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Hate crime in the online/offline environment

Dahlstrand, Karl; Olsson, Patrik

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Patrik Olsson & Karl Dahlstrand. Lund University

The prevalence of hate crime in the merged online/offline environment draw attention due to a political climate where populist and extremist political movements are gaining ground. The visibility of hate crime activities has provoked public debates around the problem and engages scholars, organizations, agencies and institutes concerning this phenomenon. For various reasons, it is complicated to determine the actual extent of hate crime in its different shapes and forms. According to the hate crime statistics in Sweden, published annually by the National Council for Crime Prevention (Brå), "hate crimes with xenophobic/racist motives made up the largest proportion, followed by hate crimes motivated by sexual orientation." (Brå 2014:14) The number of Swedish police reports with an identified hate crime motive was estimated to 5 508, in 2013. (Brå 2014:14)

The rapid pace of information technology has contributed to produce new venues for purveyors of hate, spreading their rhetoric of intolerance in the online environment as well as in the offline environment. The expansion of hate and hate groups are most noticeable on the Internet e.g. social media, and cyberhate as threat has become a challenge to most people and even young people during their formative years. (Perry & Olsson 2009)

The attention surrounding hate crimes has led to political demands for changes in the law. The judiciary has also been given additional resources to prevent and prosecute persons guilty of hate crimes. In addition, the phenomenon has been noted in a number of other political, media and social contexts. Since hate crimes are often related to the subject to a criminal act, it is a complex concept, which also makes it difficult to gain knowledge of how common hate crime really is.

We will, in this paper, examine the official crime statistics, that show that the reporting rates for hate crime are quite stable and even slightly decreasing (Brå 2014:14). According to the same crime statistics the Internet is not the predominant environment where hate crimes are committed, the approach is not dependent on digital technology, but most hate crimes are committed in other settings like at home, the work place or in a public place and directly to the victim.

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