing organisations and are experiencing a marked increase in racist, xenophobic and anti-semitic tendencies.

Some of the far-right parties in eastern Europe that have managed to achieve some relative electoral success are as follows. The Slovak National Party entered the coalition government in March 1994. The Hungarian Democratic Forum is the largest partner in the present coalition government (for more information on these developments see Fekete 1993: 159-168; Oakley 1992; CCLIA 1993 and CARF 1994: No.20: 2). Perhaps of most concern is the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia led by Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, which, in the general election of December 1993, secured 23 per cent of the popular vote, making it the largest political party in Russia. (*The Guardian*, 31 December 1993).

Overview of this report

These related developments have contributed to creating an unprecedented level of public debate recently about the problem of racial violence and harassment in many parts of Europe (Bjorgo and Witte 1993). A related corollary of this heightened concern and awareness has been the belief that the recent period has been witness to an increase in levels of racial violence and harassment. This view has existed both in relation to mainland Europe (Ford 1992) and Britain (ARA 1993; Parekh 1994; Home Affairs Select Committee 1994). However, others have questioned the assumption that there has been an increase in the scale of the problem, arguing that such a view fails to reflect the wide variation in the size of the problem across the different countries of Europe (Miles 1994).

For the purposes of this study, it was decided that the definition proposed by the CRE in their study of racial violence and harassment in local housing estates (CRE 1987:8) would serve the purpose of investigating the full range of the problem. This states:

Racial harassment is violence which may be verbal or physical and which includes attacks on property as well as on the person, suffered by individuals or groups because of their colour, race, nationality or ethnic or national origins, when the victim believes that the perpetrator was acting on racial grounds and/or there is evidence of racism.

This definition has the advantage of allowing incidents of 'low level' racial harassment such as racial abuse to be included in addition to racial attacks and racially motivated damage to property.

Chapter 2 will review existing statistics and research to examine the scale of the problem in Britain and establish whether it has increased. The objective of investigating the scale of the problem is to provide a more accurate measure in order to improve our understanding of the phenomenon and to enable it to be tackled more effectively.

Chapter 3 of the report presents the findings from a new qualitative study based on depth interviews with 74 African Caribbean and South Asian people which explored the nature of the different forms of racial violence and harassment and in particular gathered more information on aspects of 'low-level' racial harassment.

Chapter 4 of the report is also based on the qualitative study and examines briefly another often neglected aspect of the problem – the 'hidden injuries of racism' – that is, how the lives of African Caribbean and South Asian people are affected beyond the actual racial violence and harassment that takes place.

The report concludes with a discussion of the key issues involved in addressing the problem more effectively.

Note

1. CARF claim to have found evidence that a further 16 deaths occurred as a result of 'police brutality' and 'suicide provoked by official racism' (CARF No.18 January/ February 1994).