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CONCLUSION PAPER
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The 'how' and 'why' of hate crime and the implications for mental health practitioners

Key outcomes

In the EU, reports of hate crime have steadily increased over the past decade. This is an alarming development since it can have devastating consequences for the victims and disrupts the harmony between communities within societies, since being a victim of a crime has severe negative psychological and mental impact. On 5 and 6 December, the RAN Mental Health working group meeting on 'The 'how' and 'why' of hate crime and the implications for mental health practitioners' took place in Berlin, Germany. Mental health practitioners, police, local authorities and youth and social workers were invited to discuss the victims and perpetrators perspectives and to share ideas and experiences about possible interventions. Participants also discussed the (psychological) impact of hate crime on society, communities and individuals and the role of (mental health) practitioners in addressing this impact.

Key lessons

- In addition to the psychological effects on the individual and communities, hate crime impacts the broader society. Prejudice, stereotyping and discrimination adversely affect the "healthy" and positive coexistence between different members of a community.

- Most hate crime perpetrators believe that life is unfair to them or their community. They tend not to express their needs and woes that are at the root of their personal trauma. Not only personal, but also collective trauma can be a motivation to use violence.

- Victims of hate crime are more likely to become perpetrators. It is clear that hate crime, if left unaddressed – both legally and mentally, may leave a considerable trauma for both the individual, the family and their community.

- Mental health practitioners need to understand the underlying (socio) psychological dynamics and rational behind these acts. The main focus of mental health professionals is helping people in need, which could be both victims and perpetrators. In this context, trauma-related work with the victims, their families and even within communities is key.

This paper summarises the main conclusions following the discussions and presentations.

Highlights of the discussion

Underlying dynamics of hate crime

There was a general consensus that there are multiple ways to relate dealing with hate crime to the prevention and countering of violent extremism (P/CVE). For example, the underlying mechanisms motivating the perpetrator to use violence or the impacts on individuals, communities and society are similar for hate crime and violent extremism. Hate crime is a serious offense which can have a lasting effect on the person harmed, their family and their community. The current (online) media and political landscape, in particular hate speech[1], was mentioned as contributing to the increase of hate crimes. While a common accepted definition of hate crime is lacking, hate crimes are defined as crimes motivated by LGTBQ+ hatred, racism, xenophobia towards religious minorities, fear/hatred of other ideologies and people with physical or mental diversities. However, there are differences between EU countries on whether they consider hate speech as a hate crime. There is also a difference on the identified risk groups and bias motivation criteria. For example, if hate crime could also be motivated by hatred/disgust towards the homeless or rooted in misogyny and other gender-related hatred. This lack of a common definition brings challenges in the daily practice of practitioners.

The victims

During the meeting, practitioners identified shame, lack of self-care, isolation and low self-esteem as consequences for the victims of hate crime. Since the hatred is directed to a part of someone's identity, that person will need to regain and repair their identity in relation to the conflict. Hate crime not only impacts the 'direct' victim but witnessing discrimination or violence against their in-group can lead to the same psychological distress as the 'direct' victim. It also impacts the community as a whole. Hate crime send messages to members of the victims' social group and family that they are unwelcome and unsafe in the community. In turn, this victimises the entire group and reduces feelings of safety and security.

In addition to the psychological effects on the individual and their community, hate crime also impacts the broader society. Prejudice, stereotypes and discrimination can have adverse effects on the "healthy" and positive coexistence between different members of a community. Participants also mentioned that unattended childhood trauma from hate crime creates community-based trauma bonds. Victimisation also happens on a societal level (e.g. communist regimes in Eastern Europe). It was mentioned that this caused people to feel paranoid and to distrust authorities. They event felt unsafe or anxious with their family or friends. Another possible consequence for the society is a "competition" between victim groups about who has suffered the most. This leads to deepened discrimination between victim groups.

The seriousness of this problem can be seen in the rising antisemitism in France. "The Jewish community has seen a series of attacks targeting people, accounting for 52% of the incidents recorded, with a significant share of physical violence (10%, or 60 incidents recorded)." [2]

As a consequence, Jews are leaving France in considerable numbers or have moved to neighbourhoods with a majority Jewish population.

