



Equality and
Diversity Forum

AZIZFOUNDATION

Hate Crime: Cause and Effect

A research synthesis

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This synthesis was written by EDF, drawing on:

Walters, M.A., Brown, R. and Wiedlitzka, S. (2016). *Research Report 102: Causes and motivations of hate crime*. Equality and Human Rights Commission: Manchester.

Paterson, J. L., Walters, M.A., Brown, R. and Fearn, H. (2018). *The Sussex Hate Crime Project: Final Report*. University of Sussex: Brighton.

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Introduction

This synthesis aims to provide a clear and accessible summary of two recent research reports on the causes and impacts of hate crime to support people seeking to influence or develop policy.

It brings together the key findings and recommendations of two ground-breaking studies into hate crime, [Causes and motivations of hate crime](#), and the [Sussex Hate Crime Project final report](#).

Causes and motivations of hate crime (CMHC) was funded and published by the Equality and Human Rights Commission in 2016 and provides an overview of the current evidence on hate crime causation and perpetrator motivation. The authors are Prof. Mark A. Walters and Prof. Rupert Brown, with Susann Wiedlitzka, from the University of Sussex.

CMHC brings together for the first time evidence and emerging insights from the law, policy and social science on the causes and perpetration of hate crime. It aims to inform criminal justice agencies (or those working to influence them) in their approach and use of preventative measures.

Sussex Hate Crime Project (SHCP) was a five year research project, funded by the Leverhulme Trust, to examine the indirect impacts of hate crimes – how hate attacks on members of a community affect the thoughts, emotions and behaviours of other members of that community. It focuses on hate crimes targeted against Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans (LGB&T) and Muslim communities.

SHCP provides, for the first time, a comprehensive empirical basis for understanding what the effects are and why they are likely to occur.

The final report, published in 2018, summarises the findings of the project's 20 studies, which used a variety of different research methods, including questionnaire surveys, individual interviews and social psychological experiments. The authors are Dr Jenny Paterson, Prof. Mark A. Walters, Prof. Rupert Brown and Dr Harriet Fearn, from the University of Sussex.

What is hate crime?

Both reports use the criminal justice system's agreed working definition of hate crime: 'any criminal offence which is perceived, by the victim or any other person, to be motivated by a hostility or prejudice...' for England and Wales. CMHC also references the Scottish criminal justice system's definition: 'crime motivated by malice or ill will towards a social group'.

All three countries also record 'hate incidents' which are defined as '[a]ny non-crime incident which is perceived, by the victim or any other person, to be motivated by a hostility or prejudice...' Hate incidents may result in severe harms, and/or escalate over protracted periods of time into more serious forms of emotional, sexual and/or physical abuse.

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Responding to hate incidents therefore enables law enforcement agencies to capture escalation, trends and repeat incidents.

The reports note the five officially protected characteristics (race, religion, disability, sexual orientation and transgender) that are monitored by the police as 'strands' of hate crime and incidents.

There is no single type of hate crime. Some of the most common types of hate crime involve:

- incidents that occur during an ongoing local conflict (for example, between neighbours) that has escalated over time;
- incidents that form part of a targeted campaign of abuse directed against certain individuals within a neighbourhood; or
- incidents that occur in public spaces and are perpetrated by individuals who feel somehow aggrieved by the victim – sometimes occurring during commercial transactions or on public transport.

Causes and motivations

The CMHC report found that a person who commits a 'hate crime' need not actually be motivated by hatred for his or her victim, but rather it is his or her expression of prejudice or bias against the victim's (presumed) group membership that more properly characterises such crimes.

Perpetrators of hate crimes are not always motivated by a single type of prejudice or hatred but can be influenced by a combination of different prejudices.

There is no single type of hate crime perpetrator. Practitioners need to appreciate that situational factors (that is, location and victim–perpetrator relationships) may differ depending on the type of offence (for example, verbal abuse, harassment etc.) and the type of hate-motivation (for example, homophobic, disablist etc.).

Hate crimes may also be the product of our social environments. Some researchers assert that hate crimes are more likely to occur where society is structured in such a way as to advantage certain identity characteristics over others (for example, white, male, heterosexual). Systemic discrimination, typically codified into operating procedures, policies or laws, may give rise to an environment where perpetrators feel a sense of impunity when victimising certain minority group members.

Perpetrators of hate crime can be motivated by a variety of different factors. Some research (from the US) suggests that there are four 'types' of perpetrators, including: thrill seekers (those motivated by a thrill and excitement); defensive (those motivated by a desire to protect their territory); retaliators (those who act in retaliation for a perceived attack against their own group); and mission (perpetrators who make it their mission in life to eradicate 'difference').

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Some evidence within social psychology suggests that perpetrators may be influenced by their perception that certain groups pose a **threat** to them. These threats can be divided into 'realistic threats' – such as perceived competition over jobs, housing and other resources, and physical harm to themselves or others – and 'symbolic threats' which are concerned with the threat posed to people's values and social norms.

Cyber hate is a growing phenomenon which, reporting figures suggest, vastly outnumbers offline hate crime. There is some research suggesting that perpetrators of cyber hate crime have similar motivations to those who act offline.

Similarities and differences between different types of hate crime

Though there are some dissimilarities between types of hate crime, the researchers suggest that most, if not all, hate crimes are linked by perceptions of threat. Threats can be linked to economic stability, access to social or state resources, people's sense of safety in society, and/or values and social norms.

Some differences in the nature and dynamics of hate crime can be observed across the protected strands. Research suggests that both anti-Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual (LGB) and transphobic hate crime can involve a greater propensity towards physical violence. Disability hate crime evidence shows high levels of sexual violence and property offences. Certain trigger events (such as global terrorist attacks) have been linked to sharp rises in anti-religious hate crime.

