SIKH COALITION BAY AREA
CIVIL RIGHTS REPORT 2010
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INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 2009, the Sikh Coalition, with the help of several dedicated volunteers, began conducting a pioneering survey of Bay Area Sikhs. The survey gathered information on Sikhs’ experiences with incidents of bias, employment discrimination, language access and other obstacles that hinder the community’s full integration into local civic and political life.

This report represents the results obtained from data collected from over 1,300 Sikhs who live in the Bay Area’s nine counties. While the Sikhs surveyed for this report make up only a small fraction of the tens of thousands of Sikhs estimated to live in the Bay Area, their experiences provide a snapshot of issues important to this community throughout the region. In many cases, the data presented in this report exemplifies significant gaps between the promise of the law and the Sikh community’s reality on the ground.

The Sikh Coalition is making several policy recommendations based on the information that was collected. These recommendations are intended to be a starting point for the discussion on how to grow opportunities for Bay Area Sikhs to participate in their neighborhoods. In many instances, following these recommendations would begin to close the gap between what the law mandates and what the Sikh community’s experience has been. In the coming months and years, the Sikh Coalition will spearhead advocacy efforts to further these recommendations.

Copies of this report are available by contacting Neha Singh, the Sikh Coalition’s Western Region Director, at neha@sikhcoalition.org.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

"AS A MOTHER, I WILL REPENT FOR THE REST OF MY LIFE THAT I CANNOT BRING BACK MY SON’S CHILDHOOD AND SAY, ‘GO HAVE FUN WITH YOUR FRIENDS. ENJOY THE SCHOOL PICNIC.’ I THINK EVERY CHILD HAS THE RIGHT TO GROW UP IN A MUCH HEALTHIER ENVIRONMENT AND ACHIEVE THEIR FULL POTENTIAL."

Upinder Kaur said these disturbing words as she related the relentless bias and bigotry her son and family endured during his school days in California’s Bay Area. Their life included violence, vandalism, fear, and the seeming lack of care by officials who could have done something to stop it.

Upinder Kaur and her family are not alone.

The information included in this report reflects data gathered from a survey of over 1,300 Sikhs in the Bay Area. Several of their responses identify significant gaps between the promise of the law and the Sikh community’s reality on the ground in the nine Bay Area counties.

While it is true that Sikh residents of the Bay Area are thriving and make up some of California’s and the nation’s most productive entrepreneurs, technologists, scientists and other professionals, Sikhs in the Bay Area – across all socio-economic lines – are also vulnerable to bias-based discrimination. The survey found that at the airport, in school, on the job, or at a shopping mall, Bay Area Sikhs like Upinder Kaur experience bigotry at rates alarmingly higher than the general population.

Sikh children face bullying, harassment and violence at a very high rate

Nowhere is the brunt of bigotry felt more by Bay Area Sikhs than in the schoolyard. Our surveys and interviews found that teasing, taunting, and even physical abuse of Sikh boys in school is the norm - not the exception.

Surveys of over 500 Sikh children from across the Bay Area revealed that:

- **74%** of turbaned boys suffer bias-based harassment
- **65%** of all Sikh boys in middle school, with or without turbans, suffer some form of racial or religious bullying
- **86%** of Sikh boys surveyed in Alameda County have been targets of racial or religious teasing or harassment in school
Harjit Singh,* a middle school student, is emblematic of this dynamic in Bay Area schools:

Harjit Singh was repeatedly teased and harassed by fellow students. Starting from the beginning of the school year, he was called a ‘terrorist’, had his patka ripped off his head, and was physically threatened. Harjit says, “This past year, on September 11th, they made fun of me all day. They [the bullies] were calling me a terrorist and other stuff. They asked me, ‘were you born on 9/11 holding a rocket launcher.’” Harjit says he felt like he could not tell anyone, even his parents, because the students would find out and the teasing and harassing would get worse. “If I tell, they are going to hurt me, if I don’t tell they are still going to hurt me, they are going to use vocal words instead of hands, fists, and weapons. After they get suspended I know they can come back and hurt me. I can tell by the way they have acted in the past.”

In short, the surveys and interviews that constitute this report make clear that the bullying and teasing of young Sikh boys in particular is a crisis. As a result, the Sikh Coalition calls on all interested parties --- parents, teachers, and administrators --- to take immediate action to protect Sikh children from harm in school.

Sikh adults disproportionately face insults, prejudice and discrimination

Sadly, adulthood does not mean an end to discrimination for Sikhs living in the Bay Area. While Sikh adults reported discrimination at much lower rates than Sikh children, the rate at which they suffer discrimination is much higher than that of the general population.

The Sikh experience with discrimination in the Bay Area often begins at the hands of strangers (and sometimes even co-workers or neighbors) whom they encounter in the streets. Thirty-eight percent of Sikh adults surveyed had been called an epithet such as “Bin Laden,” “terrorist,” or “towel-head.”

For example, Bhupinder Singh, a Bay Area taxi driver, told us that he is called “Bin Laden” regularly:

“[At] night is when the problems start happening for taxi drivers. People are drunk and the thoughts and feeling that they have been hiding come out … discrimination against Sikh taxi drivers is a regular thing and being called ‘Bin Laden’ is something you get to hear on a monthly basis.”

Of note, being college-educated or working as a professional does not insulate a Sikh from becoming the target of insults. Sikhs with college or professional degrees reported being called epithets more often than those with limited education. Their higher rate of reporting may be due to (a) less fear about the consequences of reporting or (b) the nature of their jobs – external facing client interactions instead of working exclusively within the Sikh community.

Sikhs in the Bay Area also suffer immensely from hate crimes due to their religious identity. Ten percent of surveyed Sikhs reported being victims of hate crimes such physical abuse or property vandalization. Sixty-eight percent of these crimes have been in the form of physical attacks against Sikhs, and 32% of the crimes were vandalized property. This reflects a very high rate, especially given that the FBI reports just over 1,000 hate crimes based on race, religion or ethnicity statewide in 2008.³

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1. Several people surveyed for this report have asked to remain anonymous. The names of all individuals identified with an asterisk throughout the report have been changed to protect their privacy.
2. A Dastaar or Pagh is a turban mandated to be worn by Sikhs over their uncut hair. A turban is required of Sikh men and often also worn by Sikh women. A Patka is a small square piece of cloth worn on the head by young Sikh boys or girls in lieu of full turbans.
3. FBI Uniform Hate Crime Reports, 2008 (http://www.fbi.gov/ucr/hc2008/data/table_13ca.html). Note that the FBI Uniform Hate Crime Reports is a voluntary self-report from states on hate crimes. Many argue soundly that it significantly undercounts the number of hate crimes each year in the United States.
Khera Singh* tells a familiar story on violence against elderly Sikhs in the Bay:

Khera Singh, an elderly Sikh man, likes going to a local park in Union City. He enjoys socializing with the other elderly Sikh men and going for a walk. He says, ‘I've seen elderly Sikh men have their turbans knocked off by some young kids. These kids are about 14-15 years old. The older the man looks the more likely he will be attacked by them. Some of the other Sikh men in the park have yelled at these kids. The kids just run away.”

Discrimination rampant in workplace and public accommodations

In addition to suffering bigoted name-calling in the streets, Sikhs also, at times, suffered the loss of employment opportunities because of their faith. Twelve percent of the Sikhs surveyed reported that they believed they were refused employment because of their identity, such as on-the-job dress and grooming codes that forbid beards or turbans, but have no impact on workplace health or safety. Again, the rate of Sikhs in the Bay Area being refused employment was fairly consistent across all income levels.

Jasdeep Singh’s* story is representative of the struggles of many Sikhs:

In 2008, Jasdeep Singh, a recent immigrant, was searching for a decent paying job to support the high-cost of living in the California Bay Area. He pursued a job at a Chevron gas station, which was advertised in the local newspaper.

