

RESEARCH REPORT

From Turkey to Canada: The Persistent Shadows of Hate Crimes Against the Hizmet Movement Members

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Introduction

This report presents the findings of a follow-up research study focusing on the hate speech and hate crimes experienced by members of the Hizmet Movement in Canada. This study builds on a [previous report](#) that examined the broader impacts of hate speech against the Hizmet Movement, aiming to provide a more detailed and specific analysis of the types and frequencies of hate crimes, as well as the nature of the hate crime experiences of the victims within the Canadian context.

What is Hizmet Movement?

[The Hizmet Movement](#), also known as the Gülen movement, is a transnational social and religious movement inspired by the teachings of Fethullah Gülen, a Turkish Islamic scholar and preacher. Originating in Turkey in the late 1960s, the movement has grown to encompass a global network of educational institutions, charities, media outlets, and dialogue centers. Gülen's teachings emphasize a moderate form of Sunni Islam, prioritizing altruism, hard work, education, and interfaith dialogue. The movement's name, "Hizmet," which means "service" in Turkish, reflects its core mission of serving humanity through various community-oriented initiatives.

In Canada, the Hizmet Movement has established itself as a peaceful and integral part of the nation's multicultural landscape. [The movement's Canadian affiliates](#) are actively involved in promoting interfaith dialogue, education, and community service. They operate schools known for their academic excellence, cultural centers fostering mutual understanding, and various interfaith organizations that organize events and discussions to bridge cultural and religious divides.



Despite the positive role of the Hizmet Movement in Canada, the impacts of the hate speech campaign initiated by the Turkish government have transcended borders, affecting the Hizmet community in Canada. The derogatory label “FETO,” used by the Turkish government to criminalize and demonize the movement, has fostered an environment of fear and repression among Hizmet affiliates, even in the relatively safe haven of Canada. This campaign of hate speech has not only affected individuals’ mental health and sense of belonging but has also led to instances of verbal abuse, physical assaults, property damage, and online harassment.

Building on the previous report that examined the broader impacts of hate speech, this follow-up report aims to provide a comprehensive

analysis of the hate speech and hate crimes experienced by members of the Hizmet Movement in Canada by focusing on the types and frequencies of hate crimes, as well as the nature of these crimes. Through a combination of quantitative survey data and thematic analysis of open-ended responses, the report will:

- Document the various forms of hate crimes encountered by Hizmet members in Canada
- Understand the contexts and perpetrators of these hate crimes.
- Highlight the psychological, emotional, and social impacts on the victims.
- Provide evidence-based recommendations to address and mitigate hate speech and hate crimes against the Hizmet Movement in Canada.

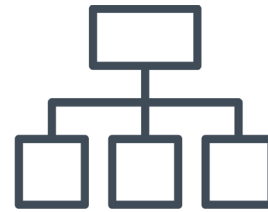
Research Method



318 People Participated



142 Participants Responded
Open Ended Question



7 Categories of Hate Crimes
Emerged

This study conducted with 318 people who identify as a member of the Hizmet Movement and live in Canada (N = 318).

The majority of the participants (82%) moved to Canada and sought asylum after July 2016. In the survey, we asked them about the impacts of hate speech and hate crimes, especially the use of the “FETO” label.

65% of the participants were male and 35% of them were female. The average age of the participants was 39 and their ages ranged between 18 and 70.

Majority of the participants live in Ontario (83%), while we had some participants from Alberta (8%), Quebec (3%), British Columbia (3%), Yukon (0.3%) Saskatchewan (0.3%), Manitoba (0.3%) and Nunavut (0.3%).

