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Akademisierung Sozialer Arbeit

Social Work‘s Role in Online Hate Speech Prevention

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Karen L. Meixner. Social Work‘s Role in Online Hate Speech Prevention. soziales_kapital, Bd. 27 (2023). Rubrik: Sozialarbeitswissenschaft. Graz.

Printversion: http://www.soziales-kapital.at/index.php/sozialeskapital/article/view/784/1471

Abstract

The research described in this article considers online hate speech from a social work perspective. It focuses on perpetrators of online hate speech, working with the rationale that finding out who is committing online hate speech and understanding their reasons and motivations can be beneficial when planning preventative measures. The two main research questions are: 1. Which factors contribute to posting online hate speech? 2. What role can social work play in the prevention of online hate speech? Initially the article makes clear why social work should be concerned with the issue of online hate speech. After a short overview of several theoretical approaches that could be used to understand what drives people to post hate online the results of the research are presented. The relatively high proportion of older and retired people committing online hate speech is one thought-provoking discovery. It can be shown that resentment over perceived injustices, ignorance of legal aspects relating to hate speech regulation, as well as a lack of media literacy are all key factors contributing to online hate speech. More generally, developments in modern neoliberal society were thought to play a significant role. Areas where social work, on the micro, mezzo and macro level, could play a role in prevention are presented and discussed.

Keywords: Social Work, Online Hate Speech, Freedom of Expression, Media Literacy, Social Identity Theory, Prevention.

1 Introduction

When considering research topics relevant to social work, Online Hate Speech (OHS) may not immediately spring to mind. Admittedly, literature and research on this topic can more frequently be found in the fields of Communication and Media Studies, Law or Computer Science, however, the following article aims to make clear why OHS is a phenomenon that is relevant and should be studied from a social work perspective. It will present the results of recent research carried out in Austria which focuses on the perpetrators of OHS, working with the rationale that planning preventative measure will be more effective after finding out who is committing OHS and their reasons and motivations for doing so. This focus on the perpetrator perspective has been lacking in research into this topic. (cf. Walters/Brown/Wiedlitzka 2016: 39; Siegel 2020: 61).

Hate speech is a term which refers to all forms of expression which attack or malign a person‘s immutable characteristics or their belonging to a certain group (cf. Carlson 2021: 4). Online hate speech does not only adversely affect those individuals directly targeted but can harm groups, communities and society. Prejudices and rumours spread online can lead to marginalisation and violence in the real world. UNESCO (2023) states: „Hate speech […] is an attack on inclusion, diversity and human rights. It undermines social cohesion and erodes shared values, setting back peace, stability, sustainable development and the fulfilment of human rights for all.“ According to the *International Federation of Social Work* (IFSW) Global Definition, social work should „promote social cohesion“ (not ‚*undermine*‘ it), furthermore social work is based on principles of „social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities“ (IFSW 2014) – all principles attacked in one way or another by OHS. Therefore, prevention of online hate speech can be considered a mandate for social workers and justifies the research question: What role can social work play in the prevention of online hate speech?

2 Background: Online Hate Speech and Hate Speech in Austria

With the dramatic increase over recent years in online platforms and the ubiquity of online communication OHS has become increasingly omnipresent and problematic. According to the *United Nations* (UN) OHS „represents an unprecedented challenge for our societies“ (UN n.d.) especially by inciting violence and intolerance. Some aspects of OHS have been well researched and documented – for example, the effects of OHS on victims. Carlson (2021: 2) points out that „[h]ate speech traumatizes its victims and negatively impacts their self-worth; it silences political participation and distorts public discourse“. Likewise, the topic of how content can and should be moderated by platforms such as *Meta*, *Twitter* and the like is hotly debated (cf. Fischer/Millner/Radkohl 2021: 254). The EU Code of Conduct on Countering Illegal Hate Speech Online was created

in 2016 and has been signed by almost all main platforms (cf. European Commission 2019) and The European Union Digital Services Act (DSA) which was published in October 2022, should enforce a new standard of accountability of online platforms concerning harmful and illegal content.