When Jasdeep and his brother-in-law arrived at the Chevron office in San Jose, they were instructed to watch a video. In this video, a Chevron representative stated that they require their workers to not have long hair and be clean-shaven. This requirement pertained to any kind of job - cashier, car washer, or mechanic. Despite the requirement conveyed in the video, Jasdeep still decided to submit an application at Chevron. However, a Chevron employee rejected his application despite an explanation by Jasdeep's brother-in-law that his unshorn hair was an article of faith maintained by Sikhs.

While the days of legalized segregation in this country have passed, many Sikhs in the Bay Area report being denied service at public accommodations, like restaurants or retail stores. Six percent of Bay Area Sikhs reported being refused service at a private business, usually because some aspect of their religious garb – turban, unshorn hair, etc. – was not permitted on the premises. While this percentage may seem low, the fact that even one Sikh is denied service simply for being Sikh is disturbing in a post-civil rights era.

Racial profiling targets Sikhs

Besides discrimination in the workplace and public businesses, Sikhs in the Bay Area also believe they are unfairly targeted by law enforcement because of their faith. Twenty percent of Bay Area Sikhs report being unfairly stopped by a police officer, airport employee, security guard, or Transportation Security Administration (TSA) employee.

Gurinder Singh’s story is emblematic of the experience of Sikh travelers across socio-economic lines who suffer additional scrutiny at the airport:

“It has gotten worse over time. When I first started traveling it was happening about 80% of the time. Now it’s 100% of the time. TSA officers tell me, ‘You seem to know what to do, you are a regular here.’ After my ID is checked, and I go through the scanner without beeping it, I am always asked ‘would you like me to check it [i.e. turban]’. I say ‘No, I will do it’. I am not offered a private screening room. Many times, non-Sikhs waiting in the security line are shrugging their shoulders and nodding their heads out of amazement and embarrassment.”
Language and health care barriers impede Sikh integration into civic life

Beyond overt religious discrimination, our report finds that Sikhs in the Bay Area also endure more difficulty with access to health care and language access than their neighbors. These difficulties often result from a lack of understanding amongst service providers about Sikh social service needs.

To begin with, Sikhs are uninsured at higher rates than the general population in the Bay Area. The 2007 California Health Interview Survey (CHIS) reported that 13.2% of Californians did not have health insurance. However, the Sikh Coalition’s survey results showed that 19% of Bay Area Sikhs reported being uninsured. This problem becomes more acute when comparing Sikhs with their neighbors in the Bay Area. Only eight percent of people in the Bay Area are without health insurance – less than half the Sikh rate.

Adding language access challenges to the mix makes the healthcare system even less accessible to the Sikh community. Jagmeet Kaur & Kashmir Singh Shahi, Bay Area community activists, found one of the main obstacles preventing Sikhs from carrying health insurance are language access issues. Kaur & Shahi have been coordinating a senior social services resource fair in Fremont for two years. They say “The two longest lines are always for health insurance and social security benefits because other Sikhs are there to provide translation services.” These two activists are now part of a larger team trying to provide Punjabi-language medical services for Sikhs in the East Bay through a new community center project.

In conclusion, there is a wide gap between the promise of the law and the situation of the Bay Area Sikh community. Whether it is at the airport, school, work, or a local restaurant, Sikhs are discriminated against because of their religious articles of faith. In addition, Sikhs in the Bay Area suffer higher rates of uninsurance and often have trouble understanding vital government services because of language access concerns.

Though Sikhs in the Bay Area may thrive in many fields, they still face significant problems that have been long-ignored by local policymakers. This report contains several recommendations on how to close the gap between the promise of the law and our community’s concerns. The Sikh Coalition urges policymakers and the public to carefully review those recommendations. It is our hope that through persistence, these vital issues of civil rights and social justice can and will be adequately addressed by our government, service providers, and neighbors in the Bay Area.
# Highlights from Youth Survey Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>47%</th>
<th>74%</th>
<th>69%</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>of Bay Area Sikh Youth report experiencing bias-based harassment.</td>
<td>of Sikh boys who maintain all five articles of faith encounter bias-based discrimination.</td>
<td>of Sikh boys who maintain a Dastaar/Patka are teased or harassed in school.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Over HALF</th>
<th>Middle School Sikh boys</th>
<th>Sikh youth in Alameda &amp; Santa Clara Counties</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>of the Sikh students in Fremont Unified School District &amp; New Haven School District reported being teased or harassed because of their religious &amp; ethnic identity.</td>
<td>are most vulnerable to harassment because of their religious and/or ethnic identity: over <strong>TWO-THIRDS</strong> of them reported such harassment.</td>
<td>report the highest rates of teasing &amp; harassment <strong>51% AND 40%</strong> respectively - because of their religious and/or ethnic identity.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>56%</th>
<th>76%</th>
<th>30%</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Most Sikh boys are teased or harassed because of their religious and/or ethnic identity.</td>
<td>of Sikh youth believe it would be helpful if someone spoke about Sikhism in their schools.</td>
<td>of anti-Sikh harassment in schools is in the form of physical hitting or touching.</td>
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# HIGHLIGHTS FROM ADULT SURVEY RESULTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>10%</strong></td>
<td>of Sikhs reported being victims of hate crimes. 68% of these were physical attacks. Another 32% of the reported hate crimes consisted of vandalized property.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>38%</strong></td>
<td>of Sikhs surveyed have been called a racial or religious epithet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>12%</strong></td>
<td>of Sikhs reported being refused employment because some aspect of their religious identity or appearance was deemed unacceptable to the employer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>6%</strong></td>
<td>of Sikhs surveyed have been refused service by a private business because of their identity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>25%</strong></td>
<td>of turbaned Sikh men believe they have been unfairly stopped or questioned by a police officer, airport employee, security guard, or transportation service employee.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1 out of 2 Sikhs</strong></td>
<td>surveyed who filed a complaint with a government agency were not happy with the government’s response.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sikhs in the Bay Area are MORE THAN TWICE as likely to be uninsured for health care than their Bay Area neighbors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sikhs are MOST OFTEN harassed at work on account of their hair or headwear.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>68%</strong></td>
<td>68% of hate crimes against Sikhs take the form of physical attacks against Sikhs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
WHO ARE SIKHS?

Sikhs are members of an independent religion that is nearly 500 years old, and has its roots in Punjab - a region of South Asia. The faith has over 23 million adherents worldwide, making it the world’s fifth largest religion. Sikhs believe in one creator, known as “Waheguru”, an initiation ceremony into the Khalsa, ten human Gurus and one eternal guru. The eternal guru for Sikhs is the Guru Granth Sahib (Sikh holy scripture).

Sikhs in California’s Bay Area

Sikhs have been in the United States for over 100 years, but are still a small minority community here. It is estimated that there are 500,000 Sikhs in the United States. The oldest and largest community of Sikhs is in California.

The history of Sikhs in the Bay Area dates back to the early 1900s when Sikh students enrolled at local universities and participated in the Ghadar movement. In 1920, Bhagat Singh Thind, a graduate of UC Berkeley and World War I veteran fought a legal battle to attain US Citizenship after completing his duty in the United States Army.

Today, Bay Area Sikhs have diverse backgrounds. Some Sikhs have lived in the Bay Area for many generations while others are new immigrants. Sikhs are also diverse in terms of class, education, and professional backgrounds. Sikhs are heavily involved, for example, in the fields of transportation, technology, finance, nursing, education, medicine, and social services. The majority of Sikhs in the Bay Area live in San Jose, Union City or Fremont.

However small in number, local Sikhs have certainly become an active and visible part of their communities. Among those Sikhs we surveyed, for example,

- **70%** are American citizens.
- The registered voter rate is **92%** for Sikh American citizens – much higher than the national average.
- **42%** speak English as their primary language.
- **15%** were born in the United States.
- The majority have lived in the U.S. for **20-30 years**.
- **85%** carry some outward manifestation of their religion.