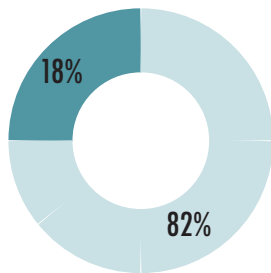


Fig 1. Percentage of participants who sought asylum in Canada after July 2016

■ Moved to Canada before 2016
■ Moved to Canada after 2016 and sought asylum

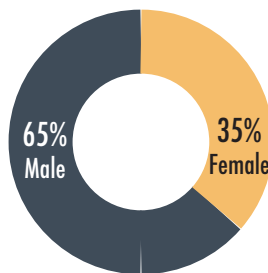
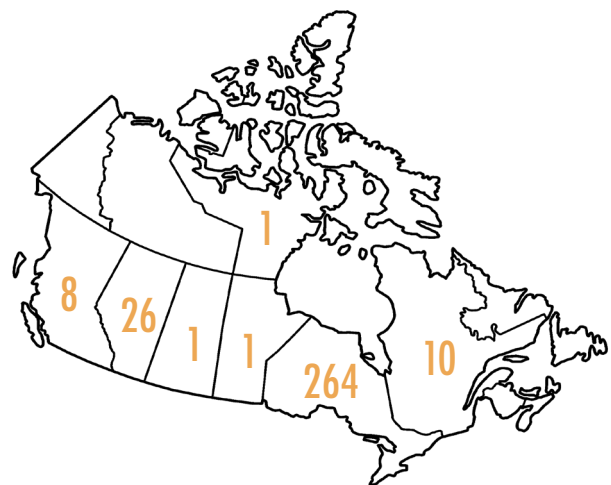


Fig 2. Gender distribution of participants

■ Female
■ Male

Fig 3. Geographical distribution of participants



To better understand the specific hate crime experiences of the victims we asked them how frequently they experienced the following hate crimes in Canada because of their affiliation with the Hizmet Movement:

- verbal attacks
- physical attacks
- online attacks
- institutional damage
- property attacks
- threats

As a follow-up open-ended question, we asked the participants to explain if they heard or witnessed any other hate crimes conducted against other Hizmet members or institutions. The participants gave striking examples of hate crimes that they heard or witnessed. A thematic analysis was conducted to identify the common themes in the answers given to this open-ended question.



FINDINGS

VERBAL ATTACKS

Verbal Attack

Insults, slurs, or derogatory comments made in person, over the phone, or through other communication channels, targeting individuals or groups due to their identity.



A significant percentage of the participants (59%) reported experiencing verbal attacks in Canada. These attacks occurred in various everyday settings, illustrating that members of the Hizmet Movement are frequently targeted while trying to continue their daily lives. Verbal assaults were reported during everyday activities such as shopping, dining out at restaurants, attending classes, and particularly in interactions with Turkish immigrants who hold negative views towards the Hizmet Movement.

Verbal attacks often left individuals feeling isolated within their social circles, as they struggled with a pervasive sense of insecurity despite being hundreds of kilometres away from Turkey.

"I was on a double date with my Canadian boyfriend, his roommate, and his roommate's date. His roommate's date was a Turkish girl ... When we sat at the bar, the first question the Turkish girl asked was 'Are you a terrorist?'. Everyone on the table just froze. I said no, and immediately hide my involvement with Hizmet community. ... She then interrogated me for at least 15 minutes and kept saying 'I do not

"I WITNESSED A FEW TURKS IN THE SHOPPING MALL TALKING INSULTINGLY, CALLING US 'FETÖ SUPPORTERS,' AND I FELT VERY UNEASY."

want to sit with a terrorist, that's why I am asking so many questions, just to make sure you are not a FETO Member". ... I cried so much that night, my boyfriend was in disbelief at how easily she asked about being a terrorist. I kept repeating "I am not a terrorist" throughout the night. I had so many nightmares that night, thinking I was back in Turkey. That day, I felt unsafe even though I was in Canada."

The hostile encounters sometimes led to arguments and distressing conversations, exacerbating the emotional toll on the participants. In an effort to avoid potential conflicts, participants reported withdrawing from interactions with other Turkish immigrants. This self-imposed isolation not only heightened feelings of loneliness but also contributed to a growing sense of polarization within the community.

"Due to the negative experiences I had in different countries, I distanced myself from everyone who speaks Turkish or whom I know to be Turkish. Every one of them made me feel like they would be hostile towards me."

