

"Being you is not a crime. Targeting you is."

Researching hate crime in Tyne and Wear

Background

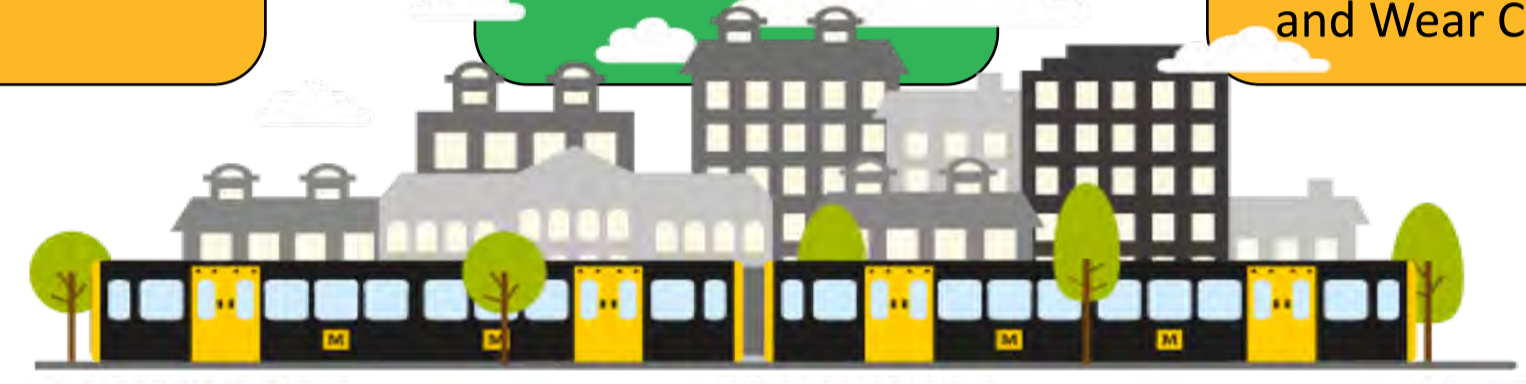
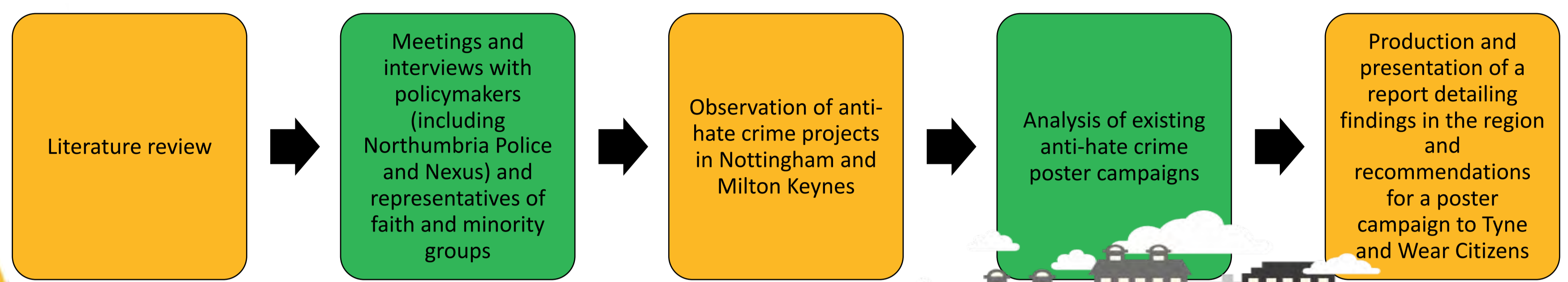
'Hate crime' is now a widely recognised concept in both the media and criminal justice system. What distinguishes hate crimes from other offences is that they are perceived (either by the victim or a witness) to be **driven by hostility or intolerance**. A hate crime can occur in many forms, including verbal abuse, harassment and assault. Currently in the UK, there are five 'protected characteristics' that are allowed protection under hate crime laws. These are: disability, religion, sexual orientation, race and transgender identity.

For many perpetrators, hate crime is used as a **tool of intimidation** with the intent to subordinate the chosen victim and the community to which they belong. Subsequently, hate crime is found to have a more profound and damaging impact on its victims than other crimes; many victims experience a heightened fear of revictimisation whilst unrelated members of the community are sent the message that they are equally at risk and do not belong. Legislation exists to reflect the enhanced impact hate crimes have on its victims; thus, **perpetrators of hate crime receive harsher penalties** than that given to those committing parallel non-hate crimes

The relationship between hate crimes and broader systems of oppression means sociology has a lot to offer hate studies – a widely under-researched area of criminal justice.

Project aim: To assess the causes and motivations of hate crime in Tyne and Wear and create a set of recommendations that will inform a poster campaign to be produced by Tyne and Wear Citizens and distributed across public transport in the North East.

Methodology



Recommendations for a poster campaign

Following the EU Referendum, the UK government identified public transport as an emerging 'high risk environment' for hate crime (Home Office, 2016). A research study conducted by Walters (2014) found that over 70% of hate crime victims will avoid certain locations as a result of the incident they experienced. Public transport plays a huge role in enabling travel in the North East; if members of the public feel unable to use public transport due to feeling unsafe, the implications can be catastrophic and lead to social isolation. This year, 158.5 million passenger journeys have been made across all modes of public transport in Tyne and Wear (nexus.org.uk, 2018); a poster campaign with this audience has the potential to make a tangible impact on viewers. Suggestions for poster content include: **posters designed by children, face-to-face posters, and posters illustrating a situational timeline.**

Findings in Tyne and Wear

Time spent with different communities in Tyne and Wear has shown that hate crime is experienced by a wide variety of social groups in the region; **the visibility of the hijab** makes Muslim women likely targets for hate crime perpetrators. Muslim women in the region have expressed that Islamophobic rhetoric is something they experience daily but official statistics held by Northumbria Police do not reflect this.

