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Racial murders: nearly half the victims are white

Home Office release official figures as police claim that political correctness is stifling the debate

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Nearly half of all victims of racially motivated murders in the last decade have been white, according to official figures released by the Home Office.

The data, released under Freedom of Information legislation, shows that between 1995 and 2004 there have been 58 murders where the police consider a racial element played a key part. Out of these, 24 have been where the murder victim was white.

The disclosure will add to the intense debate over multiculturalism in British society. The figures also overturn the assumption that almost all racial murders are committed against ethnic minority victims.

Senior police officers have admitted that 'political correctness' and the fear of discussing the issue have meant that race crime against white people goes under-reported. One chief constable has claimed that white, working-class men are more alienated than the Muslim community.

Peter Fahy, the Chief Constable of Cheshire and a spokesman on race issues for the Association of Chief Police Officers, said it was a fact that it was harder to get the media interested where murder victims were young white men.

'The political correctness and reluctance to discuss these things absolutely does play a factor', he said. 'A lot of police officers and other professions feel almost the best thing to do is try and avoid it for fear of being criticised. We probably have all got ourselves into a bit of state about this.'

'The difficulty in the police service is that the whole thing is being closed down because we are all afraid of discussing any of it in case we say the wrong thing - and that is not healthy.'

Racial violence in Britain has become the subject of intense scrutiny since the public inquiry in 1999 into the murder of black teenager Stephen Lawrence. Most of the high-profile cases of hate crime have been focused on young blacks, including

Damilola Taylor and more recently Anthony Walker, who was murdered with an axe at a Liverpool bus stop by white youths.

Yet these latest official figures give the most complete picture of racially motivated murders in the UK, revealing the situation to be much more complex. In March 2004 a white Scottish teenager, Kriss Donald, was bundled into a car while walking in the Pollokshields area of Glasgow. He was later beaten, stabbed 13 times, and set on fire. British Pakistani Daanish Zahid was found guilty by unanimous verdict of the charges of racially aggravated murder.

In the same year Christopher Yates, 30, a white man, was beaten to death in an assault by a group of drunken Asian youths as he walked home in Barking, east London.

Politicians and the authorities often face difficulty in raising the issue of racial attacks on white victims for fear that far-right extremists will try to exploit such events to stir up racial tensions.

Fahy also warned of caution in over-interpreting the figures. He said that the 24 white victims also included those who were Jewish, 'dark-skinned' Europeans or gypsies. In addition, seven of those were killed by white attackers, four by black, six by Asian, with seven whose racial background was not identified.

Police have suggested that some white-on-white killings may be a result of attacks between Scots, English, Irish and Welsh people.

Overall, there have been 10 black victims and 16 Asian victims. Of the 58 race murders, 18 have been where a white attacker has killed a black or Asian individual and another 14 where one member of a minority group has murdered another for racial reasons.

'This shows the complex society we are policing,' said Fahy.

'I will be honest with some of this discussion about the alienation of Muslim people. Police officers would tell you there are a lot of young people out there who feel alienated.

'There are a lot of young white working-class lads, particularly on the more difficult estates, who are hugely alienated. Yet very little attention is given to that.

'Sometimes we forget that ethnic minorities actually make up quite a small percentage of the population.'

Three years ago Phil Woolas, MP for the Oldham East and Saddleworth constituency, who is now Minister for Community Cohesion, said 'political correctness' was

stopping racism against white people from being condemned. As a result, he said, attacks on whites by black and Asian people are not criticised by politicians and could harm race relations in Britain.

This weekend Woolas refused to comment, but a spokesman for the Department for Local Communities and Government said: 'Racially motivated crime is wholly abhorrent, whatever the background of the victim.'

'This government has worked hard to improve the investigation and prosecution of these crimes across all ethnic groups.'

In 1999 the Commission for Racial Equality published a report that concluded that most racial crimes were committed against white people, although it pointed out that at the time white people made up 94 per cent of the population and that, proportionally, black and Asian people were still far more likely to be victims of race attacks.

The report suggested that white people might also be more likely to report a crime such as a street robbery carried out by a black person as a racial incident.

A spokeswoman for the CRE said the Home Office figures raised some interesting issues but she did not want to comment further until the data could be properly analysed.

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