The impact of these verbal attacks extends beyond immediate emotional distress, fostering a climate of fear and mistrust. Participants reported altering their routines and social behaviors to minimize exposure to potential verbal abuse, which further entrenched their sense of alienation.



ONLINE ASSAULTS



Online Assault: Harassment or threats directed at individuals or groups through digital platforms, such as social media or email, based on their race, religion, gender, or other protected characteristics.

Online platforms have no borders, so being in Canada did not protect Hizmet supporters from being targeted for online assaults. The majority of our participants (65%) reported experiencing online assault while in Canada. Some of these assaults came from influencers sharing their experiences of moving to and living in Canada, while others were from individuals expressing their hatred through online platforms.

Despite being a fairly common experience, online assaults foster a sense of insecurity among participants because these experiences evoke memories of greater rights violations that started in Turkey.

“... Especially on social media, the term ‘FETÖ’ is constantly used. This is very hurtful and frightening. The persecution and torture in Turkey also started with just a term.”

Participants also associated online assaults and the use of the “FETÖ” label with polarization among Turkish communities.

“Unfortunately, in online environments, we are still labeled as ‘FETÖ’ by Turks here and judged with preconceived notions. We are forced to stay away from the Turks here due to their prejudices, as they are influenced by those statements.”



24%

of participants reported receiving threats.

Threat: Explicit or implicit statements of intent to harm individuals or groups based on their race, religion, gender, or other protected characteristics.

For 24% of participants, verbal assaults did not end with mere insults. After confirming their involvement with the Hizmet Movement, perpetrators escalated their attacks to include serious threats. These threats were often directed towards their lives and included menacing statements about abduction or murder.

“I personally experienced it. I was threatened by an AKP supporter shopkeeper with being abducted, tortured, or killed.”

Such severe threats intensified the sense of fear and vulnerability among the Hizmet Movement members. These threats often forced individuals to alter their daily routines, avoid certain areas, and limit their social interactions to ensure their safety. The psychological impact of living under constant threat is profound, leading to heightened anxiety and a pervasive sense of insecurity despite living in a country away from the conflict.

THREATS

“ I personally experienced it. I was threatened by an AKP supporter shopkeeper with being abducted, tortured, or killed. ”

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COMMUNITY.”



DEFAMATION

Defamation has emerged as a significant issue for members of the Hizmet Movement in Canada, manifesting in various contexts among participants. Many individuals were targeted on a personal level, with their reputations threatened by people falsely labeling them as terrorists to their neighbors or friends. These defamation attempts created feelings of unsafety and unease for those targeted, further exacerbating their worries about sharing their ideas or living freely.

Others were targeted on an institutional level, with their businesses being undermined by people spreading unfounded information to potential customers, aiming to harm their profits.

“I witnessed in Barrie that the newly opened business of a friend was boycotted by others who told potential customers that it belonged to a ‘FETÖ supporter.’”

Defamation attempts were not limited to verbal assaults; in some cases, they became even more serious. With the support of the Turkish government, people disseminated published materials to incite hatred towards Hizmet Movement supporters.

“Last summer, at the ‘Muslim Heritage Day’ festival, Turks from the AKP who did not belong to the Hizmet Movement refused to return our greetings and questioned our patriotism. Their stand featured only a magazine titled ‘Radicalism,’ filled with articles accusing Hizmet members of terrorism.”

Lastly, members of the Hizmet Movement were targeted even in religious realms. Participants reported experiencing hate speeches at masjids, which contributed to their sense of alienation and fear within their own religious spaces.

“In the mosques, there were speeches against the Hizmet Movement. The Diyanet’s Pape Mosque openly targeted the Hizmet Movement, making it impossible for us to attend (services). We couldn’t benefit from the opportunities within Canada’s borders, and the Canadian government did not intervene clearly.”