As far as the legality of hate speech is concerned, historical events and cultural differences mean that there are very varied positions found across the globe. In the USA, the First Amendment is often cited as a way of protecting free speech and it permits the use of hate speech in both private and public discourse. This correlates with The Right to Freedom of Expression provided for in Article 19 of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (UNDHR). One frequently used justification for allowing OHS is the ‚Marketplace of Ideas', a theory dating back to Milton's *Areopagitica* (1644), which suggests that „in order for truth to be found, all ideas, even bad ones must be thrown into competition with one another so that the best among them may emerge" (Carlson 2021: 10). This theory does not take into account, however, the phenomenon of silencing. According to a study carried out by the *Institute for Democracy and Civil Society* (cf. Geschke/Klaßen/Quent/Richter 2019), after being confronted with online abuse, more than half those surveyed stated that they were unlikely to post their political opinion online. *Meta's* hate speech policy also refers implicitly to arguments concerning silencing: „We believe that people use their voice and connect more freely when they don't feel attack on the basis of who they are." (Meta 2023)

In many countries, including Austria, the right to freedom of expression ends when other human rights are violated by its use, for example, The Right to Equality and Non-Discrimination which is provided for in Articles 1, 2 and 7 of the UNDHR. As far as OHS is concerned the UN Human Rights Council has established that „the same rights people have offline must also be protected online" (Article 19 2018).

Online Hate Speech can take many forms and in Austria there is no one law which covers this offence. The majority of cases fall under paragraph 283 of the Criminal Code (Strafgesetzbuch) *Incitement of Hatred*, which was adapted in 2016 in response to the increased incidences of OHS in the country (cf. StGB). Other offenses contravene the Criminal Code's paragraph 188 (Denigration of Religious Teachings) or paragraph 282 (Request for and Approval of Criminal Acts). Some OHS is considered a violation of the law prohibiting National Socialist activities (Verbotsgesetz). In 2021 the legal recourse which already existed was expanded and became easier to access with the introduction of a new online hate legislative package (cf. BMJ 2021).

The *BanHate* App, developed in cooperation with the antidiscrimination office in Styria and introduced in Austria in 2017 provides an anonymous way of reporting offensive online content including OHS. The successful introduction of this App combined with the increase in prosecutions due to the change in paragraph 283 of the Criminal Code, led to the development of a diversional

intervention programme called „Dialog not Hate“ (Dialog statt Hass) for OHS offenders. The aim of the programme „Dialog not Hate“ (DnH), provided nationwide by the Austrian national probation service *Neustart* since 2019, is to provide the state prosecutor offices and courts with an effective instrument for handling OHS and preventing future breaches of the law. In effect we are talking here about tertiary/indicated prevention. The DnH programme lasts six months and consists of both individual sessions and group modules. These modules include: clarification of legal aspects, media competence with focus on social media, offence processing for relapse prevention, discourse competence (expressing criticism without resorting to degradation), sensitisation and raising awareness of the impact on victims and victim groups.

3 Theoretical Approaches

Three theoretical approaches which could provide an understanding of the reasons and motivations for posing OHS seem logical and are briefly outlined below (cf. Meixner 2022: 18ff.).

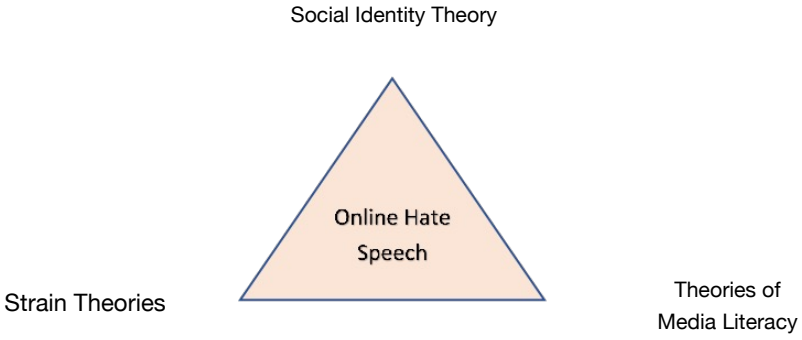

Figure 1: Theories Relating to OHS (Meixner 2022: 18).