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[1] *Online hate speech has been linked to increased negative attitudes towards outgroups and to radicalisation. Recent research even links online hate speech with offline hate crime. Evidence is found that online hate speech predicts offline hate crime, e.g., the anti-Muslim messages spread by former US President Donald Trump through social media correlated with the hate crime against Muslims in states with high social media use. There is also evidence that offline hate crime increases online hate, e.g., Moonshot (2018) found that the events in Charlottesville around 'Unite the Right' rally impacted the activity on google where there was a 400% increase in searches indicating a desire to get involved with violent groups.*
[2] See: https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/more-and-more-jews-leaving-france-due-to-anti-semitism/2651089 or https://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/article/french-jews-fleeing-country

The following challenges and gaps were identified during the meeting.

- **Lack of reporting**. There are several explanations for this:

  o Stigma around hate crime.

  o Victims do not realise they are victims and therefore don't report the crime.

  o Victims report to NGOs/CSOs but not to public authorities. There is inadequate data between the NGOs/CSOs and the public authorities.

  o Victims do not feel protected by authorities. For instance, an official report in Spain requires the name of the victim.

- **Lack of adequate victim support** across the EU (including reporting a legal action taken).

  o There is either little or no capacity or attention for the gender dimension of victim support. For instance, there may be no female staff to handle cases involving violence against women.

  o Public authorities need other agencies to help the victims, but there is a big gap between NGO and public authority approaches.

- **Victims might become perpetrators**. It is clear that hate crime, if left unaddressed – both legally and mentally, may result in considerable trauma for both the individual, the family and their community.

  o This trauma could drive them to further isolate and withdraw from general society, creating parallel societies that become a breeding ground for radicalisation.

  o Additionally, it creates further discontent towards authorities. This may create a need for retribution by reciprocal violence and potentially create serious mental health issues.

The perpetrators

Psychological factors might influence someone's vulnerability or susceptibility for extremist groups or narratives. This can also result in committing hate crime. The psychological state of feeling alienated, excluded, discriminated against and detached from society can become a risk factor. What most perpetrators of hate crime have in common is the belief that their life is unfair to them or their community. Generally, they are not expressing their needs and woes rooted in their personal traumas. Not only personal, but also collective trauma, can motivate the use of violence. When someone is raised with the idea that revenge for the collective suffering is justified, they might resort to violence as a way to regain control and status. At the societal level, gender role pressure (e.g. men as a protector of the community or family) further promotes this use of violence. Another driver for hate crime mentioned during the meeting is moral narcissism. Participants noted that perpetrators may consider themselves as extreme or superior moral beings in order to justify the violence.

One observation by practitioners is that perpetrators tend to repeat the narratives they hear in the media. Often, these relate to feelings of things/privileges being taken away from them (e.g. jobs, housing) while other groups in their belief get everything (e.g. refugees). The prejudice against out-groups and dehumanisation of unfamiliar groups will be amplified by political and public discourse where members of these groups are scapegoated for societal problems. These discourses further trigger the individuals' perception of threat. This in turn fuels fear, ignorance or anger which may lead to targeted aggression against the out-group.

Some of the main challenges mentioned during the meeting include:

- How to deal with the perpetrator when he/she is also a victim (e.g. due to generational trauma).

- How to provide physical and psychological security and resilience as a mental health practitioner.

- Perpetrators not recognising they are perpetrators and portraying themselves as victims. Self-victimisation is a common strategy.

- Early detection is difficult (e.g. when does hate speech spill over into violence).

- While different agencies should be involved in the reintegration of the perpetrator, which agency is accountable for what?

- The way the media and politicians present information by normalising violent narratives, hate speech and in some outlets the creation of a post-truth narrative.

- Public authorities are not efficiently protecting victims of hate crime/speech. This could make them more attracted to extremist groups/narratives or even become perpetrators themselves.