TRANSNATIONAL REPRESSION/ ESPIONAGE



Transnational repression has become a significant concern for members of the Hizmet Movement in Canada, with 67% of participants reporting their worries about increasing activities by the Turkish government. These activities include surveillance, intimidation, and the targeting of individuals based on their association with the Hizmet Movement.

Participants reported various forms of transnational repression, including the blacklisting of businesses, the surveillance of program attendees, and the collection of names to be reported to the Turkish government. The impact of these activities is profound. Indi-

viduals reported that their personal information was shared with the Turkish government, often leading to severe consequences for their families and associates back in Turkey.

“I learned that some Turks who are not part of the Hizmet Movement reported Hizmet members here when they traveled to Turkey. They provided lists of names, and as a result, official reports were made, and the assets of some Hizmet members in Turkey were seized.”

Furthermore, the fear of espionage extends to routine interactions with Turkish consulates. Participants

67%

of participants reported being worried about Turkish government's surveillance.

“ I heard that a Canadian citizen, who previously coordinated Hizmet activities in Vancouver and Calgary, was arrested upon arriving in Turkey. ”

expressed concerns that personal information provided during consular services was being used against them.

“I saw a post on social media stating that the Toronto consulate forwarded the address information of an elderly Hizmet member who applied for an e-devlet (e-government) password to Turkish judicial authorities.”

In addition to these direct impacts, there were reports of severe repercussions for Hizmet members or their associates who traveled to Turkey.

“I heard that a Canadian citizen, who previously coordinated Hizmet activities in Vancouver and Calgary, was arrested upon arriving in Turkey.”

These experiences highlight the far-reaching and invasive nature of transnational repression. The surveillance and reporting activities not only create an environment of fear and mistrust among Hizmet members in Canada but also lead to tangible and devastating consequences for their personal and financial security. The ongoing threat of espionage and the potential for severe repercussions in Turkey add to the stress and anxiety faced by Hizmet members, significantly impacting their ability to live freely and safely.

The transnational repression tactics employed by the Turkish government indicate the urgent need for international awareness and action to safeguard the rights and well-being of affected individuals.



Denial of Services by Turkish Embassy or Consulates

More than half of participants (54%) reported being targeted by the Turkish Embassy at least once.

Participants mentioned being denied services and unable to obtain necessary documents, complicating their lives in Canada due to missing documentation. However, it is not only their lives that are impacted by this. Participants might have property or other investments they want to cash out, and the denial of services creates problems when they need to do this, especially if other family members have a stake in these investments.

“Since the embassy does not process the transactions of Hizmet members, and they cannot send official documents such as powers of attorney, not only do they suffer, but their parents and siblings also suffer.”

Worries about visiting the embassy are not limited to being denied services. Many participants reported concerns about espionage when they went to the Turkish embassy/consulate.

“I know that after applying for some official procedures at the embassy, Hizmet members are blacklisted.”

Property Attacks

Damage or destruction of personal or community property, including graffiti, arson, or defacement, driven by bias against the victim's identity.

“Yes, as I previously mentioned, AKP loyalists stormed my local culture centre in Ottawa. They also spray-painted the walls of my school with hateful messages.”




This image shows a man in the act of destroying the sign of a middle school founded by the Hizmet movement in Izmir, Turkey. Such property attacks became common following the political polarization that intensified after 2016.

21% of participants reported experiencing property attacks on Hizmet institutions. These attacks represent another level of hate fueled by hate messages about the Hizmet movement. Participants mentioned these attacks occurring while they were present in the institution. One participant recounted an incident where people were throwing stones and verbally assaulting them:

“During the events in Turkey [the conflicts after the attempted coup on July 15, 2016], Turkish citizens living in the area stoned our culture center in Ottawa and subjected us to verbal abuse and bad behavior.”

Another participant mentioned vandalism directed towards their school, which is associated with the Hizmet movement, in addition to the culture center.

These occurrences highlight the severity of the situation and illustrate how far hate speech can go. The attacks on property not only damage physical spaces but also create an environment of fear and hostility for those associated with the Hizmet movement.



