

Hello there, I'm June Simms! And this is As It Is, from VOA Learning English.

Bullying is an international issue, affecting nearly every society. Today we hear what some people in the United States are doing to try to stop it.

But first, the number of reported attacks against Muslims in Britain nearly doubled last year. The increase has led to concern among Muslim community leaders and calls for changes in government policies. Steve Ember has more on the story in this report from VOA's Al Pessin in London.

## **Anti-Muslim Attacks Rise in Britain**

British officials and Muslim leaders blame the increase in anti-Muslim attacks largely on one incident, which was recorded on a security camera. Two Muslim men killed a British soldier in London, and the two claimed they did it for Islam.

But anti-Muslim feeling in Britain goes beyond that. Fiyaz Mughal is the director of a community organization called Faith Matters.

"There is what we call a 'background noise' of anti-Muslim hate that has quite significant volume. That volume is both online as well as off-line. There are troubling indicators that anti-Muslim hate is unfortunately on the social horizon and probably here to stay for some time."

Experts say most of the anti-Muslim attacks come in the form of insults and property damage. But some mosques have been targeted. At a mosque in north London, someone threw the head of a pig over a fence next to the religious center.

As people gathered for midday prayers on one recent Friday, newspapers were reporting a sharp increase in the Muslim population in Britain. This left community leaders wondering what effect the newspaper reports might have. Omar el-Hamdoun is president of the Muslim Association of Britain.

“An increase in the number of Muslims means that, as Muslims, we need to tackle anti-Muslim hatred or Islamophobia, so that Muslims are feeling more and more part of society.”

But he notes that is difficult at times.

“As Muslims, we have our own practices, we have our own needs, we have our own reasoning. So I think all of these things are actually difficult for us to fully integrate into society.”

Britain’s 1.6 million Muslims make up three percent of the population, and are a part of everyday life. But Muslim leaders say a small number of militants and other issues serve to intensify divisions in the country and across Europe. The issues include tensions in the Middle East and anti-immigrant feelings in Britain.

“Europe, unfortunately, has a strain of hate that seems to run through it. Something about Europe seems to carry this rejection of the ‘other.’”

Fiyaz Mughal says Britain’s one-year-old rules on hate speech need to be tightened. He also says police need to react more quickly to anti-Muslim incidents. And, he says, judges should give stronger sentences to people convicted of hate crimes.

He and other experts say there is also a lot for community organizations to do to educate Muslims and the larger society. He says they need to show what Islam is and how it can fit into a society very different from its traditional homelands.

I’m Steve Ember.

You are listening to As It Is, our daily program for people learning English. I’m June Simms in Washington.

## **How Bullying Feels to Those Who Experience It**

Bullying is not a new issue. It exists in almost every society. It takes different forms, including social isolation and verbal and physical attacks. There is also cyber-bullying, the electronic posting of mean messages targeted at a specific person.

Elana Burack is a high school senior in North Carolina. Three years ago, she spent most of her time with one group of girls. They were close friends, or so she thought.

“We'd eat together at lunch and go to parties and share secrets. One day I decided to sit with a different group of girls at lunch, which I didn't think would be a problem.”

But it was.

“I was sort of cornered by my friend group and told, ‘You're not allowed to do that. You have to sit with us. You're not allowed to sit with other people.’ And at that moment I sort of realized are these girls really my friends?”

Burack talked to the girls about her concerns.

“You're supposed to support me, and to help me and encourage me. And I don't feel like you're doing that and I wasn't sure that we could be friends anymore.”

Elana Burack is one of more than 80 teenagers who shared their experiences in a new book -- “Under Attack: True Stories Written by Teen Victims, Bullies and Bystanders.”

“It’s extremely painful to hear how cruel people can be towards each other.”

Stephanie Meyer is the co-creator of a monthly magazine written by and for teens. She helped edit the stories in the book. She says bullying is a serious problem among youth.

“Very often a young person who is bullied becomes very depressed, or because they're depressed, the bullying affects them even more. And there are too many instances of teens who have committed suicide as a result.”

But bullying, she says, can also be a cry for attention.

“Very often the bullies themselves have been victims. And they are trying to regain the power that they have lost in being bullied at home, being bullied by older children when they were young. And so they regain a sense of power by being the actual bully.”

With the growth of social media, cyber-bullying has also become a problem.

“There is one young woman who was at a party, the end of the summer, and they were playing on a ‘Slip ‘n Slide.’ And at one point, part of her bathing suit apparently was kind of revealing and a picture was taken and it was posted on Facebook and she was not even aware of it for weeks.”

That girl was 17-year-old Autumn Bornholdt.

“I was mortified. I couldn’t believe that these girls who I thought were my friends had not told me that this picture was online.”

At first, she says she was too ashamed to tell her family.

“I was actually at the doctor’s office with my mom one day. And one of my true friends texted me and said, ‘Oh my goodness, there has been another post on your Facebook wall.’ So I went and I read it and I just started crying. And my mom asked me why I was crying. So then I told her. And she immediately started calling all of these other girls’ parents and asking them to remove these nasty posts.”

College freshman Sitav Nabi also suffered bullying in the 7th grade. She is now 18 years old. She says it was a painful experience that she will never forget. And she says people who stand by and watch such incidents are just as guilty as the bullies.

“If you are watching someone being bullied, being attacked, and you know it’s wrong, you have to stand up and make them stop because you’re traumatizing another human being.”

Sitav Nabi and the other teens who shared their experiences about bullying hope to bring more attention to the problem. They say this will help other youth realize that they are not alone, they can stand up for themselves and their friends, and put an end to bullying.

That's As It Is for today. Thanks for joining us. Have a question or comment about our show? We would love to hear from you. Email us at [learningenglish@voanews.com](mailto:learningenglish@voanews.com).

VOA world news is coming up at the top of the hour, Universal time.

I'm June Simms. I hope you will join me again next week for more news on As It Is.