

Report: Hate crimes spike against Muslims, Jews

By DEEPA BHARATH



African Americans are the most frequent targets of [hate crimes](#) while Jewish and Muslim communities experienced the most dramatic increases in hate crimes in 2009, according to a report released by the Orange County Human Relations Commission Wednesday.

The report also found that hate crimes against Latinos were down in 2009 after a two-year upward trend. Hate crimes against the gay and lesbian community also were down for the third year in a row.

However, the report added that hate crimes against certain groups such as the gay and lesbian community and undocumented immigrants are underreported "because of fear and lack of trust."

The numbers documented in this report may be relatively small, but each incident denotes the demeaning and dehumanizing of an individual because of his or her race, skin color, religious belief or sexual orientation, said Rusty Kennedy, executive director of the Orange County Human Relations Commission. "Our goal with this report is to create awareness that hate crimes do occur in Orange County," he said.

Kennedy gave the example of an incident that occurred last year in an Orange County junior high school where a Muslim boy was cornered in a restroom by two other boys who said they would shoot him if he came to school the next day. "Do we want children to be threatened because of their religious beliefs or race in our schools?" he said. "This report helps shine the light on these incidents and help the public realize that hate crimes are real and they happen everywhere."

The commission documented a total of 77 hate crimes in Orange County in 2009. Here are highlights:

- Hate crimes involving African Americans were down about 30 percent -- from 23 incidents in 2008 to 16 in 2009. But African Americans, who make up only 2 percent of the county's population, were still the target of the most hate crimes, the report found.
- Hate crimes against Muslims and the Middle Eastern community grew from four incidents in 2008 to 10 in 2009. The report states that hate crimes against these communities have been relatively higher since the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. Also, hate crimes targeting Jews increased for the second year in a row -- from 10 incidents in 2008 to 14 in 2009.
- Crimes targeting Latinos dropped significantly from 15 incidents in 2008 to six in 2009. A similar trend was seen in crimes against the gay and lesbian community, where the number of hate crimes fell from 11 incidents in 2008 to six in 2009.
- Although the number of hate crimes against the Asian community is relatively lower, there was a three-fold increase in 2009 -- from two incidents in 2008 to seven in 2009.
- The report also shows that there was a 50 percent increase in hate crimes targeting people because of their religious beliefs while crimes motivated by race or ethnicity dropped by 20 percent.
- More than half of the hate crimes reported in Orange County involved vandalism or graffiti.