**Hate Crimes in America**

Heather Murray

Salt Lake Community College

CJ 1010: Introduction to Criminal Justice

Professor Terpstra

August 6, 2020

**Introduction**

Are hate crimes rising in America, as the news would lead us to believe, or are they falling as we would all hope? In this paper we will first discuss what a hate crime is and who the potential victims of a hate crime are. We will then look at the number of single-bias hate crimes between the years 2014 and 2018, and examine whether the trend in the data shows an increase or a decrease in the number of hate crimes committed. Lastly, we will explore possible reasons for why the data is trending in the direction it is going, and the validity of the data that has been reported to the Uniform Crime Reporting (URC) Program.

**Hate Crimes in America**

A hate crime is defined as “a crime in which the defendant intentionally selects a victim, or in the case of a property crime, the property that is the object of the crime, because of the actual or perceived race, color, religion, national origin, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, disability, or sexual orientation of any person” (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2016, p. 1). A victim of a hate crime isn’t necessarily a person. “The victim of a hate crime may be an individual, a business/financial institution, a government entity, a religious organization, or society/public as a whole” (US Department of Justice). This means that if an offender chooses to vandalize a local gas station because he knows that it is owned by a family of Jewish decent, and his motivation is to hurt this family because they are Jewish, this is considered a hate crime.

There are many different motivators for hate crimes. As I mentioned earlier, the race, color, religion, origin, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, disability, or sexual orientation of a person can cause the perpetrator of a hate crime to act out towards their victim. Below is a graph showing the trend in the total number of single-bias hate crimes reported between the years 2014 and 2018. I’ve separated each category by the type of bias the crime was motivated by in order to allow for better understanding of the trend in single-bias hate crimes.

(US Department of Justice)

By looking at this graph, it would seem that hate crimes are on the rise. We’ve started with a total number of single-bias hate crimes motivated by race and ethnicity in 2014 of 3,871 and ended with 4,954 in 2018. However, when comparing the total number of single-bias hate crimes with the number of agencies participating in the program that actually reported one or more incidents, we get a slightly different picture. As the number of agencies that reported an incident increases, the number of incidents also increase. Is this increase in incidents because more hate crimes are occurring, or is it because more agencies are reporting the incidents that have already been occurring the whole time?

(US Department of Justice)

Deciding whether or not hate crimes are rising is a difficult task. We have to take into account factors such as reporting by “city, county, college and university, state, tribal, and federal law enforcement agencies [is] voluntarily submitted” to the URC Program. This means that we don’t have a complete picture. In the year 2018 only 16,039 agencies participated in the URC Program (US Department of Justice). Of those agencies, only 2,026 reported any hate crimes. Does this mean that hate crimes only occurred in the jurisdictions of 2,026 agencies, or does that mean that only 2,026 agencies decided to report the hate crimes that occurred? Seeing as thought the reporting of hate crimes by these agencies is completely voluntary, we will never know unless we gather data about which agencies choses to report these hate crimes and why they chose to do so, which seems quite redundant. Questions such as this make it difficult to say definitively whether or not hate crimes are on the rise.

Other issues arise in the validity of the data, such as the fact that many incidences of hate crimes go unreported. With data showing that “4 persons were murdered, and 9 were raped” in 2014 due to hate crimes, it is easy to understand why this is (US Department of Justice). There is a lot of shame a victim can experience after being victimized. Inner conflict, such as feeling as if they should have done something to prevent being victimized can arise, or fear of further conflict and victimization can also be in the forefront of a victim’s thoughts. These types of dilemmas within the victim can often lead to letting the incident of the hate crime go unreported. This also effects the validity of the data we’re looking at.

Another issue that arises when trying to analyze the validity of hate crime data available is the fact that hate crimes can often be indistinguishable from similar crimes of that are not motivated by bias. Did the boy down the road throw a rock through your window on accident, because he was angry with your family, or because he didn’t like the fact that a white family moved into a predominantly Hispanic neighborhood that he felt ownership of? It is hard to differentiate hate crimes from other crimes, especially if the victim and/or offender chooses not to speak with the police. If the only information the police have is that a teenage youth through a rock through your window, they are not going to jump to the conclusion that a hate crime was committed, and rightly so!

These issues aside, the trend that we’re seeing is that a slight rise in the occurrence of hate crimes is occurring. This could be due to the fact that America is becoming increasingly diverse. When cultures clash it can be difficult, tensions can rise, and people can make poor choices. Hate crimes regarding race and religion make up over half of all hate crimes. This is a trend we saw in all the years we examined, with 2014 having only 5,462 single-bias motivated hate crimes and 2018 having 7,036 (US Department of Justice). Race and ethnicity are so deeply rooted and how we identify ourselves and others, it is easy for some to fall prey to an ‘us versus them’ mentality. It would make sense that racially or ethnically motivated hate crimes occur the most frequently.

**Conclusion**

Hate crimes are a difficult topic to pin down. It isn’t easy to answer the question of whether or not hate crimes are on the rise. Hate crimes can have a variety of motivations for those who perpetrate them, and those who are victimized by a hate crime can have many different motivations for obscuring the truth or not reporting it at all. Hate crime data has its limitations, such as voluntary reporting by government agencies, victims who chose not to report what has happened to them, and hate crimes being difficult to distinguish from other crimes. However, with the data we have available it is easy to see an increase in the occurrence of hate crimes.

References

International Association of Chiefs of Police. (2016, September). Investigation of Hate Crimes Concepts and Issues Paper. Retrieved June 4, 2020, from <https://www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/2018-08/HateCrimesPaper2016v2.pdf>

US Department of Justice. (2018, September 10). UCR Publications. Retrieved June 4, 2020, from https://www.fbi.gov/services/cjis/ucr/publications#Hate-Crime Statistics