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5. A political movement against British colonialism.
The Visible Sikh Identity
The Sikh Rehat Maryada (Sikh Code Of Conduct) mandates that all initiated Sikhs wear each of the articles of faith. Sikhs who are not initiated may carry some or all of the articles of faith.

Sikhs Articles of Faith

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kanga: A comb</th>
<th>Kirpan: A sword</th>
<th>Kachera: A special, slightly longer type of underpants.</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kara: An iron bracelet.</td>
<td>Kes: Unshorn, uncut hair.</td>
<td>Men must and women may wear turbans, the traditional head covering for Sikhs’ uncut hair.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Sikhs’ visible identity, a manifestation of their inner commitment to their faith, makes them stand out in society. According to the requirements of the Sikh faith, many Sikhs do not cut their hair or shave their body hair and wear a turban. Unfortunately, since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, Sikhs have been repeatedly misidentified as members of the Taliban or Osama bin Laden’s terrorist network because of their articles of faith.

In North America, the vast majority of those who wear turbans are Sikhs. Nevertheless, ignorance about the faith and recurring media images of alleged terrorists have created an environment in which Sikhs are regularly singled out for harassment, verbal abuse, and mistreatment by both private and, at times, public actors. Sikhs in the Bay Area, as this report clearly demonstrates, are not immune to this harassment.
BIAS-BASED HARASSMENT IN SCHOOLS

School Bullying: What Does It Look Like?

For young Sikhs who maintain their turbans, school bullying has reached crisis proportions. Almost three-quarters of young Sikh males who maintain turbans state that they have faced harassment and bullying because of their articles of faith. This is an alarming rate of harassment that requires the immediate attention of school authorities and officials.

The National Youth Violence Prevention Resource Center reports that nearly 30% of teens in the United States (or over 5.7 million teens) are estimated to be involved in school bullying as either a bully, a target of teen bullying, or both. The 2006 California Health Kids Survey Factsheet shows that 37% to 46% of middle and high school students in California reported being harassed. Three-fourths of this harassment is reported to be bias-related. Moreover, the top triggers for this bullying are the race, ethnicity, national origin, gender, religion, or sexual orientation of the victim.

The Sikh Coalition’s surveys found that while nearly half of Sikh youth overall suffer bias-based harassment, turbaned Sikh boys are particularly vulnerable. Nearly three-quarters of turbaned boys suffer bias-based harassment. In middle school, the rate shoots up to 65% for all Sikh boys.

Harjit Singh’s story is emblematic of this crisis:

Harjit Singh, a middle school student in the Bay Area, was repeatedly teased and harassed by fellow students. Starting from the beginning of the school year, he was called a ‘terrorist’, had his patka ripped off his head, and was physically threatened. Harjit says, “This past year, on September 11th, they made fun of me all day. They [the bullies] were calling me a terrorist and other stuff. They asked me, ‘were you born on 9/11 holding a rocket launcher.’ Harjit says he felt like he could not tell anyone, even his parents, because the students would find out, and the teasing and harassing would get worse. “If I tell, they are going to hurt me. If I don’t tell, they are still going to hurt me. They are going to use vocal words instead of hands, fists, and weapons. After they get suspended, I know they can come back and hurt me. I can tell by the way they have acted in the past.”

During a harassment incident in P.E. class, Harjit reacted by getting into a fight with his bully. Harjit says, “I couldn’t take it anymore. They call you terrorist and even if you don’t want to punch them they drag you to the point where you fight back.” The fight started when a student asked Harjit, “what’s under there [referring to his patka] and then proceeded to rip off his patka, which caused his unshorn hair to fall out of the top-knot. After ripping off Harjit’s patka, the student said, “I’m sorry I just wanted to see if there was a bomb in there.” Harjit punched the bully and got suspended for five days; whereas, the bully got suspended for four days. Harjit’s math teacher had declared him the student of the month the same week Harjit was suspended for fighting.

After Harjit was suspended, his parents and school administration got involved. The situation is now starting to be addressed by school administrators.

Profile Of A Sikh Student Bullied At School

The prevalence of cases like Harjit’s have helped us identify the profile of a Sikh who is most vulnerable to discriminatory bullying and harassment. He will be:

- A Sikh boy
- Who wears a dastaar/patka (turban) or is initiated and maintains all five Sikh articles of faith
- And is an immigrant

This boy mostly likely attends a school in Alameda County – in either the Fremont Unified School District or the New Haven Unified School District.

He is most often called insulting names and has his dastaar/patka disrespectfully touched by fellow students, which can lead to a fight. He often tells his teachers, who are likely to help him.

While the survey data makes clear that these boys are the most vulnerable, it should be noted that biased-based harassment in school is a burden that most Sikh children endure across the board, male or female, with or without a turban. As with other Sikh issues, this is a burden the community shares with other minority groups – children from specific racial, ethnic, religious backgrounds, or of a particular sexual orientation – but which tends to be openly pronounced in the case of Sikhs because they are easily identifiable by their articles of faith.

Figure 2: Top Reasons Sikh Youth Are Teased or Harassed

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>I’m Punjabi/South Asian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>My Dastaar/Patka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>My Kes/Braids</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Look Like a Terrorist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>My Kara</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>My Kirpan</td>
</tr>
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The story of Dayanidh Singh, another young Sikh boy, exemplifies the type of anti-Sikh bullying that can occur in other realms of student life:

Dayanidh Singh was a player on his city soccer league in Vacaville. Two of his teammates, who were the sons of his coach, constantly teased and harassed him. First, they used words, then threw soccer balls at him, and it ended with a physical fight. Dayanidh’s mother, Sukhwinder Kaur, witnessed the fight and immediately took him to her car. She says Dayanidh was angry and emotionally upset, but vehemently did not want his mom to talk to the coach. Dayanidh believes “Nothing could be done. She [the coach] wasn’t going to do anything about it. She didn’t before. I just wanted to leave.” Kaur had spoken to the coach many times about her son being teased and harassed by the two players on his team. The coach always responded that her sons were just curious. Kaur was patient and always offered to educate them on Sikhs. She says, “I knew it in my heart that her [the coach] response was not right, but I wanted to be patient and give them time.”

Dayanidh’s mother says her son was very angry and upset for a while. He would not talk about what happened even though she tried to get him to open up several times. Kaur says, “I don’t want him to be an angry child or hold anger towards these two boys. We had problems with kids teasing him at school, but the teachers and vice principal were very responsive. At the city soccer league, the coach was not responsive. I tried to offer my help to educate them about Sikhs many times and tried to be patient with them as human beings. As a mother it was very hurtful and frustrating because I could not do anything. What can you do when people have so much hate in their hearts?”

Upinder Kaur, another Bay Area mom, recalls the harassment her son endured:

Upinder Kaur, an immigrant mother of a college-aged son recalls the nine years of teasing and harassment that tormented her son and their family. When her son was five years old, the family migrated to United States and started creating a home in the Bay Area. She says, “we were expecting trouble when we came to the United States; we had been pre-informed that our Sikh identity would be a challenge for us.” From first grade, my son was called “diaper head”, “you’re stinky”, and “is there poop on your head.” The teasing and harassment escalated as he moved up in grade-levels. “Middle and high school were the worst times. He was called names, pushed, shoved, beaten up, had his books stolen, dastaar ripped off, lockers broken, and a day before his class final, his folder was stolen. My son became socially isolated and had no friends. He was always the kid helping the lunch lady or his teachers so he could keep himself occupied during free time at school. There was a time when my son became short tempered, irritated, and lost patience. His sister, who is five years younger than him, became fearful of also being attacked. The teasing and harassment took time away from my son’s studies. One episode of stone throwing would take away an entire evening from us. By the time we made a report and told police, hours would have gone by.”