Knowledge gaps

The CMHC report recommends the need for further work between researchers, civil society organisations and practitioners to fill the gaps in evidence that would enable the development of an effective strategy for preventing hate crime.

Specifically, it highlights the need:

1. For further research into why and how people commit hate crime, including the structural factors that cause hate crime.
2. To properly scrutinise perceptions of threat so that we can better understand how people's fears and prejudices about others can be effectively addressed.
3. To explore why many people who feel animosity towards certain groups choose *not* to offend. This reverse perspective may help to elucidate the key factors that help to deter people from hate-based criminality.
4. To understand more about the relationships between people in the groups who commit a hate crime, and when and how these lead to the group being more likely to commit a hate incident or crime.

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5. The cause of hate crimes committed across minority groups.
6. The extent and nature of hate crimes that are committed against individuals in the same minority group.
7. The role of the internet (including social media/blogs/traditional media) in spreading hate.

Incidence and awareness of hate crime

The SHCP report found that respondents were likely to have been victimised in a hate crime/incident in the past 3 years: 72% of LGB&T respondents and 71% of Muslim respondents had been victims.

Respondents were likely to know someone else who had been victimised in a hate crime/incident in the past 3 years: 87% of LGB&T respondents and 83% of Muslim respondents knew another victim.

Experiences of hate crime via the media and online were also extremely common: 83% of LGB&T respondents and 86% of Muslim respondents had been directly targeted online. 86% of LGB&T respondents and 88% of Muslim respondents knew someone who had been targeted online. 90% of LGB&T respondents had seen at least one hate crime reported in the media in the past 3 years.

Effects of hate crime

The report found that the indirect experiences of both anti-LGB&T and anti-Muslim/Islamophobic hate crime are similar to those of direct experiences. Hate crimes spread fear and anger throughout communities that impact upon people's actions and their perceptions of the criminal justice system. Individuals themselves do not have to be targeted to be impacted: simply knowing someone who has been victimised is sufficient to cause these effects. Hate crimes have the potential to cause injury and distress both at the individual and community level. They affect individuals' emotional wellbeing - predominantly causing anger and anxiety. These emotions are linked to certain behavioural responses, both proactive and avoidant.

Specifically, it found that:

Hate crimes, whether experienced directly, indirectly, through the media, in person or online were consistently linked to:

- increased feelings of vulnerability, anxiety, anger, and sometimes shame; and
- being more security conscious, avoidant, and more active within the community.

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Hate crime victims received more empathy than non-hate crime victims and sometimes were blamed more than non-hate crime victims.

The indirect effects of hate crimes can be described as a process:

- hate crimes increase feelings of vulnerability and empathy;
- feelings of vulnerability and empathy then increase emotional reactions (anger, anxiety, shame); and
- these emotional reactions motivate specific behavioural responses:
 - anger leads to pro-active behaviours and less avoidance
 - anxiety leads to avoidance and security concerns
 - shame, although not always felt strongly, is linked to avoidance, pro-active behaviours, security concerns, and uniquely to retaliation.

Seeking justice

Perceptions of the criminal justice system were generally negative – especially when people had indirect experiences of hate crimes.

Around a quarter of respondents had contacted the police about a hate crime, while less than 10% had experience with the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) about a hate crime.

- Contact with the police was associated with more negative perceptions for Muslim respondents.
- Contact with the CPS did not significantly affect perceptions about this institution.

Respondents were unlikely to report verbal or online abuse but were very likely to report acts of vandalism and assault to the police.

Younger participants and those less identified with their community were less likely to report hate crimes to the police.

Some participants would not report hate crimes because they felt that it would not help and that they may experience secondary victimisation by the police.

61% of LGB&T and Muslim participants (including those with both direct and indirect experience of hate crime) preferred restorative justice (RJ) as a criminal justice response to hate crimes (i.e. dialogue focused on repairing harm) rather than an enhanced prison sentence. LGB&T participants perceived RJ to be more beneficial to the victim and the offender and were more satisfied with RJ compared to an enhanced sentence.

Community

The more people identified with their community, the angrier they felt about hate crimes and the more they wanted to get involved in combating the harms of hate. Interviews revealed that LGB&T and Muslim people felt connected to their communities at three levels: locally, nationally and globally.

Interview participants felt greater levels of anger and anxiety about hate crimes committed in their local neighbourhood. Some interview participants felt connected to other LGB&T and Muslim people globally through a sense of “shared suffering”.

Interview participants felt angry about hate crimes against other groups but felt less vulnerable and anxious about these compared with hate crimes against their own community.

Implications for supporting targeted communities

The research identified the need:

1. For agencies to have a more comprehensive understanding of the emotions hate crime cause and their effects on behaviours, and to implement measures that carefully aim to reduce targeted communities’ perceptions of threat and to alleviate individuals’ feelings of anger and anxiety, while also reducing individuals’ need to avoid certain locations or to change their appearance.
2. To treat hate crimes as a distinct type of offending, which requires a specific legislative response, including the use and extension of hate crime legislation that treats such crimes more seriously than other offences.
3. For measures that specifically aim to address community harms during the criminal justice process, e.g., via the use of Community Impact Statements during criminal trials, to more fully reflect the harms that hate crimes cause.
4. To increase confidence in the police to counter negative experiences and fears of prejudice towards LGB&T and Muslim communities.
5. To effectively communicate to LGB&T and Muslim communities the policies, practices and support measures that are already in place. For example, there was evidence to suggest that where individuals made use of specially trained officers, or came into contact with an LGB&T liaison officer (for example), they were very satisfied with the way they were treated.