Damage or destruction of personal or community property, including graffiti, arson, or defacement, driven by bias against the victim's identity.

Physical Assault

One participant shared a disturbing experience where a neighbor, upon learning they were a Hizmet member, verbally harassed them and blocked their path with a car. The neighbor then spread rumors to humiliate them:

"A friend of ours was verbally harassed and had their path blocked by a car when their Turkish neighbor found out they were a Hizmet member. Rumors were spread about them to humiliate them among others."

Additionally, participants reported hearing curses and insults directed at Hizmet members in Turkish mosques and during iftar gatherings and even a physical attack incident. One participant recounted:

"I heard from those who experienced it firsthand that curses and insults starting with 'FETO'cular' were made during iftar and in the Turkish mosque. It included physical assault on a sympathizer in a mosque in Edmonton."

These occurrences emphasize the severity of the situation, demonstrating how deeply hate speech can permeate, leading to physical violence against those associated with the Hizmet movement, even in a country perceived as a safe haven.

■ **12%** of participants in Canada reported experiencing physical attacks. Turkish immigrants often move to Canada seeking safety and believing they have left conflicts behind. However, the strength of hate messages is such that they have significant implications even thousands of kilometers away from Turkey. Hizmet supporters are presented as threats and public enemies, inciting hatred strong enough to lead to physical attacks against individuals.

POLARIZATION AMONG TURKISH COMMUNITIES



A significant portion of participants (92%) reported experiencing polarization between Turkish communities and the Hizmet movement. This division is deeply felt and has tangible impacts on the lives of individuals within the diaspora. Hate speech and polarization attempts that originate in Turkey have far-reaching effects, influencing behaviors and attitudes even in countries thousands of kilometers away.

92%

of participants reported experiencing polarization between Turkish communities and the Hizmet Movement

“I have distanced myself from everyone I know who speaks Turkish. Each of them made me feel like they would show hostility towards me.”

One participant shared their struggle with distrust and fear among Turkish-speaking individuals due to past negative experiences:

“Due to negative experiences in different countries, I have distanced myself from everyone I know who speaks Turkish. Each of them made me feel like they would show hostility towards me. Some people around me avoid us, thinking they would also get harmed when they go to Turkey if they are seen with us. There are people who accept that we are good but still avoid us due to the slander against us. This makes me very sad and wears me down.”

This fear of association has led to a dispersed Turkish diaspora, where people avoid Hizmet members to avoid being labeled similarly. Even those who do not agree with the propaganda are reluctant to

connect with Hizmet members due to fear of repercussions:

“People outside the Hizmet movement have become afraid to even greet us...”

Distrust within the community is widespread, leading to isolation and loneliness. Some participants have even reported being physically barred from Turkish-owned businesses due to their association with Hizmet:

“I know of Turkish businesses in Canada where Hizmet members are prevented from entering.”

Moreover, the fear of being reported or having personal information shared with Turkish authorities adds to the anxiety:

“Yes, I have heard of people confronting Hizmet members at their doors. I know people are afraid to go to the (Turkish) Embassy or talk about anything related to Hizmet nearby. Also, I know people approach new Turks they meet with suspicion and fear, thinking they will report them and give away their addresses.”

This environment of distrust and fear, fueled by hate speech and defamation, leads to a polarized and fragmented community. Even when individuals do not buy into the propaganda, the fear of being labeled or targeted keeps them from associating with Hizmet members. This polarization is the root of many hate crimes, as it fosters a sense of otherness and perceived threats among the community.

Discussion

This report highlights the troubling experiences of the Hizmet Movement members in Canada, who continue to face various forms of hate crimes and transnational repression due to their association with the movement. The findings indicate that hate crimes against Hizmet members are pervasive, ranging from verbal and online assaults to physical attacks and transnational repression. These hate crimes have led to significant psychological, emotional, and social impacts on the victims, fostering a climate of fear, isolation, and polarization within the Turkish diaspora in Canada.