“I was a very involved parent at my son’s school, particularly after the harassment started. I did classroom presentations and got a part-time job at his school so I could watch over him and protect him. When I told teachers and administrators, they always listened, but no action was taken. Eventually, the teasing and harassment carried out of the school into our neighborhood. Our house and cars were vandalized. We lived in constant stress and fear of being attacked. I had to give up a high-paying job in San Francisco because my working hours would be longer than the hours my son spent in school. I also needed to be close to his school in case anything happened. As a mother, I will repent for the rest of my life that I cannot bring back my son’s childhood and say “go have fun with your friends. Enjoy the school picnic.” I think every child has the right to grow up in a much healthier environment and achieve their [sic] full potential. It is important to grow up with a good group of friends who you can trust and play with. My son had many friends back in India as a young child. He loved playing outdoors with them, laughing and joking around. Although my son is a very strong man today, has friends, and is attending a good university by the grace of God, I think if things would have been better for him like any average and normal kid, he would be doing even better things.”
Although both Sikh boys and girls are harassed because of their religious and ethnic identity, the survey results show that Bay Area Sikh boys experience higher rates of harassment. Sixty-nine percent of Sikh boys who wear a dastaar/patka report being teased or harassed in school. Three out of four Sikh boys who maintain all five Sikh articles of faith are teased or harassed in Bay Area schools. Both amritdhari \(^9\) boys and uninitiated boys believe their dastaar/patka is the top reason for such bigotry. Therefore, the primary Sikh article of faith targeted for bias in schools is the dastaar/patka for Sikh boys.\(^{10}\)

Middle school is where most Sikh students experience bias-based harassment. Sixty-five percent of Sikh boys surveyed reported being harassed in middle school. Often, this includes name-calling or someone disrespectfully touching a Sikh student’s head covering or hair. Fifty-four percent of Sikh youth who believe they were bullied because of their head covering had their dastaar/patka disrespectfully touched. These incidents are in turn wont to escalate into threats and physical hitting (Figure 2). Physical attacks are less common than name-calling, but they tend to take place at the high school level.

Bullying can also be heightened following well-publicized incidents or commemorations. For instance, Upinder Kaur remembers seeing her son being assaulted the day after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001:

“My son was riding his bike when a few kids threw stones at him and said ‘Taliban, go back’!”

**The Impact of Anti-Sikh Bullying**

When Sikh boys are teased or harassed because of their identity, their overall emotional health is put at risk, even if their parents are unaware of what is happening. According to one study, teens who have been bullied either in the form of teasing or physical abuse more often suffer from anxiety or depression in their late teens.\(^{11}\) The 2001-2002 *California Healthy Kids Survey Factsheet 4*\(^{12}\) reports that the top two negative experiences of students harassed because of their religion are depression and having their property stolen/damaged.

Although quantitative data were not collected on students’ reactions to school bullying in our survey, Sikh youth qualitatively reported feelings of sadness and isolation, lack of school connectedness, and not feeling safe at school. The 2006 *California Healthy Kids Survey Factsheet 10* reports that middle and high school students harassed for their religion showed extreme rates of not feeling meaningful levels of school connectedness, incapacitating sadness, and not feeling safe/very safe at school. Also, Sikh youth often do not tell their parents about being bullied at school, out of fear that the teasing and harassment will get worse.

A clear policy to prevent bullying and educating families on how to pick up on signs of emotional distress would help stop this harassment and keep Sikh children safe.

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9. An initiated Sikh who is mandated to wear all five articles of faith.

10. Many Sikh boys will wear a dastaar/patka to cover their unshorn hair without maintaining the other Sikh articles of faith.


Gendered Experiences

Although both Sikh boys and girls are bullied because of their religious and ethnic identity, there are differences in their experiences. Bullied Sikh girls experience higher rates of name-calling than Sikh boys, but Sikh boys are more likely to experience physical bullying. The National Youth Violence Prevention Resource Center reports that boys experience more aggressive bullying. Therefore, the gendered experiences of bullying for Sikh youth are similar to the national average.

Sikh girls are most often targeted for their Punjabi/South Asian identity and religiously mandated long, unshorn hair. In Santa Clara County, Sikh girls’ long hair is the primary target for bullying against them. This bullying takes the form of threats and disrespectful touching of the hair. Sikh girls report that students threaten to cut their ponytails or long hair. Sukhmani Kaur, a local junior high school student, said that fellow students threatened to cut her hair at school. “They put opened scissors to my hair and threatened to cut it. They tried twice. The first time I told them to stop. They knew I couldn’t cut my hair because of my religion. I had told them. I told my counselor what happened, and nothing was done.”

Immigrant Youth Experience

Both immigrant and second-generation Sikh youth are targeted for bias-based harassment. However, immigrant Sikh youth who have lived in the United States for less than 10 years are more vulnerable to this harassment. Fifty-six percent of immigrant Sikh youth are teased or harassed as compared to 47% of second-generation Sikh youth. Immigrant Sikh youth report being harassed because of their Sikh identity and have difficulty integrating into a new cultural environment.

Does Reporting Harassment Provide Relief?

While most Sikh students get help with the bullying when they are harassed by other students, the real problem is persuading children to report harassment in the first place.

While 70% of surveyed Bay Area Sikh youth report being helped by the person they told about bias-based harassment, only 1 out of 2 Sikh youth told someone at school about the harassment in the first place. When a Sikh student reported being bullied, he/she most likely told a teacher - 63%, according to the survey results.

Bullied Sikh boys are less likely to tell someone at school compared to bullied Sikh girls. Sikh elementary school students have the highest rates of telling someone about being bullied at school, although they have the lowest rates of bias-based harassment. Fifty-five percent of bullied middle school students tell someone at school, but this is also the population that has the highest rates of bias-based harassment. Even though they are reporting, bias isn’t decreasing. Immigrant youth are more likely to tell someone at school about their experiences with bias-based harassment than second-generation Sikh youth, but least likely to be helped. Sixty-four percent of bullied immigrant Sikh youth are helped with their problems, as compared to 72% of second-generation Sikh youth.
Problem Counties

The survey results show strong evidence of bias-based harassment against Sikh youth in three Bay Area counties: Alameda, Contra Costa, and Santa Clara Counties. The Sikh Coalition is targeting the county offices of education in these three areas because they are key partners in implementing the School Safety Cadre legislation (SB 719) who also have significant problems keeping Sikh students safe, based on our survey results.\(^\text{13}\)

This bill requires coordination and collaboration among school districts, county offices of education, youth serving agencies, allied agencies, community-based organizations, and law enforcement agencies to create safe schools that are hate-free. School districts and county offices of education are specifically responsible for creating comprehensive school safety plans. The Sikh Coalition wants to make sure the experiences of Bay Area Sikh youth are included in the development of these plans. In all three counties, students report being teased, threatened and physically attacked because of their Sikh identity.

\(^{13}\) A law passed in October 2003 by the California legislature. See http://www.bullypolice.org/ca_law.html
# School District Ranking On Sikh Youth Teased Or Harassed In Bay Area Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>School District</th>
<th>County</th>
<th>Percentage of Youth Surveyed Who Reported Being Harassed</th>
<th>Gender Breakdown of those who Reported Being Harassed</th>
<th>Sample Size In School District</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Fremont Unified School District</td>
<td>Alameda County</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>Boys: 79%</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Girls: 21%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>New Haven School District</td>
<td>Alameda County</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>Boys: 56%</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Girls: 44%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>West Contra Costa Unified School District</td>
<td>Contra Costa County</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>Boys: 85%</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Girls: 15%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Santa Clara Unified School District</td>
<td>Santa Clara County</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>Boys: 64%</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Girls: 36%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>East Side Union High School District</td>
<td>Santa Clara County</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>Boys: 44%</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Girls: 56%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Evergreen School District</td>
<td>Santa Clara County</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>Boys: 67%</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Girls: 33%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Alameda County

In Alameda County, bullied Sikh boys were teased because of their dastaar/patka in middle school. Karman Singh, an immigrant Sikh youth who attended James Logan High School in New Haven Unified School District, reported that ethnic background also played a strong role in being targeted for bias as well as how the school administration resolved conflict. The student population at James Logan High School has a high number of Punjabi students. Many of the Punjabi students are also new immigrants.