3.1 Social Identity Theory

If it is assumed that hate speech is caused by a desire to ‚belong‘ to a certain group by ‚othering‘ different groups Tajfel‘s „Social Identity Theory“ (SIT) could play a role. Tajfel‘s theory postulates that we divide that world into ‚us‘ and ‚them‘ and that belonging to a certain group gives us a sense of social identity (cf. Tajfel/Turner 2004). So called ‚in-group‘ favouritism and ‚out-group‘ discrimination provide a means to enhance self-esteem. OHS could be way of lowering the social status of the ‚out-group‘ in comparison to one‘s own ‚in-group‘ and thus improving one‘s own sense of self-worth and belonging.

3.2 Strain Theories

Although OHS is not necessarily illegal (depending on what exactly is posted and where in the

world), it can nevertheless generally be described as deviant and undesirable behaviour. Illegal hate speech can be classified as hate crime and Robert Merton‘s „Strain Theory“ is still one of the main criminological theories of causation to explain hate crime. The basic assumption behind „Strain Theory“ is that ‚strain‘ arises when there is a gap between culturally prescribed goals and the opportunities and means of achieving them (cf. Walters 2011: 317). Merton defines five ways of dealing with strain – some of which lead to crime.

Moving away from criminology towards a social work perspective Lothar Böhnisch‘s „Theory of Coping“ (Lebensbewältigung) can provide a useful theoretical framework for considering motivations behind OHS. According to Böhnisch (2012) humans strive to maintain their autonomous or subjective agency. Each individual develops coping strategies for achieving this when faced with crisis situations. Some crises are very individual some are based on structural circumstances. The need to cope with ‚the strain‘ of life, including these crisis situations, is universal, what differs, however, is the strategies people use. Some people can cope with their everyday life, even during times of crisis within the realms of societal norms and legal frameworks. Some need more support in order to cope, and others develop strategies which go against the norms or even the laws of a society.

3.3 Theories of Media Literacy

The dawn of the Internet has exposed society to changes in the communicative environment at a rate unparalleled in human history and one theory which could explain the rise in OHS suggests that the new skills needed to deal with this change are not being taught or acquired. Brodnig‘s comment (2017: 7) that „many citizens do not even notice that they consume false reports“ suggests a lack of media literacy. Media and communications expert Dejan Andonov links an increase of media literacy to preventing OHS:

> „Although the legal basis and instruments are necessary against hate speech on the Internet, prevention must include media literacy, especially of young people. The skills of critical thinking and ethical use of digital platforms are starting points in media literacy and are crucial in combating online hate speech.“ (Andonov 2020: 4)

Several different models can be found which attempt to define media literacy. In the German speaking world Baacke (2007) defines Media Competence as the ability to make active and appropriate use of all types of media. He suggests four dimensions of media competence: Media Criticism; Media Knowledge; Media Use; and Involvement in Media Creation.

Hobbs (2019) distinguishes between digital literacy and media literacy and identifies several areas of overlap. Four points mentioned by Hobbs stand out as being particularly relevant to preventing OHS. 1. „Critically analyse messages to evaluate credibility and quality“; 2. „Aware of interpretation processes at work in the sharing of meaning“; 3. „Reflect on how media influences attitudes and behaviours“ and 4. „Aware of how media constructs representations of ideas, events and people in ways that impact democratic processes“. The four skills mentioned here appear to be especially relevant to the topic of this study since the possession of them could lead to incidences of OHS being avoided or reduced. Hobbs (2019) outlines five useful critical questions of media literacy: 1. „Who is the author and what is the purpose?“ 2. „What techniques are used to attract attention?“ 3. „What lifestyles, values and points of view are represented?“ 4. „How might different people interpret this message?“ 5. „What is omitted“? Experience suggests that it is the exception rather than the rule that all five questions are considered and answered before posting content online.

