



Religious discrimination in Britain: what difference does a decade make?

With Home Office funding, Professor Paul Weller and a team of researchers carried out the first major study of Religious Discrimination in England and Wales (1999-2001). Between 2010 and 2013, together with Nazila Ghanea and Kingsley Purdam, and joined by Dr. Sariya Contractor, Weller carried out a re-study, this time funded by the [Religion and Society](#) programme. Not only did the research ask whether the nature and extent of discrimination had changed, it also considered whether or not the coming into force of new equality legislation relating to religion or belief from 2003, and the Incitement to Racial and Religious Hatred Act of 2006, had had an impact.

The team reviewed scholarly literature, case law in England and Wales, European Union policy developments, relevant international instruments, and survey and Census data. They revisited still extant organisations they had contacted in 1999-2001 with a postal questionnaire. These methods were complemented by a combination of interviews and focus groups in Blackburn, Cardiff, Leicester, Newham and Norwich. Analysis is ongoing, but the following interim findings were presented at workshops in late 2012.

The findings suggest that while religious people are generally aware of their new legal rights they are often not sure how to go about pursuing them when needed, while 'non-religious' people often believe that the new legislation tends to privilege religious people, despite the legislative meaning of 'belief' including those living by non-religious philosophical and ethical values.

Interim results from the project suggest that unfair treatment on the basis of religion or belief still continues, especially in the spheres of education, employment and the media. Nevertheless, in contrast with the media (in relation to which there was little reported change), both the new survey and the fieldwork found some reduction in reported unfair treatment in education, employment and the criminal justice system (though the field research found continued reported unfair treatment in relation to immigration).

Participants in field research reported that, overall, relations between different religious groups have improved since 2001, and survey results indicate a reduction in the reporting of unfair treatment on the part of other religious groups. However, outside of specific sectors, religious organisations were more likely to identify other religious groups as a source of unfair treatment than non-religious groups.

While there has been an overall reduction in reported unfair treatment in education and employment, only in the survey evidence is there a suggestion that there has been much change in relation to treatment of religion in the media. In employment, as in 1999-2001, more discrimination was reported in relation to the private than the public sector, with the attitudes of managers and colleagues being identified more than organisational policies or practices. Problems remain in translating policy into practice.

The survey finds that Muslims, together with Pagans and members of New Religious Movements, continue to report the most frequent unfair treatment, sometimes of a quite serious kind. In recent years, members of other religions have also reported being harassed due to being mistakenly identified as Muslims. In comparison with ten years ago, there was some evidence of a more widespread incidence of issues relating to 'the 5Ks' of Sikhs, and the emergence of problems for Christian employees who do not wish to work on Sundays. Among Christians, there was some sense of increased marginalisation, yet 'non-religious' people identified instances of where they saw Christianity as being unfairly privileged, especially in the spheres of education and governance.

Overall, around a quarter of responding religious organisations thought equality and human rights laws neither helpful nor unhelpful in reducing unfair treatment of people due to their religion, and another quarter did not know, although from the remaining respondents more found the laws helpful than unhelpful. In neither survey nor field research was there much appetite for more legislation. Public education remained the preferred way to tackle unfair treatment on the basis of religion or belief. Going forward, the project team will give attention to different forms of unfair treatment: prejudice, hatred, disadvantage, direct discrimination, indirect discrimination and institutional discrimination.

Find out more...

- Visit the project's web pages: <http://www.derby.ac.uk/religion-and-society>
- Listen to Principal Investigator Paul Weller and Researcher Sariya contractor presenting the research at Programme findings conference 'New Forms of Public Religion' (September 2012, Cambridge): http://www.religionsociety.org.uk/publications/podcasts/show/nfpr_conference_presentation_weller_and_contractor
- Read the executive summary of a European report by Principal Investigator Paul Weller and Project Researcher Sariya Contractor: P. Weller and S. Contractor (2012), [Executive Summary of Learning from Experience, Leading to Engagement: For a Europe of Religion And Belief Diversity. A Policy Brief Document for the European Institutions and Civil Society Groups](#), Brussels: Belieforama (translated into Bulgarian, Dutch, English, French, German, Romanian and Spanish). Available on-line at: <http://www.belieforama.eu/sites/default/files/documents/2012-10%2520EXE%2520SUM%2520PB%2520PRINT.pdf>
- Look up an article by Co-Investigator Nazila Ghanea based upon research for the project: N. Ghanea (2012), "Religious Minorities and Human rights: Bridging International and Domestic Perspectives on the Rights of Persons Belonging to Religious Minorities under English Law", in the [European Yearbook of Minority Issues](#), No. 9, pp. 497-518.

You might also be interested in...

- Listening to project Principal Investigator Paul Weller discussing his contribution to the book showcasing Religion and Society research *Religion and Change in Modern Britain*:

http://www.religionandsociety.org.uk/publications/podcasts/show/paul_weller_controversies_as_a_lens_on_change

- A one-day workshop on 'Non-Religious Identities in Policy and Practice' (London, April 2012) at which Researcher Sariya Contractor presented the project:
http://www.religionandsociety.org.uk/events/programme_events/show/non_religious_identities_in_policy_and_practice
- A project on multi-faith spaces funded by the Programme for which Paul Weller was an advisor:
<http://www.sed.manchester.ac.uk/architecture/research/mfs/>
- A report on religion and belief in UK higher education from research led by Paul Weller:
http://www.religionandsociety.org.uk/news/show/award_holder_publishes_report_on_religion_and_belief_in_higher_education
- Paul Weller's review of religious discrimination in Britain:
http://www.religionandsociety.org.uk/news/show/religious_discrimination_in_britain_review_published
- Dr Contractor's ESRC Follow-on Funding grant on 'Collaborative Partnerships between universities and Muslim institutions: dismantling the roadblocks': <http://www.derby.ac.uk/collaborative-partnerships-project>

Project Details

Award Title

Religion and Belief, Discrimination and Equality in England and Wales: Theory, Policy and Practice (2000-2010)

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Multi-Faith Centre at the University of Derby (<http://www.multifaithcentre.org>)

University

University of Derby

Award Type

Phase 3 Large Grant

Key terms

religion or belief, equality, legislation, state, Equality Act 2010