Karman Singh immigrated to the United States from Punjab in 2004. He had been teased and harassed many times by fellow classmates because of his religious and ethnic identity. He had only been going to school in the United States for three years when in his 10th grade biology class, a fellow student would not stop teasing and harassing him in front of the teacher. The student had been calling him offensive names regularly for 2-3 days. Singh says, "I think these bullies are jealous of our strong Punjabi Sikh identity. We are proud of who we are."

That particular day in Biology class, Singh was tired of ignoring the situation and told his teacher to stop his classmate from calling him names, or he was going to hit the student. The teacher did nothing and the student continued calling
Singh names like “f*** Punjabis” and referencing his turban with offensive words. Fed up, Singh punched the student and a fight broke out. He said, “I had to defend myself … it had gone too far. I told the teacher to stop it.” Singh and the student were taken in for disciplinary action. Singh was given harsher punishment by the school principal than the student who had been bullying him. Singh was suspended for one day and given detention. The other student was only given detention. According to Singh, the Biology teacher was not disciplined for not preventing the fight. Singh’s perception is that, “It’s known at our high school that if you are Punjabi you will get suspended for more days than the other person. No question.”

The survey results show that 52% of Sikh students in Alameda County are bullied because of their identity. In Alameda County alone, 86% of the Sikh boys surveyed reported being teased or harassed in school. It should be noted that the two school districts with the highest levels of school bullying are located in Alameda County. Eight out of 10 Sikh boys in Fremont Unified School District reported being bullied. Fifty-two percent of Sikh boys attending a school in New Haven Unified School District are teased or harassed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number Of Sikh Youth Harassed In Alameda County</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number Of Sikh Boys Harassed In Alameda County</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Contra Costa County

While this report highlights bias-based harassment encountered by Sikh youth in Alameda County because it has a larger sample size of 196 individuals, it should be noted that Contra Costa County, for which there was a smaller sample size of 50 respondents, is also very troublesome. There is strong indication of a problem in this county based on information from community dialogue sessions, personal interviews, and survey results. Survey data collected from Contra Costa County youth shows that 60% of surveyed Sikh youth believe they are bullied in school because of their identity.

Santa Clara County

Although Santa Clara County had the largest sample size of 223 individuals, it had the lowest level of bias-based harassment. However, the rate at which Santa Clara youth are bullied at school is still alarmingly high. Forty percent of Sikh youth living in Santa Clara County reported that they had been teased or harassed. Sixty-three percent of Sikh boys in Santa Clara County who wear a dastaar/patka report being bullied at school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number Of Sikh Youth Harassed In Santa Clara County</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number Of Sikh Boys Harassed In Santa Clara County</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Many Sikhs like Kamalpreet believe that the key to eliminating bias against Sikhs is through education that demystifies the community and its practices.

Just over 60% of Sikh youth surveyed – whether bullied or not – stated that information on Sikhs is not taught in their schools. Sixty-seven percent of these youth believe it would be beneficial if someone came into their school or classroom to talk about Sikhs and Sikh practices.

Kamalpreet Kaur, a Bay Area high school student, makes the case for such education:

The belief that teaching about Sikhs in schools is important is clearly stronger amongst the Sikh youth who reported being bullied. Seventy-two percent of bullied Sikh youth believed that it would be beneficial to have information about the Sikh faith taught to their peers. In Alameda County, where 86% of Sikh boys reported suffering from bullying, this belief in the preventative potential of educating non-Sikhs was the strongest.

The Importance of Educational Outreach

The opposite type of education is also needed for Sikh parents. Fifty-eight percent of Sikh youth that were surveyed believe their parents need to be educated about the American schooling system. This education would help parents become better aware of their rights as parents within the school system and the resources available to them to help their child feel safe at school. Bullied youth in particular believe this to be true. According to our surveys, 65% of bullied Sikh youth believe that their parents would benefit from being educated on the American schooling system.
Racial & Religious Profiling & Discrimination

Whether it is on the streets, the workplace, shopping malls, or the airport, Sikh adults in the Bay Area suffer the indignity --- and sometimes even the violence --- of discrimination in every sphere of their lives. As with their children, they unfortunately suffer this discrimination at higher rates than the general populace.

Hate Speech:

Discrimination for many Sikhs begins with the indignity of being called an epithet by a complete stranger on the street. Almost 40% of Sikhs surveyed reported being called epithets like “terrorist”, “towel-head”, and “Bin Laden.” While these words do not cause our community physical harm, they are indicative of a general climate of hostility that is often openly expressed by members of the public.

Bhupinder Singh, a Bay Area taxi driver, states that he is called “Bin Laden” on a regular basis:

“…[A]t night is when the problems start happening for taxi drivers. People are drunk and the thoughts and feeling that they have been hiding come out … discrimination against Sikh taxi drivers is a regular thing and being called ‘Bin Laden’ is something you get to hear on a monthly basis.”

Across the board, Sikhs of all socio-economic classes and levels of education reported enduring bigoted commentary from members of the public. In fact, Sikhs with college to professional levels of education more often reported being insulted with slurs than those with lesser education. Nevertheless, it should be noted that those with limited education and non-English speakers may refuse to acknowledge the name-calling because they lack the linguistic skills to respond to the name-calling. Thus, they often chose to ignore the epithet.

Hate Crimes:

Sikhs also suffer violence at the hands of the public on account of their faith at a rate that is much higher than what occurs in the general population. In 2008, the FBI Uniform Crime Report (UCR) shows that there were 9,168 bias-motivated offenses in the United States. The UCR also reported that 19.5% of hate crimes in the United States are motivated by religious bias.

However, in the Bay Area, one in ten Sikhs reported that some aspect of their religious identify was a target for hate crimes. Sixty-eight percent of these incidents are physical attacks against Sikhs, and the remainder involved the destruction of property. Given that the FBI reports just over 9,000 hate crimes nationwide in 2008, 10% of the Bay Area Sikh population suffering hate crimes is a very high rate.

Khera Singh* tells a familiar story on violence against elderly Sikhs in the Bay:

Khera Singh, an elderly Sikh man, enjoys going to a local park in Union City. He enjoys socializing with the other elderly Sikh men and going for a walk. He says, “I’ve seen elderly Sikh men have their turbans knocked off by some young kids. These kids are about 14-15 years old. The older the man looks, the more likely he will be attacked by them. Some of the other Sikh men in the park have yelled at these kids-the kids just run away.”

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16. Note that the FBI Uniform Hate Crime Reports is a voluntary self-report from states on hate crimes. Many argue soundly that it significantly undercounts the number of hate crimes each year in the United States.
Upinder Kaur, like many Sikhs, suffered violence for years at the hands of her family’s harassers:

Upinder Kaur’s property was vandalized by bullies who were teasing and harassing her son because of his Sikh identity. Kaur says her property was vandalized almost every week for about four or five years. She filed many police reports, but no quick action was taken. She says, “They broke my car windows, stoned my new car, shattered the glass windows in my house, egged and toilet papered my house, cut plants, stomped on my flowers, and cut my water hose. I filed many police reports. My husband and I eventually spent about $3,000 to have video cameras installed on our house to catch these bullies in the act. After the FBI caught the bullies, Upinder asked them why they harassed her family. She said the bullies’ responses were, “You are the Taliban and terrorists; you are Muslims and we want to throw all Muslims outside of the United States. It was fun. We enjoyed it. We did not want your son to have that turban.”

Employment Discrimination:

Several surveyed Sikhs reported that they lost jobs or job opportunities because of their religion. Twelve percent of Sikhs reported that they believe they have been refused employment at some stage because of their identity. The rate was consistent across all socio-economic levels.

Jasdeep Singh’s* story is representative of the struggles of many Sikhs:

In 2008, Jasdeep Singh, a recent immigrant, was searching for a decent paying job to support the high cost of living in the California Bay Area. He pursued a job at a local Chevron gas station, which had been advertised in the local newspaper.