3.3.1 Filter Bubbles

In connection to the points above, filter bubbles or echo chambers can exert an enormous influence on social media users. Even experienced users who are aware of their existence are not immune. Algorithms used by web sites and social media platforms ‚filter‘ the type of content we are shown. We are given ‚agreeable‘ content that reflects or ‚echoes‘ our own values and beliefs and are less likely to be confronted with contradictory opinions and ideas (cf. Messingschlager/Holtz 2020). Of course, this is not only an online phenomenon – in real life we tend to surround ourselves with likeminded people, but we at least make this selection ourselves – online the content is selected for us. It is often extremely difficult to find counterarguments to your own opinions due to these filter bubbles. Taken to the extreme, filter bubbles could thus be considered a threat to democracy since ignorance of other positions makes deliberation and debate impossible (cf. Brodnig 2016: 22). The ‚marketplace of ideas‘ becomes a one-sided monopoly (cf. Lombardi 2019).

3.3.2 Fake News

Fake News is a frequently heard term which, if not identified as such can be problematic in society. However, as Clare Wardle (2017) demonstrates, the phenomenon is more nuanced than it may appear at first glance. As well as the obvious posting of fabricated content designed to deceive and do harm, she identifies six other forms of mis- and disinformation. These include using content in a way that intentionally misleads in order to frame an individual or issue (misleading content), providing a false context to genuine information (false context) and manipulating content in such

a way that genuine information or imagery is manipulated to intentionally deceive (manipulated context).

3.3.3 The Online Disinhibition Effect

Suler (2004: 220) identifies clear differences between on and offline behaviour and offers a differentiated approach. He identifies six factors which can lead to either benign or toxic disinhibition.

1. *Dissociative Anonymity* – it is possible to hide or change your identity online. The fact that no one knows who you are could drastically alter your behaviour.
2. *Invisibility* – for the most part of interaction online we do not actually ‚see' the person we are interacting with.
3. *Asynchronicity* – communication does not take place in real time.
4. *Solipsistic Introjection* – An effect which is especially pronounced when a person identifies ideologically with a particular community or group. „People may feel their mind has merged with the mind of the online companion." (Suler 2004: 323)
5. *Dissociative imagination* – Here the ‚online imaginary world' is distinct and separate to the ‚real world' and not confined by the social norms, rules and responsibilities that would normally apply.
6. *Minimisation of Status and Authority* – Indications of status and power which may be easily perceived in face-to-face interactions are reduced.

These factors need to be considered in addition to the aspects mentioned above in media literacy theory.

4 Perpetrator Perspective Study

An equal status mixed methods research modal with an explanatory design was used in this empirical study. In the quantitative stage, 224 files of OHS offenders who took part in the diversional intervention programme DnH were analysed. The main aim here was to identify any commonalities the perpetrators share. The results of the quantitative stage of the study were used to inform the qualitative phase which consisted of four episodic interviews with perpetrators of online hate speech and semi-structured interviews with five professionals working in the field (two social workers from *Neustart* responsible for the DnH programme; a psychologist working in the DnH programme; staff at the Styrian Antidiscrimination Office responsible for the *BanHate* App). The interviews were analysed using Kuckartz's thematic method of analysis and the results of the quantitative and

qualitative parts of the study were combined in order to provide answers to the two main research questions:

1. What factors contribute to posting OHS and
2. What role can social work play in prevention of OHS?

5 Results of the Research

5.1 Commonalities

Although the participants of the programme DnH were generally very diverse, there were some characteristics which stood out as being common to the group. In the analysis a comparison is drawn between DnH participants (who had potentially committed a criminal offense by posting illegal OHS), and with the general population of those committing criminal offenses in Austria (cf. Statistik Austria 2019) to see whether any particular similarities or differences stand out.

