



HATE | CRIMES | WORKING | GROUP

PRESS RELEASE: Hate Crimes Abound across South Africa, but are Poorly Documented

New research by the Hate Crimes Working Group (HCWG) shows worrying trends: there is limited and inconsistent documentation of hate crimes in the country, which makes these crimes harder to combat. Despite various advocacy efforts by civil society organisations, real knowledge, expertise and thorough documentation in addressing hate crimes is lacking across all sectors in all provinces.

A hate crime is defined as a criminal act committed against people, property, or an organisation that is motivated in whole or part by prejudice because of the group to which the victim belongs. Examples of hate crimes in South Africa include sexual orientation- and gender-based violence against Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered or Intersex (LGBTI) persons; religious victimisation; and violence against foreign nationals.

At present, hate crime data is gathered haphazardly by different organisations to address their unique needs, which unfortunately impairs the presentation of coherent and conclusive data to government. To address this shortcoming, the HCWG developed a multi-sectoral draft monitoring form (the first of its kind internationally), to capture data across several hate crime categories, including nationality, sexual orientation, race and ethnicity. This standardised form is needed to collate available data and monitor the extent of hate crimes in various sectors, so as to increase government's awareness of the types of hate crimes occurring in South Africa and improve policy and strategies for addressing hate crimes.

Based on 394 interviews in the Eastern Cape, Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo and Western Cape, preliminary research led by UNISA's Professor Juan Nel to pilot the monitoring form shows that the average age of victims is 31 years old, and most victims resided in a township area, completed secondary education and were unemployed.

With regard to race, the research showed 76% of victims were Black, 11% were Coloured, 7% were White and 2% were Asian. Victims included mostly females (52%) followed by 47% males and 1% intersex. Regarding gender, 48% of victims identified as female, 45% identified as male and 7% identified as transgender. The majority of victims were heterosexual (69%), 29% were gay/lesbian and 2% were bisexual. 52% of victims were single and 31% were married. Most of the victims were Christian (61%), whilst 23% practised Islam and 16% were from other religions.

The findings show that most hate crimes incidents occurred between 18h00 and 23h59 (49%). Sixty-three percent of the incidents included physical violence, 59% included verbal abuse whilst 44% included rape and robbery. Incidents were related to an individual's nationality (49%) and sexual orientation (49%) as well as gender expression and race. Most victims received support from an NGO/CBO (55%), friends (48%) and family (38%). Whilst other individuals witnessed the incidents (61%) only 19% offered assistance. Eighty-one percent (81%) of victims reported an emotional impact following the incident. Impact on various levels of the victim's daily functioning was reported.

Thirty-eight percent of offenders were 27-37 years and 28% were between 16 and 26 years of age. Most of the offenders were unknown to the victims (68%). Reportedly 47% of offenders were law enforcement officials while 34% were people from the community. Except for the category "Other" where there were an average of three (3) female offenders, categories relating to Foreign Nationals and LGBTI sectors averaged 3 male offenders per incident. Eighty-seven percent of the victims were on their own at the time of the incident.

The majority of cases (54%) were not reported to the police. In cases that were reported, the majority of victims indicated that the police were helpful and supportive (76%) and that they also received supportive medical assistance. Forty-eight percent reported the incident to an NGO.

Based on the preliminary research, the draft monitoring form will be revised and a user guide will be developed for easier use. Training will also be offered to participating organisations and an online version will be created.

The research was funded by the Open Society Foundation for South Africa (OSF-SA) and Humanistic Institute for the Development of the South (HIVOS) MAGI Fund, with ongoing support from the Department of Psychology at UNISA.

The HCWG is a multi-sectoral network of CSOs established to spearhead advocacy and reform initiatives pertaining to hate crimes in South Africa and the region. It seeks to contribute towards sound national policy and legislative interventions to combat hate crimes through speedy enactment of comprehensive hate crimes laws; improving the policing of, and judicial responses to hate crimes; and assisting in the development of effective mechanisms to monitor hate crimes incidents. See <http://hcwg.ipt.co.za/> or contact Iole Matthews iolem@iafrica.com

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