



organization for
the prevention
of violence

Responding to Hate Crimes and Incidents in Canada

Organization for the Prevention of Violence
Spring 2019
Edmonton, Alberta

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Reporting Hate:

- Statistics and data collection related to hate crimes and incidents should be expanded to better capture the **intersectional elements of hate**. Understanding the intersectional identity of victims will help improve programming and prevention efforts, as well as help organizations who deal with victims of hate to better anticipate the needs of prospective clients.
- **Capturing and publicly sharing the location of hate incidents** will similarly improve the ability of government and civil society to develop responses. This sort of information is relevant to policymakers and practitioners but is not presently readily available.

Responding to Hate:

- **Law enforcement agencies must become both more proactive (to prevent) and responsive to hate crimes and hate incidents.** Especially in racialized communities, the perception that police services do not take these incidents seriously has wide-ranging repercussions on their relationships with police.
- Law enforcement agencies should aim **to supplement training provided to recruits on hate crimes by including modules on this in other specialized courses**, like those offered to members as a part of diversity training programs.
- **Adequate resourcing of hate crimes units is essential** – officers in units we spoke with expressed their feelings that they were overextended and faced structural barriers to engaging in a satisfactory level of proactive outreach.
- **Civil society organizations engaged in responding to hate** – either raising awareness about the impact of hate or providing support to victims, **should receive additional multi-level government support.**

Introduction

After extensive media coverage the national trend of growth in police-reported hate crimes in Canada is well-known to many. The release of the 2017 hate crimes data by Statistics Canada caused alarm after noting a 50 per cent year-over-year rise in national incidents, with the rise driven in large part by a jump in the number of hate-related property crimes (vandalism, graffiti, etc.). Between 2012-2015 there was roughly a 250 per cent increase in police reported hate crimes targeting Canadian Muslims. In 2017 this number increased by a further 150 per cent. That same year Canadian Jews reported a 60 per cent spike in police reported hate crimes - they remain the most impacted religious minority community in Canada.

What is less well-known and cannot be fully measured in the statistical data is how this trend is experienced, first-hand, by the individuals, families and communities who experience hate crimes and incidents directly. The testimonials and opinions of these individuals should be heard by those who are seeking to reform legislation surrounding hate crimes. Targets and victims of hate crimes can aid in the identification of gaps in existing legislation and measures undertaken within the criminal justice system.

The Organization for the Prevention of Violence completed extensive research on the topics of hate motivated violence and hate crimes in Alberta in 2018. During this period the OPV interviewed and conducted focus groups with 124 community members and leaders. A broad cross-section of community leaders from ethno-cultural, newcomer and indigenous communities were consulted. Additionally, 170 interviews were conducted with law enforcement officers, including hate crimes investigators in Edmonton, Calgary, Medicine Hat and Lethbridge. From this research the OPV identified several gaps and areas of challenge in local and national responses to hate crimes.

Issues with Capturing and Understanding Data related to Victimization

Accurately capturing data when measuring hate crimes is challenging, as the way in which the data are recorded does not effectively deal with the intersectional elements of victimization. For example, if a Nigerian-Canadian woman who wears a hijab is targeted, determining whether to code the attack as motivated by religious or racial hatred is not easy, but it may be these particular, overlapping identities that are central to her victimization. Until this issue is somehow better dealt with in crime reporting, it will be difficult to truly grasp the scale, scope and nature of the problem in Canada.

That said, the primary group affected by hate crimes in Alberta (in nominal terms) were the Black community. They were followed by Arab or West Asians (30), Muslims (26), East and Southeast Asians (18), Jewish Albertans (16) and LGBTQ+ (16). It is important to note that different communities tend to have different reporting rates, and therefore this cardinal ranking may or may not reflect actual rates of victimization. For example, there were only four police-reported hate crimes targeting Indigenous Albertans - from our research and interviews with Indigenous leaders in the province this is not an accurate reflection of experiences with hate among First Nation, Metis and Inuit communities. Moreover, these crude rates do not capture the effects of structural hate and racism which disproportionately affect Indigenous peoples.

