

# Breaking the cycle

Can community strategies and partnership-working stamp out hate crimes? Dr Gurnam Singh, from Coventry University, writes about a guide put together for those tackling perpetrators and dealing with victims



Dr Gurnam Singh: partnership-working can tackle hate crime

Whilst in law there is no such thing as a 'hate crime', in recent times we have seen the emergence of legislation that introduces the notion of aggravated criminal offences based on hate and bias as a motivating factor. A basic understanding is that hate crime occurs when a perpetrator targets a victim because of his or her actual or perceived membership of or association with a certain social groups e.g. race, religion, sexual orientation, disability, ethnicity and nationality.

Incidents of hate crime have continually risen in UK towns and cities, with little sign of a change in the trend. In 2005 UK police recorded 50,000 racially or religiously motivated crimes, yet according to the 2005 British Crime Survey that year there were actually 260,000 offences committed, indicating that many victims feel unable to report crimes against them. Approximately half of the police forces in England and Wales reported an increase in racially and

religiously motivated incidents.

A new resource guide for those dealing with hate crime, including police officers, prison officers, parole officers, lawyers, social services and community groups has been developed by researchers at Coventry University, in partnership with the Coventry Hate Crimes Reduction Partnership. The guide, *Tackling Hate Crime in Coventry: Resource Guide for Front Line Practitioners* was launched on August 29, 2008, and whilst the resource is based on information from the Coventry region, the messages and recommendations contained within it are of national concern.

Historically, government policies have focused on hate crime detection and prosecution. Whilst these aspects are important, the guide seeks to move beyond strategies focusing on short term punishment by highlighting the long term aspects of prevention and restorative justice. The resource guide uses a holistic approach to the issue, recognising that hate crime affects us all; victims, perpetrators and bystanders.

The resource guide introduces a new theoretical model of prevention protection, prosecution and penance. Research indicates that mistrust between communities, resulting from social and economic deprivation, a sense of 'victimhood' and misinformation, can lead to a dramatic increase in hate crime.

In a review of hate crime data from a number of countries in 2003, *Examining Hate-Motivated Aggression* Kellina Craig suggests that 'the probability of

occurrence is greatest when prejudice is fueled by perceived competition and a relative sense of deprivation.'

Professionals must, therefore, work together to create and implement community development strategies to prevent hatred spreading and improve cohesion. This could include; developing community forums for local people to express their views; improving local facilities to encourage social groups and clubs; or establishing a hub for education where local people can have access to careers and training advice as well as opportunities to complete courses.

One example of a community cohesion project is the Building Bridges Project (BBP). BBP is carried out by 16-25 year olds, and is hosted and managed by Race on the Agenda (ROTA).

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The organisation mentors and trains a group of young BME and white British people to conduct fieldwork with young people who live in deprived London areas high in gun and knife crime.

The group aims to raise awareness of ethics and human rights and engage its members in research, diverting them from harmful activities. The project also

gives both of these two young groups a voice in the policy-making on issues that involve them and their lives. The young people are involved in a number of activities including learning how to develop their thoughts in a written format, presenting their work to an audience and producing a short film recording their findings.

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Hate dehumanizes both the victim and perpetrator, therefore educational and therapeutic strategies need to enable each to regain their trust in others and society as a whole. This could include such things enabling and facilitating both victim and perpetrator to share their life experiences through dialogue, visits to museums, creative arts and media work and practical reparations activities in communities. It is clear that, in order to facilitate such activities, joint working amongst social workers, teachers, youth

workers, probation and the police is crucial.

Fighting hate is as much about challenging the ideas and misinformation about people from other cultures as it is about confronting the individuals that act on these distortions. Challenging these ideas must take place in schools from an early age. Education should instill a sense of social and civic responsibility within children, encouraging them to get involved with their community and, most importantly, other communities - cutting across ethnic and religious boundaries.

School leaders and teachers have a responsibility to monitor hate and fundamentalist group activities within schools, working closely with the police to share information. Outside school, responsible community leaders also have a key role in tackling hate. In emphasizing the pious and humanistic traditions of their particular faith community, they can become a powerful force in combating the extremists who often use religion to back up hate campaigns. Respected community members need to oppose and expose charismatic hate mongers in order to visibly challenge the distorted beliefs of fundamentalists.

The local police can have a great impact on community cohesion through an increased visual presence. After the 7/7 bombings an extra police presence was introduced around Southwark, which provided reassurance to the community whilst enabling their opinions to be effectively communicated to key stakeholders, including the police, local government and local businesses or community groups. As a result, there were no racially motivated attacks in the borough in the wake of the attacks.

Police officers also need to have an understanding of the factors which influence an individual's development of prejudice and hatred; these include poverty, social deprivation, identity confusion, fragmented family structures and changing community demographics.

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