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## **Inside London terrorists' minds Brit probes find bombers weren't fringe freaks**

By HELEN KENNEDY  
DAILY NEWS STAFF WRITER

It was a double shock to Britain to learn the men who blew themselves up were ordinary, cricket-mad, middle-class youths from suburbia.

"They were suicide bombers - and they were British," exclaimed a shocked Daily Telegraph, which ran a giant copy of one of their birth certificates on its front page.

It really shouldn't have come as such a shock.

Although the popular assumption is that the typical suicide bomber is an uneducated, crazed loner from a poor community with no prospects and nothing to live for, the truth is far different - and far more disturbing, because it makes everything even more incomprehensible.

Studies of suicide bombers have shown they tend to be well-educated, comfortably well-off and from supportive families. One in five is married. Some are parents.

They aren't usually even longtime terrorists.

"The recruits who do the suicide attacks are mainly walk-in volunteers who only joined the group a few weeks before the attacks specifically to do the attacks," said University of Chicago Prof. Robert Pape.

"Most have no experience with violence until their very own suicide attack," said Pape, whose much-discussed new book, "Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism," is based on an examination of 462 successful suicide bombings since 1980.

The popular image, he added, was created out of a lack of information and some natural, but wrong, assumptions about what "the type of person who would commit suicide would be like."

Princeton economist Claude Berrebi studied Palestinian attackers and found that only 13% of suicide bombers were raised in poverty and more than half had some college education.

A 2001 report on Palestinians suggested that the more educated a person was, the more they supported terrorism: 46% of illiterates did, compared with 68% of those with 12 or more years of schooling.

"In a stable society, the ones who do these kinds of things are Timothy McVeigh types. But in a revolutionary setting, the best and brightest - who are on the cusp of change with rising aspirations but feel they're being stymied - go for it," University of Michigan psychology Prof. Scott Atran said.

"Arguably the greatest terrorist threat lies with uprooted and egalitarian Muslim young adults in European cities," he said. "Immigrant integration into European societies has always been harder than in America."

One common factor among suicide bombers is a deep sense of humiliation.

"Most would-be suicide bombers I have interviewed say they act to restore dignity to their real or virtual community, humiliated by military occupation," Atran said.

Pape cautioned against linking all suicide attacks to Muslims. He said the most prolific bombers, with nearly 80 attacks in recent years, are Sri Lanka's Tamil Tigers, Marxist Hindus who originally invented the suicide vest.

"Jihadism most eerily resembles the immigrant-based anarchist movement that terrorized the world a century ago, killing U.S. President William McKinley," as well as leaders in Europe, Atran said.

French-Israeli filmmaker Pierre Rehov, who interviewed failed suicide attackers and the families of bombers for his upcoming documentary "Suicide Killers" has a simpler theory: It's about sex.

A strict Islamic household, even in a Western suburb, creates dangerous frustrations by separating women and men, he said.

"They have too much oppression. When they reach the point where they detonate the bomb, for one second it is absolute power - they are beyond all human rules. It is like orgasm when they actually do it," Rehov said.

Muslims believe strongly in an afterlife that isn't like the spiritual Christian heaven, but a land of real physical pleasure, he said.

"It's like if you've never been to Australia but you know it exists. They know for sure, as a fact, that heaven exists," he said. "And they strongly, strongly believe in the story of the 72 virgins."

The only way to prevent suicide bombings is to stop people from becoming human bombs in the first place, Atran said. And that means being more clear-eyed about just who's out there getting ready to strap on explosives.

"About jihadism, all we hear is that it appeals to the destitute and depraved or craven and criminal. Understand that jihadism is not that," Atran said, "and we may start to really do something about it. That's not a call for therapy, but 'know thine enemy.'"

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