As **hate crime is underreported**, existing data collected by Northumbria Police will inevitably be inadequate in attaining a full understanding of which groups are most frequently targeted in hate crimes. Subsequently, it would be unreasonable to expect focused efforts solely on tackling hate crime against Muslim women whilst other groups are being targeted.

Thus, to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the scale and primary targets of hate crimes in Tyne and Wear, my recommendations for a poster campaign focus on encouraging the reporting of any instance of hate crime and placing the topic in the spotlight to help **widen debate** and reinforce a consensus that **hateful behaviour is unacceptable**. Any increase in reported incidents would aid all policymakers in tackling hate crime; a greater understanding of where hate crime occurs and to whom will allow more focused campaigns to be devised in the future, whilst also enabling police and governing bodies to dedicate greater resources to the tackling of hate crime in the North East.

Equally, **solidarity within a community** against hate crime is of inevitable benefit to those targeted and is crucial in any effort to combat hate crime. However, many of the current initiatives in Tyne and Wear **focus solely on supporting the victim**. Whilst this is essential, it is only of temporary benefit to a victim and must not be confused with a means of tackling hate crime because it **does not implement long term change** nor does it prevent the occurrence of future incidents. To get to the crux of the issue, research must be done to gain a better understanding of the perpetrators of hate crime in Tyne and Wear and their motivations.

"I've literally been spat at walking into college when I'm wearing my hijab, by a couple of teenage boys. I didn't even bother saying anything because... what can you say?"
- Saira, 17

"I'm not allowed to leave the house on my own any more without Lesley [carer] – the kids on the estate always laugh at me and throw drinks bottles to try and trip me up because of how I look when I'm walking."
- Liv, 29

"I have experienced LGBT hate in college, when working as a volunteer, in the supermarket, on the street, on public transport and even through the wall from a neighbour."
- Peter, 33

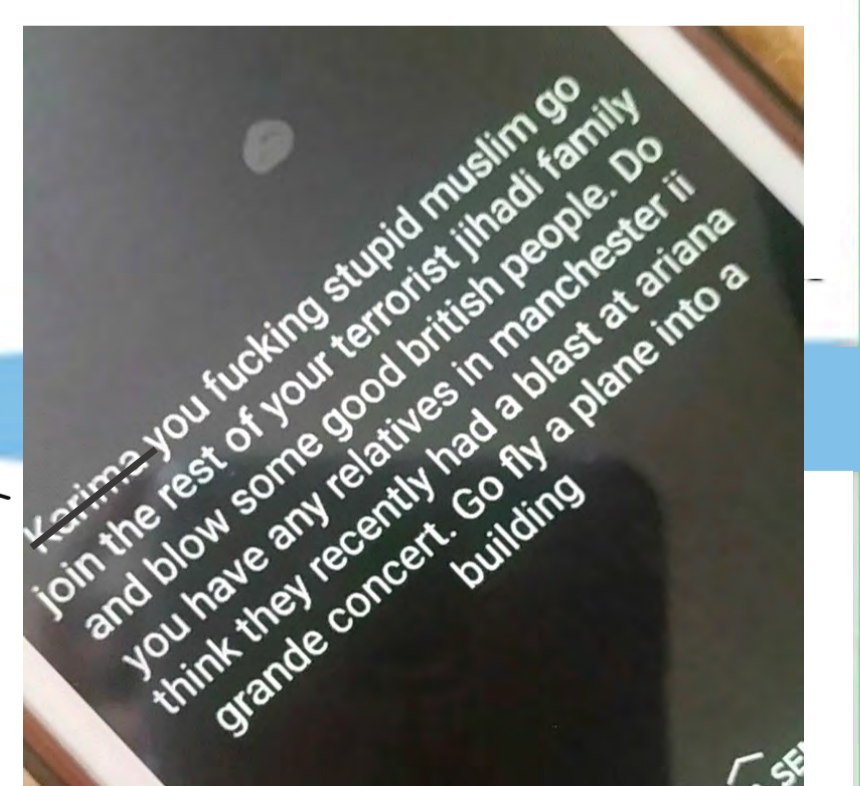


Image 1 (left): Pictures taken of Islamophobic graffiti in an underpass in Sunderland.

Image 2 (left): Screenshot of Whatsapp messages between two Muslim women from Sunderland. The conversation describes how one of the women received Islamophobic abuse on the bus as she travelled to university for her first day. The response from the victim shows how negative experiences on public transport can prevent future use of the facilities. Names have been removed.



Image 3 (below): Screenshot of a message sent to a 13 year old girl from Tyne and Wear on Snapchat. Names have been removed.



References

Home Office (2016). *Action Against Hate: The UK Government's plan for tackling hate crime*. [online] London: Home Office. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/543679/Action_Against_Hate_-_UK_Government_s_Plan_to_Tackle_Hate_Crime_2016.pdf [Accessed 29 Jul. 2018].
Nexus.org.uk. (2018). *Our key business | Nexus Tyne & Wear*. [online] Available at: <https://nexus.org.uk/what-nexus/our-key-business> [Accessed 9 Jul. 2018].
Walters, M. (2014). *Hate Crime and Restorative Justice: Exploring Causes, Repairing Harms*. 2nd ed. Oxford: OUP Oxford, p.81.