Recommendations

The role of mental health practitioners

From a strictly mental health perspective, terrorism and hate crime are not necessarily symptoms of underlying mental disorders. Violence fuelled by hatred can be a political tool with the aim to disrupt a community or a society as a whole. Yet on an individual level, mental health practitioners need to understand the underlying (social) psychological dynamics and rational behind these acts. The primary focus of mental health professionals is helping people in need, which could be both victims and perpetrators. Within this context this means trauma-related work with victims, their families and even within communities. Although the core role of any mental health professional is the care for his/her patients and their families, other roles of the mental health professionals concern the protection of society from violence. They are also required to prevent individuals with mental illness from taking part in serious criminal acts and overall from becoming victims of criminal (aggressive) acts against themselves.[3]

Inspiring methods

Group modules – biography work

Six group modules, in combination with individual appointments, to reduce hate speech and improvement of public discussion and generating insights and responsibility to avoid punishment. Offenders have the choice to participate in the programme or go to court. Hence the programme is voluntary, but with consequences. The six modules consist of the following.

- Freedom of opinion: formation of opinion, expression of opinion while respecting the law.

- Discourse competency (psycho-educational programme): knowledge about the harms of hate speech, the benefits of decency and learning constructive conversation skills.

- Offense processing: analysis of the offense, improving impulse control and considered action. For this the individual has to share what they have done with the group and take responsibility. After they do so, they often have a feeling of relief.

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[3] See: https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/bjpsych-bulletin/article/protesting-loudly-about-prevent-is-popular-but-is-it-informed-and-sensible/7E71441E52BEFEFBC32C9CF2F0563109

- Media competency: recognising attempts of manipulation and distinguishing between fake and real news.

- Discrimination: knowing the legal situation and recognising the effects on victims, perpetrators and society. for example by coming in contact with the people they are harming.

- Change of perspective: enabling encounters and engaging with different points of view.

Restorative Justice

One tool available to practitioners that works with both the victim and the perpetrator is restorative justice. Restorative justice helps the understanding and responding to the relationship where harm was done. Both the perpetrator and victim are left with their own narratives. Restorative justice brings them together and provides an opportunity for both sides to heal and move on. Some key principles of restorative justice include:

- voluntary participation of all parties who engage in this process;

- impartial (or multi-partial) role of the facilitator supporting all parties in a fair and equal way;

- creation of a safe space of open and non-judgmental sharing;

- flexibility to tailor the process to meet the specific needs and requests of both sides.

For restorative justice, the facilitator makes a significant effort to prepare. During the preparation phase, the facilitator asks both sides to clearly articulate their motivations and expectations before engaging in a potential direct encounter. Facilitators undergo standard skills training but also may complete training on specific forms of crime (e.g., hate and violent extremism) or vulnerabilities (e.g., trauma, historical abuse). The outcomes of restorative justice are:

- Education: breakdown of stereotypes, attitudes and world views that foster hate.

- Support, empowerment and voice: people affected by hate crime want to be heard and taken seriously, but this is often not the reality. A restorative meeting allows the harmed to have their voices heard in a controlled secure environment which can be deeply empowering. People who have committed a crime want to apologise, reintegrate and ultimately move on with their lives.

- Meeting needs: social acknowledgement and support, stablishing a sense of power and control over their lives, and having the opportunity to tell their stories in their own way.

In polarised settings, including cases of hate crime and violent extremism, situations are characterised by black and white, "us versus them" thinking, negative stereotyping, prejudice and feelings of distrust. Restorative dialogue and storytelling have the potential to build trust and shift relationships in a positive direction. They can create channels to restore respectful and constructive communication.

Further recommendations for practitioners

- **Raise awareness and sensibilisation of hate crime** by disseminating relevant practices. Communicate through storytelling to make messages easy to understand.

- **Reflective practice with two people (victim and perpetrator).** Listen to different perspectives to understand who is being affected and how and what is being done to make things right.

- **Recognise the harm caused** by using a restorative approach.

- Be aware of **triggers** that undermine a therapeutic and restorative sessions.

- Consider the **language used and the location** in which restorative practices take place.

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- As a practitioner, try to be **empathetic to perpetrators** while being aware of their human rights.

- **Victims have the right to choose.** The best person to decide if Restorative Justice is suitable for someone who has experienced hate crime, is the person themselves. It is true that victims of hate crime can be vulnerable and need to be protected from further emotional harm. This is also the role of the facilitator in a Restorative Justice process.[4]

- **Building community resilience**. Communities collaborating with law enforcement to expel extremist groups. Building a victim community makes it possible to deal with it together. Community support for victims is important.

