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Exploring third party reporting across categories of hate in Tyne and Wear

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Introduction

Research was carried out with 'Arch', a third party hate incident reporting scheme in the North East of England, through which we were given access to data concerning reported and recorded incidents collected in Sunderland and Newcastle between 2005-2015. The data set comprises 3908 incidents in total, making this the largest data set of its kind in the UK. The data was cleaned to allow for statistical analysis defining the data through key variables including categories of hate incident (racist/religious based, homophobic/transphobic and disablist). This allowed observations regarding: similarities and differences between incident types in this region; the value of this type of model for recording and responding to hate incidents/crimes; and consideration of the role of frontline organisations, including Arch, in challenging hate incidents/crime.

Arch

Arch is funded by local authorities in the Tyne and Wear area of the NE region. In 2002 the project began as a racist incident reporting phone line, but in 2004 partnerships were developed with Northumbria Police, Victim Support and local charities to increase the reporting scope. In 2005 ARCH (Agencies against Racist Crime and Harassment) developed into a community engagement agency with an ethos of identifying concentrations of incidents and developing training around conflict management. In 2008 the project started to collect information on incidents directed at those from lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or Trans (LGBT) and disabled communities. By 2009 the details of religious based incidents were also recorded.

Methods

Descriptive statistics were used in the form of cross-tabulation tests to examine the frequency distribution of cases when examining the correlation between two or more variables. Two or more variable frequency distributions are analysed using a chi-square statistic to discover whether variables are statistically independent or whether they are associated. In addition, interpretation of data was contextualised with reference to the experiences of those collating this data.

Challenges of recording and interpretation

There were challenges encountered when conducting the statistical analysis which related to a lack of standardisation in data collection between the two cities. This included different levels of detail relating to victimised persons including in some cases absence of gender, 'race' and

ethnicity, impairment type, faith and sexuality. This hampered the ability to make more accurate assessments of the experiences of specific groups that fell under the broadly categories of hate already outlined. As a consequence of this research, demographic data are now being more directly addressed in data collection practices.

Key findings

Comparing data sources

When compared against nationally collected statistics based on police recorded incidents, the data revealed a very similar balance of reporting. For example, the vast majority of reported incidents through Arch across the period fell under the 'race' category (82%) – directly matching the proportion of racist incidents recorded by the police nationally between 2014-15. Four per cent were recorded as religious based incidents, 10% as homophobic, 0.1% transphobic and 4% as disablist – also very similar to police recorded incidents. This can be contrasted with the balance between categories as seen in the Crime Survey of England and Wales, where homophobic incidents make up 13% and disablist 32% of all incidents (2012-2015). This may suggest that issues of under-reporting of religious, homophobic, transphobic and disablist incidents/crimes in particular may still be of concern through this model of reporting and may reflect the more recent attention to these categories of hate.

Hidden incidents picked up through third party reporting

When reporting through Arch victimised persons have the choice of whether they want the police to know of the incident or not. This is a defining feature of third party reporting and this option appears important as 36.1% of all incidents through Arch in this period were not reported to or followed up by the police. This is particularly the case for homophobic/transphobic (36.5%) and racist/religious incidents (36.3%) and slightly less so for disablist incidents (29.5%). In relation to racist and religious-based incidents, under-reporting to the police continues despite the fact that such incidents are more likely than other incidents to be followed up with an investigation. Overall, a considerable proportion of those incidents not reported to the police (44%) involved offensive and abusive language, while 18% involved coercive and threatening behaviour – together constituting 62% of these incidents. These were then mostly non-physical or non-material forms of violence that had by-passed the criminal justice system, incidents which are not picked up by the police's official statistics.

Types of incidents

Across the data, the majority of incidents (54%) fall under either 'offensive/abusive language' (30 %) and 'coercive/threatening behaviour' (24%). Again, those acts which *may not* be criminal, may not be perceived as 'violent' or perhaps assumed not to be criminal are those that are most often reported. However, it is also clear that there are some key differences in incident type between different categories of hate. In relation to 'race' and religion, it is more likely for incidents to fall under more overtly violent and criminal offences such as 'material damage' (18% of incidents) and 'physical attacks' (14%). In addition, while the levels of 'mediated incidents' (threats using technology or in writing) is relatively low overall (9%), for racist and religious-based incidents there has been a dramatic tripling rise in reporting between 2012-2015 from 6% to 18%. While we do not have the details through this data, it would be reasonable to suggest that the rise of social media may account for a significant proportion of this increase. While offensive and abusive language is the most common form of incident across categories (29%), for those targeted on the basis of

perceived sexuality, this seems to be much more significant than for other groups (43%). In addition, while coercive and threatening behaviour is often recorded across the experiences of different victimised groups (24%), it makes up a larger proportion of incidents for those victims identified as disabled (30%).