When Jasdeep and his brother-in-law arrived at the Chevron office in San Jose, they were instructed to watch a video. In this video, a Chevron representative stated that they require their workers to keep their hair trimmed and be clean-shaven. This requirement pertained to any kind of job - a cashier or car washer to a mechanic. Despite the requirement conveyed in the video, Jasdeep still decided to submit an application at Chevron. However, a Chevron employee rejected his application despite an explanation by Jasdeep’s brother-in-law that his unshorn hair was an article of faith maintained by Sikhs.*

The survey found that the top three reasons Sikhs are harassed at work because of their: 1) dastaar (turban); 2) kes (unshorn hair); and 3) national origin. Of significance: both U.S. and non-U.S. citizens report being harassed at work because of their identity at the same rates.
Public Accommodations:
While the days of legalized segregation have passed in America, Sikhs in the Bay Area shockingly report being denied service at places of business because of their religion. Six percent of the people surveyed stated that they were refused service at a business because some outward manifestation of their identity was deemed unsuitable.

Most Sikh men who were refused service because of their identity indicated that the main reason identified by the place of business was their turban and unshorn hair. While this percentage may seem low, the fact that even one person is denied service is disturbing in modern America.

Law Enforcement Profiling:
Besides workplace and public accommodation discrimination, Bay Area Sikhs believe they are the unfair subjects of law enforcement targeting on the basis of their religion. Twenty percent of the Sikhs surveyed reported being unfairly stopped by a police officer, airport employee, security guard, or Transportation Security Administration (TSA) employee. One quarter of Sikh men report that their turbans are the main focus of unwarranted scrutiny. Once again, in the Sikh Coalition’s experience, Sikhs with limited education and non-U.S. citizens are less likely to report this discrimination because of their limited experience in the U.S., fear of law enforcement, and a desire to stay out of “trouble.”

Gurinder Singh Ahluwalia’s story is emblematic of the experience of Sikh travelers, who suffer additional scrutiny at the airport across socio-economic lines:

Gurinder Singh Ahluwalia, President & CEO of Genworth Financial Wealth Management, has been traveling through Oakland International Airport about three times a month for business since the summer of 2006. Ahluwalia believes he is profiled 100% of the time by TSA officers at Oakland International Airport because of his turban. He says, “It has gotten worse over time. When I first started traveling it was happening about 80% of the time. Now it’s 100% of the time. TSA officers tell me, ‘You seem to know what to do. You are a regular here.’ After my ID is checked, and I go through the scanner without beeping it, I am always asked ‘would you like me to check it [i.e. turban]’. I say ‘No, I will do it’. I am not offered a private screening room. Many times, non-Sikhs waiting in the security line are shrugging their shoulders and nodding their heads out of amazement and embarrassment. As an individual, I am frustrated by the haphazard process. As an American, I don’t feel safe because of a TSA officer’s flawed logic, and as a business person, I feel very limited. I can’t just teleconference all my meetings to avoid this wastage of time, embarrassment and disrespectfulness. I want TSA to engage in a thoughtful dialogue with the Sikh community on this issue. We are being given prejudicial treatment. This discrimination is institutionalized and systematic. Sikhs are being targeted because of the way we look. TSA officers are stereotyping us as a potential threat. Honestly, how many terrorist attacks in the United States have been done by turban wearing men? None. My turban should actually let me get through the security check without a problem based on the current logic of imagery that is being used at Oakland. I don’t understand how Americans are any safer than before. At JFK Airport, I am not asked to pat down but at Oakland Airport it happens 100% of the time. The logic is flawed, and it’s discriminatory. That makes me feel very unsafe at best.”

This extra scrutiny by law enforcement officers sends a strong visual message from the government that Sikhs are in some way “suspect.” In effect, it officially sanctions treatment that singles out Sikh travelers on the basis of their appearance alone.

In conclusion, the Sikh Coalition’s survey results consistently show that Sikhs are disproportionately subject to profiling and bias-based harassment in various realms of everyday life. Whether it is at the airport, school, work, or at a local restaurant, Sikhs are discriminated against because of their religious articles of faith. In addition, the survey results strongly indicate that Sikhs are also harassed because of their national origin. The fear of Sikhs being “terrorists” because they look like the profile of a “terrorist” propagated by the media, further fuels the bigotry these law-abiding Americans face in their everyday lives.
HEALTHCARE & LANGUAGE ACCESS

In addition to formal discrimination problems, Sikhs in the Bay Area have also suffered setbacks as a result of their lack of access to healthcare. While this is an issue shared by many other immigrant communities, the problem has also been exacerbated among Sikhs because of the lack of Punjabi-language access to basic social services. Jagmeet Kaur, an East Bay community activist, explains the interplay between language access and health insurance in the following way:

"I see more Sikh families, particularly immigrant families, in need of direct social services, particularly health care. They don’t know how to access these services on their own because Punjabi is their primary language. I speak to them in Punjabi. You have to use a person’s primary language to help them understand administrative information. It’s complicated to understand in the first place, let alone if you don’t know English very well."

Many Bay Area Sikhs are recent working class immigrants to the Bay Area. Several of these Sikhs are working more than one part-time job, and do not have employer-based health insurance. Others are self-employed business owners who do not purchase private health insurance because of its high cost. Language limitations and lack of education on local government resources prevent these families from gaining full access to social services.

In 2008, the U.S. Census Bureau reported that 15.4% of Americans did not have health insurance. In the most recent study by the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, 20% of South Asians in America did not have health insurance. At the state level, the 2007 California Health Interview Survey (CHIS) reported that 13.2% of Californians did not have health insurance.

The Sikh Coalition’s survey results showed that 19% of Bay Area Sikhs reported that they do not have health care insurance—a far higher percentage than the average American and Californian, but on par with South Asians nation-wide. And it is clear that language skills impact this rate. Sixty-nine percent of those Sikhs who are uninsured speak primarily Punjabi.

Sikhs fare even worse when compared to their neighbors in the Bay Area. While only 8% of the general Bay Area population lives without health insurance, 19% of Sikhs surveyed do not have health insurance. Also, Sikhs in the Bay Area are twice as likely to not have health care insurance compared to Asian residents of the Bay Area.

Of the surveyed Sikhs who have health insurance, 22% are on government-sponsored plans. In 2008, the Census Bureau reported that 29% of Americans are on government sponsored health plans. Sikhs who are not U.S. citizens are more likely to have no health insurance than Sikhs who are U.S. Citizens. Hardit Singh and Pal Kaur are two representative examples of this dynamic:

Hardit Singh & Pal Kaur are an elderly couple who are US Citizens. They have both lived in the United States for about nine and half years. About four years ago, the couple found themselves in a difficult situation with little economic or social support. At the age of 70, Singh was working the graveyard shift at a local gas station. Kaur was unable to work because of a physical illness. They had no health insurance and were very much in need of other social services. But they had no information about which social services/benefits they were entitled to as US Citizens or how to access them.

17. SAALT (South Asian Americans Leading Together) September 2009 Factsheet: “Health Care Issues Affecting South Asians in the United States”
18. 2007 California Health Interview Survey: http://www.chis.ucla.edu/
Eventually, one day they attended a Punjabi outreach event where they met CAPS Ambassador, Kashmir Singh Shahi. In Punjabi, he explained which benefits they were entitled to, accompanied them to the government agency offices, and made sure they filled out the proper forms through a translator. Today both of them have government-sponsored health care insurance. Shahi says that the City of Fremont is now willing to translate brochures and other literature into Punjabi after hearing about many other stories like this one. He hopes other cities will do the same.