Recommendations policy support

- **Strengthened cooperation between CSOs, law enforcement and judicial actors.** Tackling hate crime involves enhanced reporting, investigation, prosecution, and prevention (RIPP), and parallel victim support, necessitating the involvement of a range of public and civil society actors. The division of responsibilities and competencies of the actors is essential in terms of trustful relationships with victims and methods or instruments that can be employed. Careful coordination of these separate activities must be conducted in order to ensure their complementarity and comparability of data gathered. It is also important to support the investigation, prosecution and reporting through mechanisms such as third-party reporting.

- **Strengthen Victim Support.** Adequate victim support is a matter of ensuring, protecting and enforcing their rights as per the Victims' Rights Directive. Victim support is also essential in building trust between relevant agencies and victims, which must be enhanced in order to boost reporting rates and contribute to more effective investigations, prosecutions, and long-term prevention. Communication and cooperation between public authorities and CSOs is important. This is due to the nature of the relationships between CSOs and victims, as well as CSOs and minority groups which are more vulnerable to hate crime. As such, it is a large asset in encouraging reporting on the part of victims.

- **Improved reporting procedures.** In terms of hate crime ("the most severe expression of discrimination") that goes unreported, victims are left without opportunities to redress and perpetrators are never brought to justice. Accurate reporting is also essential in ensuring that the scale and urgency of the issue is understood and sufficient resources are dedicated to tackling it. A range of elements currently complicate the reporting of hate crime and incidents of discrimination, including a lack of a standardised definition of hate crime across relevant bodies in each Member State, a reluctance on the part of victims to report hate crime, and inadequate data sharing between CSOs and law enforcement.

- **Enhanced practitioner training.** This specifically relates to the different aspects of combating hate crime. These include reporting, investigating and prosecuting, as well as victim assistance and inter-agency cooperation.

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[4] Reference Professor Mark Walters, Hate crime and Restorative Justice. Also recent podcast by Mark Walters https://open.spotify.com/episode/0WQKrUau431Wo6K1AkgS7I?si=nNxBHLXCQhS82ZEbphGEug&nd=1

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Relevant practices

1. **Stand Up Against Hate** There is room for improvement at the European level in the management of hate crime and discrimination against people or communities based on gender, race, sexuality or other aspects, as well as in the response given by the public authorities of European countries. STAND-UP aims to establish a public authority-led, multi-agency model for countering hate crime.

2. **Why me? Transforming Lives through Restorative Justice** A national charity delivering and promoting Restorative Justice for everyone affected by crime and conflict. Many victims of crime feel side-lined by the criminal justice system. Restorative Justice gives them the chance to ask questions about the incident, explain the impact it had on them, and have a say in how the harm can be repaired. This restorative dialogue transforms lives by helping people affected by crime to recover. It also helps people who commit crime to stop.

3. **Dialogue not hate,** **Respect.lu** The objective of dialogue (as opposed to hate) aims to redirect writers of hate speech to more respectful forms of communicating their opinions and ideas. They do this by discussing legal norms and legal limits and the harmful effects of hate speech.

Follow-up

- This event can be followed up by a joint event with RAN Mental Health and RAN Families, Communities and Social Care to focus on the role of mental health practitioners in family and community resilience.

- RAN Practitioner training for practitioners to understand the underlying psychological dynamics of hate speech and hate crime and to understand the role each discipline plays.

- RAN Policy support could address the topic focussing on the role of policy makers in the political discourse

Further reading

Making Restorative Justice happen for hate crime across the country

European Forum on RJ Practice Paper on Restorative Justice and Violent Extremism

Safe.To.Be Handbook on working with LGBT+ hate crime

Making Restorative Justice happen for hate crime in the UK – policy and practice

Learning Disability and Autism – 3 videos – cuckooing, mate crime and verbal abuse

Working in multi-lingual settings – cultural translation, videos and more

Restorative Justice for acts of Violent Extremism – EFRJ Policy and Practice papers

The neuroscience of Restorative Justice – TED Talk by Dan Reisel

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