

## **ADDRESSING HATE AND VIOLENCE**

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Hate Crimes are like a canary in the mine shaft: they expose potential weaknesses and fractures in a society that if not addressed can lead to ever greater victimization and also severe societal wide consequences. Thus they are crimes that are committed not just against individuals and groups but society at large. In order to adequately respond to them we need to address their causes and to mobilize whole society. Political, social, economic and civic organizations all have important roles to play. And in our ever more connected and globalized society we also need them to work together and collaborate beyond national borders.

In my presentation I will first briefly define hate crimes, discuss its causes and examine its consequences. Then, I will address problems and challenges that we face as we try to respond to hate crimes. I will finish by discussing strategies that we use to eliminate them.

### **Toward Defining Hate Crimes: New Challenges and Old**

The conventional way of defining hate crime is an attack on an individual or individuals that is motivated in whole or in part, by the hatred, bias, or prejudice a perpetrator or perpetrators have about the actual or perceived race, color, religion, national origin,

gender, disability, or sexual orientation of another group or individual. Under this formulation hate crimes are viewed as a more violent extension of other type of behaviors and attitudes such as prejudice, bias, racism, sexism, ageism, homophobia and xenophobia.

Although hate crimes are typically committed against individuals, their real targets are may often be the groups to which victim belongs – as a way of keeping a group in its place. Thus when perpetrators choose their victims, they typically take clues from the wider society: who are the vulnerable groups, how are they perceived by the political, economic and social institutions, what type of protection they may receive from the political, legal and social system? Negative views of migrant workers promoted by the media, for example, give perpetrators justification for an attack. Lack of appropriate and timely reaction from the police, political and community leaders, and the legal system often embolden them further. Equally, disturbing, if actions against victimized groups is allowed to escalate they create problems that may easily consume the entire society by heightening intergroup violence and by diverting strategies and policies from addressing the genuine problems a society may be facing, such as economic insecurity, health concerns or crime.

### **Sources of Hate Crime**

While the implications of hate crime are profound and can be widespread throughout an entire society the origins of this phenomenon are typically far narrower. Most acts of

hate violence are perpetrated by otherwise ordinary people, teenagers and young adults “down the block”, at the next desk in the office, or in the same classroom at school, who are unsophisticated with respect to the ideology of hate but simply participate, on a part-time basis, in committing acts of hate violence. Such people might visit hate web sites, read the propaganda of hate groups, but they typically do not hold membership in any formal hate group. Moreover, hate is often only part of their motivation for acting in a violent manner. Those who commit hate offenses are typically marginalized and alienated. Some come from dysfunctional families, where they felt unwanted or abused. Others were ignored or bullied by their schoolmates. And for some others, rapid social change makes them feel disconnected from their communities or the larger society.

Although most of the work of police and legal institutions concentrates on organized hate groups, the majority of hate incidents reported to the police in many countries have been committed by people with whom victims have some contact, rather than by strangers or extremists. In that respect schools are becoming important social institutions in which to study violence. The majority of hate crimes in these settings are committed by young males, many of whom drop out of school or have had problems adjusting to life in schools. Bullying is one of the problems that are increasingly seen as a serious issue among students. Although long considered a youthful rite of passage, bullying has recently been recognized as one of the most disturbing crimes affecting young people. There are many similarities between hate crimes and bullying and thus bullying has to be taken seriously by school authorities. Schools are not just places where transmission of academic knowledge takes place, but also institutions that play an important role in

socializing students to live and get along with other members of the society. In diverse society all members have a right to be treated fairly and equitably regardless of their characteristics.

Hate crimes may also arise from intergroup conflict that escalates as a result of intergroup competition for scarce resources. In this situation hate crime may be far less personal and more designed to send a message from the residents of a neighborhood, school, or college dormitories to the “outsiders” who had dared to move in. Study after study suggests that hate crimes escalate when newcomers cross racial, ethnic, religious, or national lines. As more previously marginalized groups try to insert their presence, they also can become targets of hate violence. Visibility of gay and lesbians on college campuses and neighborhoods led to increased violence against them.

Other vulnerable groups are migrants and refugees. Individuals and members of organized hate groups in many countries led attacks on refugee hostels, immigrants’ businesses and religious organizations. Their attacks have ranged from threats and harassments, the destruction of property to assaults and murders. At various times, perpetrators have been motivated by an increase in economic competition in society, by the manipulation of people’s fear by some political leaders, and/or by cultural differences among segments of the population.