### Types of Health Insurances That Cover Bay Area Sikhs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Insurance Type</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Health Insurance Through Work</td>
<td>382</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purchased From Private Company</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicare</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medi-Cal</td>
<td>55</td>
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<tr>
<td>California Healthy Families Program</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Another side effect of language access challenges is that many Sikhs are only able to fill out government forms and understand important social services information in a limited capacity or require translation services to do so. Jagmeet Kaur and Kashmir Singh Shahi work directly with new immigrant Sikhs on these issues:

Jagmeet Kaur, a SEVA Group member and CAPS (Community Ambassador Program for Seniors) Site Coordinator and Ambassador, and Kashmir Singh Shahi, also a CAPS Ambassador, are two local Sikh community activists who work with the Bay Area Sikh community, particularly in Fremont, on direct social services issues. Kaur and Shahi say one of the main obstacles preventing Sikhs from having health insurance are language access issues. Based on the hundreds of cases they have come across, the general pattern observed is 1) lack of outreach in Punjabi -- often Sikhs don’t know the resources available to them because outreach is predominately done in English by government agencies; 2) not understanding English forms; 3) not renewing health insurance -- many Sikhs unknowingly throw away health insurance renewal forms because they are in English.

Over the past two years, Kaur & Shahi along with the help of 11 other CAPS Ambassadors have been organizing a “Senior Resource Fair” at Fremont Gurdwara Sahib. At this resource fair, over 20 direct social services agencies are present to provide linguistic and culturally sensitive outreach. Over 100 senior citizens and their families access direct social services at this resource fair. Kaur & Shahi say, “the two longest lines are always for health insurance and social security benefits because other Sikhs are there to provide translation services.”

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19. SEVA stands for “Sikhs Engaged in Volunteer Activities.” It is a long-established group of Sikh community activists, based in Fremont, California.
20. The CAPS program is administered by the city of Fremont, and aims to help senior citizens navigate the social services system by appointing community ambassadors to liaise with them. See also http://www.capseniors.org/
BAY AREA SIKH CIVIL RIGHTS AGENDA: POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the Sikh Coalition’s policy recommendations to protect the civil and human rights of the Bay Area Sikh community. In the coming months and years, our objective is to persuade school officials, government agencies, and private actors to implement these recommendations in an effort to create a more accepting Bay Area community for all.

Bias In Schools

To California Department of Education, Bay Area School Districts & County Offices of Education

- **General Recommendation:** Any and all measures should be taken to protect Sikh children from becoming victims of bias-based harassment. No Bay Area student should be bullied or harassed because of their religious and/or ethnic identity.

- **A Systemic approach to addressing bias-based bullying:** All schools should have a policy that: (1) defines and prohibits bias-based harassment; (2) lays out the consequences of violating this policy; (3) includes a protocol for filing and addressing complaints of bias-based harassment in an effective and timely manner; (4) publicizes the protocol among parents and students and those with limited English proficiency; (5) tracks and monitors action taken to address complaints of harassments; and (6) periodically reports back to the public the number of complaints filed by members of a protected category and by school and/or school district (and remedial action taken).

- **Adopting and releasing public plans to create a bias-free School environment:** All schools should adopt a yearly written plan available to the public on efforts to create a bias-free school environment. The plan should educate school personnel and pupils on appreciating diversity and discouraging prejudice.

- **Executive agency action to address the vulnerability of Sikh children to bias-based harassment:** By the end of 2010, the California Department of Education should issue a memorandum to all California school districts describing the particular vulnerability of Sikh school children to bias-based harassment and urging schools to take action to protect Sikh children from bias-based harassment. This memorandum should also include information about Sikh practices, particularly focusing on the Sikh articles of faith. In addition, California Department of Education, school districts, and local schools should ensure that school curricula include discussion of Sikh history, traditions, and contributions to the cultural and economic life of California as a means of reducing bias against Sikh school children through education.

- **Outreach to the Sikh community on the education System:** All schools should affirmatively work with Sikh organizations or activists to create culturally sensitive Sikh community outreach efforts and educational trainings to help educate Sikh parents about the American schooling system. Workshops should be developed collaboratively between schools and community organizations to train parents about the process for filing school bullying complaints. These workshops should also provide parents with guidance on identifying signs that their children are being bullied.
To State & Local Elected Officials

- **Support federal anti-bullying legislative efforts:** All local government officials should endorse passage of the Safe Schools Improvement Act of 2009\(^{21}\).

- **Incorporate Sikh issues into state legislation:** The school bullying experiences of Sikh youth, particularly those of dastaar/patka wearing Sikh children, should be incorporated into the School Safety Cadre legislation (SB 719).

To City- and County-Sponsored Youth Recreational Providers

- **Protect Sikh children on the Playground:** All County and city recreational agencies should ensure that all staff and volunteers are trained on the Sikh religious practices to prevent bias-based harassment in sports leagues and other recreational activities, e.g., little league baseball teams, soccer teams, etc. Sports leagues should also devise policies that explicitly permit accommodations for children who wear Sikh articles of faith.

Racial & Religious Profiling

To California State Law Enforcement Agencies and Bay Area Law Enforcement Agencies

- Collect and publicly report data on the race, religion, and ethnicity of individuals who are stopped and searched and whether such stops resulted in an arrest. Such data would help identify patterns of profiling.

- Require Sikh awareness trainings for all California law enforcement officers. These trainings should include material on being sensitive to religious practices when law enforcement officials engage with faith-based communities.

- Enact legislation or a change in state administrative policy to limit local and state police enforcement of immigration laws, including restricting localities from “deputizing” local police to perform immigration enforcement functions.

- Establish a policy that requires state employees to keep confidential the immigration status of state residents who interact with state and local government.

To All Bay Area Elected Government Officials

- Endorse passage of the End Racial Profiling Act in the U.S. Congress.

Hate Crimes Prosecution and Prevention

To All Bay Area District Attorney’s Offices

- Strongly prosecute all crimes against Sikhs and seek hate-crime enhancements where the facts merit doing so.

- Offer at least one training per year to staff on how to recognize and prosecute anti-Sikh bias crimes in collaboration with Sikh community organizations and the Community Relations Service of the U.S. Department of Justice.

- Collaborate with Sikh organizations to educate the Sikh community, particularly recent immigrants, on how to report incidences of hate.

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\(^{21}\) Amends the Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act to include bullying and harassment prevention programs.
Employment Discrimination

Though the California Fair Employment and Housing Act already prohibits employment discrimination throughout the state, more efforts clearly need to be made to implement the principles of this law amongst government and private employers with Sikh job candidates or employees.

**To All Employers and Government Agencies**

- All employers and government agencies - particularly law enforcement agencies - should accommodate Sikh articles of faith in their hiring practices.
- Government agencies should issue memoranda clarifying that Sikhs are welcome to pursue careers with their articles of faith intact.

**To State Legislators**

- A California Workplace Religious Freedom Act should be introduced and passed by the state legislature to prevent workplace discrimination on the basis of religion.

Access to Public Accommodations

**To All Government Agencies**

- State governed facilities should create security policies that do not interfere with Sikh religious practices. These facilities include courts and other state buildings.
- Local county and city human relations commissions should aggressively pursue cases of public accommodation discrimination on the basis of religion.
- Federal, state and local government agencies should work with Sikh organizations to educate the Sikh community on how to report public accommodation discrimination.

Language Access

**To All Government Agencies**

- All entities receiving federal funding need to provide meaningful access for individuals with limited English proficiency in compliance with Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Acts. These entities need to follow any official guidance created as a result of Executive Order 13166 for enforcing Title VI. All Bay Area cities with large Punjabi populations should pass and implement policies like San Francisco’s Equal Access to Services (EAS) Ordinance. EAS requires city departments to make its services accessible to any language spoken by limited English proficient persons who constitute either 1) five percent of the population served by the Department; or 2) 10,000 residents citywide.
- Prioritize the hiring of bilingual and bicultural staff, who are certified interpreters, in county and city facilities, especially agencies which provide crucial social services, such as education, health care, government assistance, public benefits, and law enforcement.
Translate all government materials into Punjabi. Government agencies and private actors should collaborate with Sikh organizations to disseminate these materials in a timely and complete manner.