Summary of Findings

Verbal and Online Attacks

Most participants reported experiencing verbal (59%) and online assaults (65%), often exacerbating their feelings of isolation and fear within the Canadian context.

Physical Assaults and Property Attacks

Physical attacks (12%) and property attacks (21%) have occurred, further endangering the safety and well-being of Hizmet members.

Defamation and Threats

Defamation is a significant issue, with individuals and institutions being targeted, resulting in social and economic harm. Moreover, 24% of participants reported receiving threats, escalating their sense of vulnerability.

Transnational Repression and Espionage

A concerning 67% of participants expressed worries about transnational repression, including surveillance, blacklisting, and espionage activities conducted by or on behalf of the Turkish government.

Denial of Services by Turkish Embassies

More than half of the participants (54%) reported being denied essential services by the Turkish Embassy/Consulate, complicating their legal and personal affairs in Canada.

Polarization Among Turkish Immigrants

An overwhelming 92% of participants reported polarization within the Turkish community in Canada, driven by hate speech and the fear of association with Hizmet members.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

FOR THE CANADIAN GOVERNMENT

Strengthen Legal Protection

- Enhance hate crime legislation to explicitly cover transnational repression and provide legal recourse for victims of hate crimes linked to foreign government actions.

- Establish a monitoring body to track and report incidents of transnational repression and espionage activities targeting diasporic communities.

Support Services for Victims

- Increase funding for mental health services and community support programs specifically designed for victims of hate crimes and transnational repression within diasporic communities.

- Develop educational programs to raise awareness among law enforcement and the public about the unique challenges faced by Hizmet members and similar groups.

Diplomatic Pressure and Sanctions

- Apply diplomatic pressure on Turkey to cease its campaign of transnational repression against Hizmet members and other targeted groups in Canada.

- Consider sanctions or other punitive measures against individuals or entities involved in these activities.

FOR CANADIAN LAW ENFORCEMENT

Enhanced Training and Awareness

- Provide specialized training for law enforcement officers on the dynamics of hate crimes and transnational repression, particularly those targeting diaspora communities like the Hizmet Movement.

- Create clear protocols for responding to and investigating incidents of hate crimes and espionage reported by Hizmet members.

Strengthening Cybersecurity Measures

- Collaborate with cybersecurity experts to develop and deploy tools that protect Hizmet members from online harassment and espionage, particularly on social media platforms.

Community Policing Initiatives

- Implement community policing strategies to build trust with Hizmet members and other vulnerable communities, ensuring that they feel safe reporting crimes and seeking assistance.

- Establish dedicated liaison officers within law enforcement agencies to work closely with the Hizmet community and other diaspora groups at risk of transnational repression.

FOR HIZMET COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS IN CANADA

Community Outreach and Education

- Increase outreach efforts to educate Hizmet members about their rights in Canada and provide resources on how to protect themselves from hate crimes and transnational repression.

- Organize workshops and seminars in collaboration with legal experts, mental health professionals, and law enforcement to empower community members and address their concerns.

Strengthening Cybersecurity Measures

- Establish dedicated support groups and counseling services for victims of hate crimes and transnational repression, providing a safe space for individuals to share their experiences and receive emotional and psychological support.

- Develop a community alert system to quickly disseminate information about potential threats or incidents, ensuring that members can take appropriate precautions.

Community Policing Initiatives

- Forge alliances with other diasporic and minority communities in Canada that face similar challenges, creating a unified front to advocate for stronger protections and resources.

- Engage in interfaith and intercultural dialogue initiatives to build broader support networks and reduce polarization within the broader Turkish community in Canada.



CONCLUSION

The ongoing hate crimes and transnational repression against the Hizmet Movement members in Canada pose a significant threat to their safety, well-being, and sense of belonging. The Canadian government, law enforcement, and Hizmet community organizations must work collaboratively to address these challenges. By implementing the recommended policies, it is possible to create a safer and more inclusive environment for all members of the Hizmet community in Canada, while also upholding Canada's commitment to human rights and multiculturalism.