At times threatening events or the characterization of events or groups as threatening can aggravate or actually create racial, ethnic, religious, national or other divisions within a

society that result in the escalation of hate crimes. Thus, in the aftermath of 9/11 the fear of terrorism contributed to the development of a new sense of vulnerability among the native population in the United States and in Europe. For example, in the United States, some irate citizens were eager to victimize almost anyone who had a “Middle Eastern look,” even if their victims traced their ancestry to India, Pakistan, Italy, Greece, or Latin America --whether they were Muslim or Christian, or whether they embraced the U.S. and its values (Levin and Rabrenovic, 2004). Anti Jewish sentiments increased dramatically as well. In Europe most of the new anti-Semitism has been primarily oriented toward Israel but the rhetoric echoes the old anti-Semitism. However, many of the recent attacks on Jews and synagogues in countries around the world have been perpetrated by identifiably Arab or Muslim youths

Another important issue is connection between hate crime and intergroup violence. Although hate crimes are committed by relatively few members of society, they can provoke massive modification in social, economic and political relations. When hate crimes are allowed to go unchecked and unpunished, incidents of hate and bigotry can easily become part of a vicious cycle of violence that spirals out of control and ultimately escalate into pervasive intergroup hostilities. Moreover, when such crimes go unchallenged it implicitly sends a message of support and encouragement to those who would perpetrate violence in the future.

Indeed, many of the deadly and violent conflicts of the past century as well as in this century occurred within nations, not between nations. They are the result of challenges to

the legitimacy of political regimes or the failure to integrate diverse social groups into the political process as well as economic policies that depress wages, increase unemployment in a society and decrease social spending. Those problems are rooted both in individual state economic and political realities as well as in larger global economic, political and social conditions.

In times of economic instability, structural changes, or political turmoil, the members of the majority group within a society often react to real or perceived threats to their position in society by turning against the members of minority groups in their midst. Operating under a zero-sum definition of the situation (i.e., someone else's loss is viewed as personal gain) they try to limit the minority's civil rights and access to their country's economic resources. The inability or lack of willingness of formal governing structures to protect the human rights of minority residents and to address growing social inequalities become the root cause of many ethnic conflicts. In their extreme forms, such conflicts can lead to expelling and killing minority group members for the purpose of creating ethnically homogeneous societies.

Although the victims of violence within the state may be members of particular ethnic group violence against these victim groups may also spill across national boundaries to undermine security of their neighbors, as well as larger geo-political regions. Under these circumstances it may no longer be possible for conflicts between groups to be resolved by the nation itself and require action and support from the wider international community. The realities of how hate associated violence can escalate and how it sometimes willfully

used as lever to gain political advantage are forcing us to redefine nature of security and to go beyond the role of the state and military to define and obtain security of a society.

### **Problems in Addressing Hate Violence**

The complex nature of hate violence and range of motivations underlying this type of violence complicate our efforts to address this phenomenon. In many places government officials and the public still have a hard time admitting the existence of hate violence as a social problem. In other places, even when the problem is acknowledged, there is no systematic way to collect evidence in order to better measure the magnitude of the problem, identify those who are affected and gain an understanding of the underlying factors producing these crimes.. Equally disturbing, however, is that even when there is agreement as to the nature of the problem, public officials and community leaders are often slow to develop and implement solutions.

Part of the challenge in addressing hate crime arises from the need for attitudes and practice to catch-up or aligns with policies to address the problem of hate. For example, an important strategy in the United States and Europe was the creation of laws that criminalize hate violence. Once the laws were established, however, problems with their implementation developed—for example, training the police more effectively to recognize when a hate crime is committed, increasing the willingness of courts to prosecute the perpetrators based on evidence that is collected, developing services to help victims, and generating long-term measures to prevent future crimes.

Indeed despite existing laws in many locales today we still have difficulties in collecting accurate data on hate crimes, and the problems are quite basic. The first problem is documenting the hate violence. In many places police departments are not willing to or do not have organizational capacity to do the work necessary for identifying an incident as bias motivated and then reporting it to the proper authority that collects this type of information. The second problem deals with developing expertise to identify and respond to hate crimes and its victims. Even departments that are willing to collect data face challenges based on their inability to correctly classify hate crimes due to the ambiguous nature of some of them. For example, police officers have to make a judgment call when there are multiple-motivations for committing crime, hate being just one of the motives. The lack of accurate data makes it hard to provide appropriate support to the victims. The lack of official response highlights the importance of civic organizations such as the Community Trust in England and the Anti Defamation League in United States in contributing to more accurately collecting data on hate crimes.

Addressing hate crime is also often complicated by the need to work across national or regional lines. Because we live in a more connected world, the boundaries between national and international responsibilities are often blurred. For example, the suppression of hate literature by one nation is not, in times of global electronic networks, a solution to the problem of ethnic conflict and hate. National web sites that reach an international audience are no match for any nation's policy of formal prohibition and restriction.



Multiethnic societies are also faced with the problem of how to balance human rights with ethnic rights. Human rights are often defined as individual, citizenship rights that theoretically apply to each and every members of society, whereas ethnic rights refer to the special prerogative granted to a minority group to address its particular needs. An increasing number of governments are paying attention to handling intergroup relations by recognizing minority rights and by making special provisions for them. International organizations such as this one are also actively promoting standards that enhance minority rights. This is important because ethnic conflict often has its roots in the inability of government to first legitimate and then recognize and protect minority rights.