Ensure that Punjabi language services are available on all government hotlines and telephone assistance services.

Work with colleges and universities to recruit and support students who seek to expand their bilingual skills.

Train county and city employees on how to identify and handle language needs.

Work with Sikh organizations to create, fund, and institute English as a Second Language classes that are culturally sensitive to the needs of the community.

Healthcare Access
To All Government Agencies

Government agencies should collaborate with Sikh organizations to regularly provide information and enroll uninsured Sikhs into government-sponsored health care plans.

Educate the Bay Area Sikh community on federal, state, local, and private health insurance plans in a culturally sensitive manner.

Develop a network of Sikh healthcare workers who speak Punjabi to provide health services to low-income Sikhs.

Collaborate with Sikh organizations and active community members to educate the community about the federal health care plan. The guidance should specifically address how this new approach to health care will impact the Bay Area community.
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Overview

The information presented in this report was derived from focus group sessions, surveying of Bay Area Sikhs, community dialogue sessions, and partner organizations’ feedback. The quantitative data cited in this report is the product of 1370 surveys of Sikhs who live in the nine California Bay Area counties - Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, Napa, San Mateo, San Francisco, Santa Clara, and Sonoma.

The report draws upon two separate survey instruments, one for adults and one for children. A total of 827 adults and 543 youth were surveyed. The survey was administered in both English and Punjabi, depending on the respondent’s preference. Bay Area Sikhs were surveyed at five local Gurdwaras (Sikh houses of worship), Sikh events, a local high school, two Bay Area universities, and online.

The surveys broadly asked about the following issues:

- Public Harassment & Hate Crimes
- School Bullying & Discrimination
- Employment Discrimination & Workplace Harassment
- Interaction With Government Agencies
- Language Access
- Healthcare Access
- Low-Cost Housing
- Parental Engagement In Education
- Community Demographics

Focus Groups & Pilot Study

The Sikh Coalition conducted a total of three focus group sessions with Sikh high school and college students as well as elderly Sikhs before administering the survey. The sessions provided insight into the civil rights concerns of these different population groups. During each focus group session, participants were asked to name the top ten issues impacting Bay Area Sikhs. Then the group was asked to rank the issues from 1-10, 1 being the most important and 10 being the least important. Questions were included in the survey instrument that addressed the top issues identified by the focus groups.

Two separate surveys were created-one for adults (18 and above) and the other for youth (17 and under). The Bay Area Sikh Civil Rights surveys were built off of the Sikh Coalition’s Sikh Civil Rights surveys administered in New York from 2006-2007. Suggestions from partner organizations were also incorporated into the survey instruments. The two surveys were then piloted at the Gurdwara in Fremont, California.
Data Collection

The final adult survey was administered in English and Punjabi. The final youth survey was primarily administered in English, although a Punjabi version was available if requested. The Sikh Coalition held 15 in-person survey days in the Bay Area with the assistance of over 20 volunteers. The survey data was collected from August-December 2009.

During the data collection process, all survey volunteers were formally trained on the data collection process and asked to assist any survey participants with language access issues or other concerns. All survey participants were assured that their personal information would be kept confidential and data would only be reported in the aggregate.

Analysis

Interns and volunteers entered the survey data collected during in-person survey days into the Coalition’s computer system. Data was entered exactly as reported. A total of 998 surveys were submitted in-person during survey days and 522 surveys were submitted over the Internet.

After the completion of data entry, both the online and survey day data sets were merged together; however, adult and youth data was kept separate because two distinct survey instruments were used to collect the data. The data was then cleaned and surveys incorrectly completed were deleted. A total of 150 surveys were deleted. Clean data sets were then imported into Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for statistical analysis.

Descriptive measures were used to analyze the data set. The most common descriptive measures were frequencies and cross tabulations.

Some respondents inadvertently or purposely skipped certain questions. Unless otherwise stated, the figures provided in this report were calculated by the total number of respondents who answered an individual question or were of a specific demographic background. Sample sizes for each statistic are available on request.

Note that this report is based solely on the information volunteered by community members who responded to these surveys. No effort was made to double-check the experiences reported with school officials, former or potential employers, law enforcement personnel or any other outside agency.

Dialogue Sessions

The survey results were shared with the Sikh community through dialogue sessions. These dialogue sessions were opportunities to receive feedback on the results from different stakeholders. Sikh community dialogue sessions were held on a local Punjabi radio station, local Gurdwaras, and Khalsa Schools (Sikh children’s language/religious learning centers).
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Sikh Coalition team received invaluable support from various members of the Bay Area community in producing the Bay Area Civil Rights Report.

The Sikh Coalition would like to acknowledge the backing of the San Francisco Foundation, who funded the community organizing work that led to the creation of this report.

This report would not have been possible without the dedicated work of Sikh Coalition Bay Area interns: Bhavreet Singh, Manjot Singh, Manpreet Kaur, Navdeep Kaur and Sargun Kaur. Their assistance in survey development, data collection & entry and community outreach in general was the foundation for this publication.


The organization is thankful to all Punjabi print and non-print media outlets that provided us with opportunities to engage the local community in the results of this survey.

The Sikh Coalition team would also like to thank the management committees of the El Sobrante Gurdwara Sahib, Fremont Gurdwara Sahib, Hayward Gurdwara Sahib, Milpitas Gurdwara Sahib, San Jose Gurdwara Sahib, and Sikhcess-Bay Area, for their cooperation in allowing us access to their members for our survey and civil rights work. We thank the Khalsa School administration, faculty, and students at El Sobrante Gurdwara Sahib, Fremont Gurdwara Sahib, and San Jose Gurdwara Sahib as well as the SEVA Group for their support of this project. Thank you for sharing your life experiences with us.

We appreciate the feedback of Nicole Gerardi and Artineh Samkian on the survey instruments and Don Carney on the final report.

We are proud of the input and support received from our partner organizations who also work to secure civil rights in the United States: Asian American Legal Defense & Education Fund (AALDEF), Asian Americans For Community Involvement (AACI), Asian Law Caucus (ALC), California Immigrant Policy Center, Silicon Valley FACES, and South Asian American Leaders For Tomorrow (SAALT).

Ravneet Kaur, the Sikh Coalition’s Community Organizer in California was responsible for survey development, data collection, analysis, dialogue sessions, and the writing of this report. Neha Singh, the Sikh Coalition’s Western Region Director, provided primary support and supervision for the project that led to this report. Amardeep Singh, the Coalition’s Program Director, provided primary editing support for this report. The Coalition’s Executive Director, Sapreet Kaur; Legal Director, Harshimran Kaur; Development Director, Paul Russell; and Director of Law and Policy, Rajdeep Singh also supported the completion of this report.

Finally and most importantly, the Sikh Coalition is humbled and appreciative of the Sikhs who shared their experiences of discrimination with us. Together we will continue to make our voices stronger and help ensure that no other Sikh will have to encounter this hate.
ABOUT THE SIKH COALITION

The Sikh Coalition was born in the aftermath of bigotry, violence and discrimination against New York City’s Sikh population following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. It began as a volunteer effort on the night of September 11, 2001, when an elderly Sikh and two teenagers were violently attacked in Richmond Hill, Queens in “reprisal” attacks by fellow Americans.

The Sikh Coalition formally incorporated on October 18, 2001, and began operating as a volunteer-led organization of concerned Sikhs across the country. Today, our mission is tirelessly pursued by an active Board of Directors and 11 staff members in offices located in New York City, Fremont, and Washington D.C.

Our mission, as a community-based organization, is to work towards the realization of civil and human rights for all people. In particular, the Coalition works towards a world where Sikhs may freely practice and enjoy their faith while fostering strong relations with their local community wherever they may be.

The organization pursues its mission by:

- Providing direct legal services to Sikh persons whose civil or human rights are violated;
- Advocating for law and policies that are respectful of fundamental rights;
- Educating society to appreciate diversity; and
- Fostering civic engagement in order to promote local community empowerment.