Geography

Data was made available at ward level and concentrations of reported incidents were spatially uneven. However, incidents were also recorded in all wards across all years, illustrating the pervasive character of hate incidents/crimes. In relation to racist/religious-based incidents, Newcastle reported higher concentrations of incidents in the wards of Byker (14%), Walker (13%), Elswick (12%) and Benwell & Scotswood (13%). For Sunderland the primary concentrations were in Millfield (city centre) (16%) and Hendon (15%). What these areas primarily share is a history of economic decline and, subsequently, higher than average levels of deprivation. To some extent this may be the result of the tensions thrown up when demographic change takes place alongside ongoing social, economic and cultural marginalisation.[1] However, it is important to note that there is not a perfect correlation with deprivation and certainly not with other demographic measurements such as levels of ethnic diversity. Neither do we have information about the addresses of perpetrators. Other external influences such as the role of the media, mainstream politicians, and the spatially uneven penetration of far-right organisations also need to be considered in accounting for such patterns. The distribution of disablist incidents has a comparable geographical profile with that outlined above, indicating that there may be similar factors at work. The spatial analysis for homophobic and transphobic incidents reveals a far weaker correlation with deprivation, and much greater concentrations away from residential areas and towards more central areas of both cities. This may be a reflection of the increased visibility of the LGBT community in such night-time leisure spaces as the 'Pink Triangle' in the city centre of Newcastle. Our data on time trends also suggests that this community may be at risk of becoming victimised when travelling back to Sunderland from Newcastle in the early hours of the morning.

Reporting agencies

Across all categories of hate, local council services are the most important agency type (35%). This is particularly the case for those incidents reported on the basis of 'race' and religion (37%). This may be connected to the visibility of local council services, drawn upon by those in marginal social groups. Despite the fact that third party reporting is seen to offer alternative opportunities of reporting, the level of police involvement still remains important across categories, but particularly for those affected by disablist incidents (26%). Despite the focus and efforts of Arch, reporting to third sector agencies was limited, especially for incidents reported on the basis of 'race' and religion and disability. For those reporting homophobic and transphobic incidents this reporting route was more significant (15%). Educational institutions, housing associations and Victim Support also all played important roles as reporting agencies across categories of hate.

Politics of reporting

Across all categories of hate, Victim Support (VS: a national charity) played a key role in recording incidents (18% of all incidents), particularly for those reporting homophobic and transphobic incidents (24%). As with other agencies, the future existence of VS and participation in Arch has been increasingly affected by both political change and conditions of austerity. Despite its clear demonstration of effectiveness, the future role of VS has been

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[1] As noted in the characteristics of Brexit voters: see NEREF Research Briefing 8

compromised by decisions at the regional policing level resulting in VS being replaced by a new agency which is not independent of the police. The ability of other organisations to play a more active role has also been severely affected by financial cutbacks passed down from national government. In addition the character of the model of Arch itself has been severely changed due to the absence of funding to support those workers involved at local authority level. This has resulted in a switch from building of trust and relationships with community-based organisations to a purely data collection system. At the same time as the disappearance of staff and the changes in the model, there has been a considerable decline in the numbers of reported incidents. In 2012 the number of incidents reported had risen to 816 per year, but has declined to just 64 a year in 2015: this of course, does not reflect a decline in the number of incidents but in those reported.

Conclusion

Our analysis identified similarities and differences between the experiences of different victimised communities, but also who is reporting to whom on the basis of what kind of incident. There are some interesting trends suggesting that those reporting 'race'/faith and disability hate incidents are most likely to be reporting incidents that are occurring near/within their homes/neighbourhoods and incidents that are most physically threatening/injurious. In contrast, those reporting hate incidents based on sexuality or trans gender identity, are most likely to report verbal and threatening hate incidents and to report them occurring away from their homes/neighbourhoods in the city centres of either Newcastle or Sunderland.

As a piece of 'action research' this has allowed Arch to think about how they could improve recording practices and has led to the now standardised collection of identity based variables such as sexuality and faith that were absent from the original database. While it is acknowledged that there are areas which could be further developed, such as the greater involvement of third sector organisations, it is clear that Arch have helped to support individuals and communities, including (but not limited to) those who do not want to report incidents to the Police. There is still some discrepancy between the rates of incidents being reported to the police and the rates of police investigation with those reporting disability hate incidents being least likely to have their reports investigated. Raising awareness amongst police about the importance of investigating hate incidents would seem to be a priority, especially in relation to their understanding of disability hate.

Without the outreach and engagement work which has mirrored the collection of the data, the problematisation of various forms of violence targeting stigmatised and marginalised communities may risk disappearing off the local radar. Working with those communities who are most directly affected is crucial to dealing with these issues. The disappearance of the human connections between local authorities and communities themselves is a major barrier to reporting and future work on hate incidents would benefit from being locally based with dedicated community and/or outreach workers to facilitate building relationships with and between communities.