

SME RESEARCH BRIEF

Research Review – Hate Crimes

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Hate crimes make up only 0.1% of all police-reported crimes in Canada (Moreau, 2020). Why then has hate crime prevention and control become an operational priority for a growing number of Canadian police services?

To answer this question, I reviewed relevant Canadian statistics and technical reports, along with select Canadian and international research on hate crime and the police response.

What does the evidence say?

Between 2014 and 2017, police-reported hate crimes in Canada consistently increased, from a low of 611 criminal incidents in 2014 to a high of 878 cases in 2017. In 2018 (the most recent year for which national hate crime data are available), the number of police-reported hate crimes decreased by 13%, for a total of 780 incidents. However, with the exception of 2017, the number of reported hate crimes in 2018 was still higher than any other year in the past decade (Moreau, 2020).

Between 2014 and 2018, race/ethnicity was the most common motivation for police-reported hate/bias crime (on average, constituting about 46% of reported hate crimes), followed by religion (about 36% of reported crimes), sexual orientation (about 11% of reported crimes), and ‘other’ motives (about 6% of reported crimes).

Canada’s population is projected to become increasingly diverse in the coming years, which some scholars predict will lead to continued increases in hate crime over time. Because they affect not just individual victims but also their communities and society more generally, these offences have become the focus of much social and political concern in Canada. Police agencies are increasingly expected to investigate, educate and mitigate a variety of direct and residual impacts associated with hate crime.

Additional considerations

The worrisome actual and projected increases in hate crime notwithstanding, research shows that a majority (about two-thirds) of people who are victimized by hate crime do not, for a variety of reasons, report their victimization to police. As such, data on police-reported hate crimes should be understood to represent a conservative estimate of the true incidence of hate crime in Canada. Working to increase reporting rates is important because hate crimes can have uniquely violent and assaultive characteristics; cause trauma to victims, family, and friends; increase fear of being targeted for future crimes; and can escalate and prompt retaliation.

It is also important that hate crimes be reported to police to ensure that operations are calibrated to the scope of the issue so that police services are best positioned to identify and respond to these occurrences. Currently in Canada (as in other nations), hate crime units tend to be under-resourced, in large part because reporting rates are generally low; this undermines police services' capacity to respond swiftly and effectively to hate crime, support victims and deter potential offenders.

Implications for Practice

Recent years have seen increased efforts on the part of police services across Canada to facilitate the identification, reporting and prosecution of hate crime. Currently, 14 of the 20 largest municipal police services in Canada have dedicated hate crime officers and/or hate crime units, and training on hate crime and related issues is becoming more and more common. In an effort to address the under-reporting of hate crimes, a growing number of police services are also developing innovative methods to encourage the reporting of hate, including a variety of community engagement, partnership and education initiatives, along with protocols designed to quell fears and reassure victimized communities in the wake of hate-motivated crimes and incidents (for examples, see Thompson, Ismail & Couto, 2020).

The unique harms caused by hate crime require specialized attention by law enforcement. In addition to the importance of an emphasis on investigating and prosecuting offenders, research demonstrates the value of community- and reassurance-oriented policing for victims and their broader communities. The benefits of a combined enforcement/community support approach include increased feelings of safety and security in affected communities, along with higher levels of satisfaction with and confidence in the quality of policing provided – all of which are generally associated with increases in both perceived police legitimacy and in the overall reporting of crime.

Key references

Moreau, Greg. (2020). Police-reported Hate Crime in Canada, 2018. Juristat 85-002-X. Accessed at: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/pub/85-002-x/2020001/article/00003-eng.pdf?st=2dAYh6bY>

Thompson, Sara, Feras Ismail & Joe Couto. (2020). *Hate/Bias Crime: A Review of Policies, Practices and Challenges*. Prepared for the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police (OACP), in collaboration with the Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Committee. Available in May 2020 on OACP website.