Respondents tended to describe hate as functioning on two levels: targeted and structural. Individual-level hate refers to direct actions directed at groups or individuals. Example of this are things more commonly associated with hate crimes or incidents: physical violence, threats of violence, graffiti, vandalism, slurs, refusal of service, etc. Conversely, structural hatred or discrimination refers to mechanisms and structures which may not be overt or easy to identify but serve to replicate discriminatory and racist practices. Historically, this includes things like the residential school system, the “sixties scoop”, the internment of Japanese-Canadians during the Second World War, and Canada’s “none is too many” policy towards Jewish refugees in the interwar period.

Individual Experiences

Most individuals interviewed did not identify themselves as having been personally victimized by a hate crime. However, nearly all also said that they had experienced hate incidents including discrimination, been sworn or slurred at, and many said that their places of worship or community centres had also been targeted. Their responses also demonstrated recognition that hate affects people – even those with the same identity – in different ways and operates on different levels.

You have the verbal, the mental, the emotional. The things that are coming your way from different people. Sometimes I remember thinking it's coming from all different types of angles. (Male, Indigenous Leader)

Muslims homes have been vandalized and mosques. We have had hate literature distributed. The events that happen globally if it is perpetuated by someone who claims to be Muslim, we end up paying the price. (Muslim Community Leader)

There is the stuff that is very difficult to deal with and doesn't fall into violent extremism but is the interpersonal anti-Semitism – the jokes, you know. It hasn't happened for a couple of years but the basketball team from the Jewish academy used to have people throw pennies on the court as they were walking on. (Jewish Community Leader)

Community perceptions of victimization closely matched those of law enforcement officers that we interviewed, who identified non-violent criminality as making up the majority of their files, while pointing out that violent incidents tended to target members of the Muslim or LGBTQ+ community.

The majority of things we're dealing with are going to be graffiti related, so whether that's a mosque, a school, a church – swastikas are popping up. One week it'll be one or two, and then nothing for a while. (Law Enforcement Officer)

Jewish and Muslim – if you're going to get hate mail and hate posters, it is going to be one of those two. The actual crime – when I'm looking at it - an assault charge - it's probably more of a mixture between LGBTQ and Muslim. (Law Enforcement Officer)

Intersectionality and the Hijab

A common theme in the research was the intersectional nature of many hate crimes and incidents. Individuals who visibly belonged to more than one targeted group tended to experience a higher level of victimization than others. Specifically, women who chose to wear the hijab – a visible indicator of their faith – were cited as frequent targets. For example, respondents spoke of a common experience - Muslim women being targeted with verbal abuse in grocery stores, gas stations and other retail stores. This trend was not explored fully in our research and represents an area or priority for future activity.

Yes, because not only am I black, Somali, Muslim and immigrant and a woman who covers up, I feel that I am looked at as a target. We are even treated differently than other Muslims from the Middle East. (Muslim Community Leader)

People became more embolden to harassing Muslims, particularly Muslim women. Muslim men are not visibly Muslim, so they aren't attacked as much. (Male, Muslim Youth Leader)

Usually it is the Muslim women that have faced the most harm. (Female, Muslim Leader)

Effects of Hate

A general theme that emerged from the interviews was acknowledgement that victimization – and an associated heightened awareness in one's own background and identity – was creating and

deepening fractures within society, the results of which are wide-ranging. For many, they express concern about the fact that their “Canadian-ness” is being increasingly challenged and eroded by this increase in discrimination and hate. This was a particularly acute concern for youth or individuals who worked closely with youth. Navigating questions of identity and belonging is already hard enough during middle and secondary schooling, having a heightened sense of, and insecurity related to, your identity, makes things significantly harder.

