

Report says Islamophobia on the rise

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(RNS) A new report asserts that anti-Muslim prejudice has worsened in recent years, but argues the trend could be reversed with greater community outreach.

The report, "Same Hate, New Target: Islamophobia and its Impact in the United States," was released Thursday (June 23) by the Council on American-Islamic Relations and the University of California Berkeley's Center for Race and Gender.

While the report said there are no comprehensive figures to quantify the problem, anti-Muslim discrimination is broken into several categories, including hate crimes, workplace issues, schools, public accommodation, mosque vandalism and religious "profiling."

"When we say there are campaigns against Islam and Muslims, a lot of people dismiss it as conspiracy theories," said Ihsan Bagby, a professor of Islamic studies at the University of Kentucky and a CAIR board member.

"But this proves that there are concerted campaigns against Islam and Muslims."

Kamran Memon, a civil rights attorney in Chicago who represents Muslims in discrimination cases, said Islamophobia is not "a PR problem that can be solved with good marketing."

"We need to acknowledge that people have legitimate fears that can only be turned around with serious engagement," Memon said.

The report lists figures it believes to be countering Islamophobia, including comedian Jon Stewart and New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg, as well as perceived anti-Muslim offenders, including GOP presidential candidate Newt Gingrich.

The report defined Islamophobia as "close-minded prejudice against or hatred of Islam and Muslims," and said it is "not appropriate to label all, or even the majority of those, who question Islam and Muslims as Islamophobes."