Further complicating the issue of hate is that in many communities hate crime may arise from profound inequities that emerge within a society. Thus, to address problems of ethnic minorities, many European countries have also used the policies of the welfare state to provide newcomers with a minimum but very low level of resources (e.g. as housing, schooling and health care) and with a life in segregated communities. These new ethnic groups also tend to lack political power and political representation in their new countries. The combined factors of low living standards, segregation from mainstream society and a lack of political power have led many native born minorities to feel like second class citizens in their adopted nation. Nevertheless although some European nations have attempted to address these issues their efforts are at least sometimes viewed as too little and perhaps too late. As a result, as hate violence may increase, the state may be seen, at least by some, as having failed to recognize the causes of hate and to address it appropriately.

## **Strategies to Combat Hate Violence**

It is clear that we need to take hate crimes seriously. Ignoring hate incidents only allows the underlining problems to fester potentially become far more serious and difficult to solve. For a long time efforts in this direction were concentrated in reforming law enforcement and the judicial processes. As noted, in the United States, the criminal justice system was among the first public policy responses to hate crime and it continues to evolve as an important force in combating hate violence. Despite difficulties encountered, in at least some United States communities, a combination of legislation action that makes hate crime more broadly defined and more timely action by Police Departments can decrease hate violence in the city. For example, the NYPD provided resources for its Hate Crime Task Force, such as an increase in funding and training. Also, it created a monitoring database and trained all police officers to recognize and follow up on hate incidents. The importance of addressing hate motivated violence was evident in placing the Hate Crime Task Force under the direct supervision of personnel at the highest level of the police department. Significantly however, it also helped that the Hate Crime Task Force improved its relationship with the community by means of outreach efforts and the institutionalization of relationships with non government advocacy groups.

Indeed, the NYPD's extension of its program to the broader society represents a promising strategy in the evolution of hate crime policies to shift toward involvement of

community organizations, advocacy groups and educational institutions. This shift recognizes the fact that in order to address the underlying causes of hate crimes we must expand our efforts to the whole society. Respect for diversity must be valued, taught and practiced at all levels in society.

In societies divided by ethnic conflict, community based movements and organizations can provide an important base for developing cooperation and strengthening civic participation between opposing groups. Good examples of such cooperation are women's organizations. These groups typically have fallen outside the sphere of mainstream institutions, which ironically has allowed them to enjoy greater flexibility in addressing social problems and challenging conventional wisdom. The 'outsider' status of many such women's organizations has allowed them to take a leadership role in addressing the issue of hate and hate crimes.

The organizational characteristics and experience of many grassroots organizations, nonprofit organizations, and non-government organizations also provide them certain advantages in peace making activities and effort to combat hate violence. Being independent of government, such groups often have more inclusive and flexible structures, which provide the basis for their members to learn how to develop cooperative partnerships as well as the art of compromise and collaboration.

Organizational activities, among all members, are essential to the process of creating a sense of community that goes beyond the one-sided emphasis on one group over the

other. They should also deal with the community at large. These activities might include initiating after-school programs, conducting conflict resolution classes, and doing charitable work. The group dynamic that results puts the stress on the connectedness of its members, their everyday needs, and their interpersonal relationships, rather than on obtaining political positions for the individuals involved or on enhancing their personal status. This approach strengthens ties to the community and further builds their social, and potentially political, networks.

In my own research I observed how important is the timely, inclusive and comprehensive community response to hate motivated provocations aimed at immigrants. As cities try to address financial costs of incorporating immigrants into a community and perception of culture threat that immigrants represent to the local way of life, they also have to prevent hate mongers from capitalizing on those challenges. One way to do it is to create space for the community to come together around more inclusive and supportive attitudes towards immigrants. Important actors in that process are community based organizations, religious and social institutions as well as political leadership. Newspapers also play an important role in counter hate messages by presenting truthful information and covered issues fairly.

The research conducted by my colleague Jack Levin and I shows that peaceful resolution of inter group conflict is possible when there is a history of tolerance in the community, local leaders do not benefit from the conflict, a minority group is not perceived as a threat to majority of residents and interdependence develops between majority and minority

group. When those conditions are present communities are able to successfully mobilize against the hate.

The diversity of issues and strategies demonstrate that there are multiple ways to address problems and concerns generated by hate violence in society. The good news is that we are making progress in our efforts. The bad news is that we still have a long way to go.

Perhaps the greatest lesson is that hate crimes are a crime against not only particular groups but society itself and as such we must respond as a society otherwise we all lose. This knowledge will not only allow us to work together as a community to address this problem but it will also allow us to more quickly identify individuals or groups, whether they are alienated youth, misguided leaders or others, who wish to use hate to promote their own agendas.