And we say we have freedom of religion, and we do – I still agree with that in Canada but, you know, all of this is affecting the generation coming up and making them have an inferiority complex whereas we’re thinking ourselves as lesser when that shouldn’t be the case – we shouldn’t be perceiving ourselves as lesser than the rest of society.... The youth are still developing their identity – they’re thinking – what I am, or how I am portrayed, is less than everyone else. For our kids that is leading to a problem of confidence. That is something scary. (Male, Muslim Youth Leader)

If there is a specific news report and people in the office are talking about it the next morning, you know it’s a bit uncomfortable. If you have kids for example, people might question if their children will be safe. Will it be safe for them or maybe it will be easier for them not to wear the hijab out? So, a lot of it is indirect, but it still affects the mentality of the people who deal with it. (Male, Muslim Youth Leader)

We want our institutions to be publicly Jewish and we don’t want to live behind fences...we want our kids to wear Magen Daveeds and Kippot if they want to, and for that to go without comment, or worse. (Female, Jewish Community Leader)

Phone calls, bomb threats, mail violence, [it] has shattered the sense of security in the community. People are asking me proactively about security, they’re coming to me to do threat assessments, applying for funding to secure their buildings, asking for training.. (Male, Jewish Leader)

Responding to Hate

Individuals we interviewed also discussed how they often felt as though hate crimes or hate incidents were not taken sufficiently seriously by law enforcement – response times were slow, charges were rarely laid, and community concern in the aftermath often went unaddressed. While there was a general appreciation that many incidents reported were not criminal, people felt as though there was more that law enforcement could or should do.

There’s a lot of graffiti incidents. We have recordings and give it to the police, but it takes months to get anything done. (Male, Muslim Leader)

I believe in the power of community. Sharing information, not holding back information. It struck me that so many agencies don’t share information. It’s sad to see the ego game between RCMP and CSIS. (Male, Jewish Leader)

We also need to do more about taking hate crimes reports more seriously. People get discouraged reporting hate crimes when they know nothing will be done to solve the crime.
(Female, Indigenous Leader)

Police officers also expressed frustration. In many instances, the police will advocate for a charge to be laid, but the prosecutor will decline to proceed. While there is an understandable discomfort with prosecuting these sorts of crimes, the damage done to communities by a consistent failure to proceed with charges is significant. Moreover, this gap – between police and the prosecutor – also influences the perception of law enforcement within certain communities, which can create barriers to future reporting.

Couple of youth – painting swastikas, and recently we found several nooses up in a tree – targeting buildings that were well occupied by minorities – the boy that we charged even said he hates black people and we consulted with the Crown on hate crimes, but it just doesn't meet that threshold. (Law Enforcement Officer)

Conclusion

As seen in the OPV's research on hate, there was near unanimity in the belief that things are getting worse, not better, due in large part to a global political climate, where expressions of discrimination, hate and a broader "us-vs-them" narrative are widely perceived as taking hold. Respondents were dismayed to see this occurring in Canada, a nation whose identity is in large part constructed on the basis of immigration and multiculturalism. The impact of an increasingly polarized social climate was apparent among members of every community that we interviewed.

In the contemporary global climate around hate and extremism, where Jewish and Muslim communities have been subject to horrific levels of violence; for example, as seen in the terrorist attacks on the Muslim community in Quebec City in January 2017, in Pittsburgh at the Tree of Life Synagogue in October 2018 and the Christchurch mosque attacks in March 2019, hate incidents and crime needs to be taken more seriously than ever. The online space is playing a pivotal role in generating acts of hate motivated violence through spreading socially divisive rhetoric and hateful sentiments which in turn fuel extremism. This phenomenon is taking place through multiple interlinked platforms where ideas seeded on popular platforms like Facebook and Twitter lead to the more anonymous and hate filled corners of the Internet (e.g., 8Chan and Gab) where online extremists communities and "influencers" have played an essential role in mobilizing lone actor terrorism. Improving our standards for recording data and identifying and *shutting down influencers and organized hate groups who spread hate both on and offline will need to accompany improved legislative and legal standards* (e.g., changes to Criminal Code or CHRA) in order to have a meaningful impact on this accelerating trend.

The Organization for the Prevention of Violence (OPV) is funded by Public Safety Canada and the City of Edmonton, it brings together academic, community and practitioner knowledge and expertise around the problem of hate motivated violence. Its primary activities are conducting action-oriented research and operating a psycho-social intervention programs from those at risk of engaging with or seeking to disengage with hate motivated violence. The OPV operates in close coordination and cooperation with community and grassroots non-government organizations, the Edmonton Police Service, the City of Edmonton, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), REACH Edmonton and Public Safety Canada.