

Report: Hate crimes most often target blacks

But community leaders say many victims fear reporting crimes, leading to an undercount.

BY PEGGY LOWE
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Blacks are the most frequent target of hate crimes in Orange County, but leaders fear new statistics don't show a true picture of the problem.

The county's annual report released Thursday revealed 19 hate crimes aimed at blacks in 2006, compared with 2005's 17. Overall, hate crimes increased slightly, with 101 reported in 2006, up from 97 in 2005.

Mark Whitlock, a pastor at Christ Our Redeemer AME Church in Irvine, said reporting race problems at high schools in Tustin and Irvine is "unfocused" and doesn't take gang violence into consideration.

"I think it's a severe undercount," he said of the report done by the Orange County Human Relations Commission. "Our younger African-Americans probably don't report."

Crimes against minorities are severely underreported for many rea-

sons, leaders said, including misunderstanding the justice system, distrust of law enforcement or fear of further victimization.

Schools are also reluctant to report any problems for fear they will get a bad reputation, said Kevin O'Grady, regional director of the Anti-Defamation League.

The commission has programs in 30 schools, but more educators need to be open to diversity training, said Rusty Kennedy, the commission's executive director.

"We're concerned with preventing that next generation of hate from taking seed," Kennedy said.

Other findings from the report:

- Hate crimes doubled against people perceived to be Arab, Middle Eastern or Muslim, up from the four reported in 2005 to nine in 2006.
- Crimes targeting gays and lesbians dropped to 13 in 2006 from 16 in 2005.
- Hate crimes aimed at Jews increased to 15 in 2006 from 12 in 2005.
- Crimes against Asian-Pacific Islanders rose to seven in 2006 from two in 2005.
- Anti-Hispanic crimes dipped slightly, to eight in 2006 from nine in 2005.