- *Male*: Almost 80% of OHS perpetrators in the data set from the DnH programme were male. However, the proportion of females at just over 20% was significantly higher than is found in the general population of those committing crimes in Austria (only 15% female)
- *Austrian*: Almost 96% of participants were Austrian citizens, whereas in the general crime statistics over 40% crime is committed by non-Austrian citizens.
- *Otherwise law abiding*: Under 11% of those in the DnH programme had previous convictions whereas according to Statistik Austria in 2019, 43.4% of those convicted of a criminal offence already had at least one previous conviction.
- *Lacking digital and media literacy* – this aspect became very apparent after the interview stage of the study. Many participants of the DnH programme were not aware of the existence of filter bubbles or algorithms and paid scant attention to reliability of sources. Especially older offenders were not even aware of how basic privacy settings worked for their chosen social media platforms.

The distribution of ages of participants of the DnH programme is also interesting, especially when compared with general offender ages (cf. Statistik Austria 2019). There are more older and retired people committing OHS than committing other offenses.

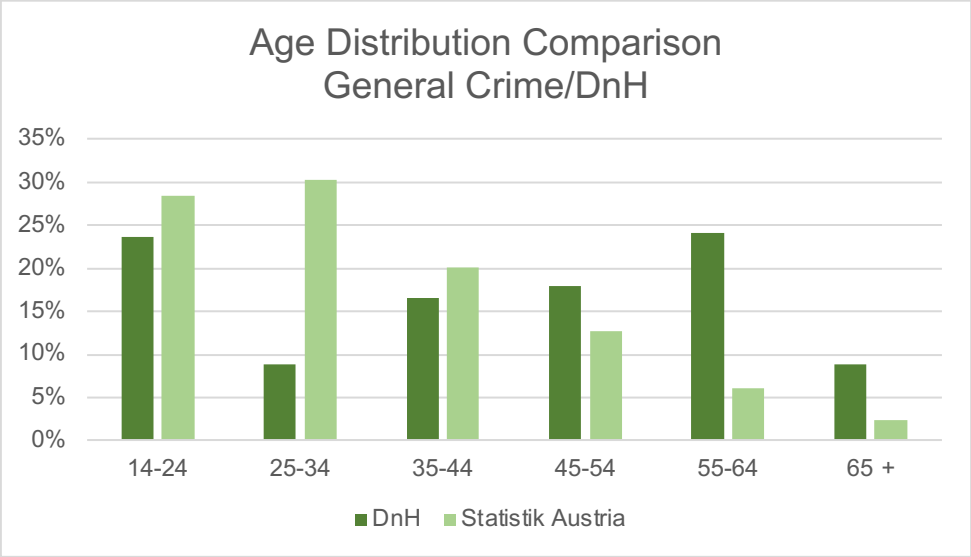

Figure 2: Age Distribution Comparison General Crime/DnH (Meixner 2022: 52).

Comparing these distributions, it is immediately evident that the age distribution for DnH is completely different to the general crime statistics distribution. Whereas for the general crime statistic population almost 80% are under 45 and over 90% are under 55, the DnH population has a much higher average age with more than half being over 45 and a third being over 55. If we consider only female participants, the age profile stands out even more. It is remarkable that when only the women in the programme are considered almost 80% are over 40 (36 of the 46 females in the sample), just over 60% are over 50 (28 out of 46) and in fact one third (15 out of the 46) are even over 60.

5.2 Factors Contributing to Online Hate Speech

After analysing the results of the interviews with perpetrators of OHS and experts working with them six main factors emerged which appear to contribute to OHS – these can partly be linked to ideas discussed briefly in the theoretical approaches above.

1. **Lack of Digital and/or Media Competence:** This point has already been mentioned as a commonality amongst perpetrators and proved to be the most frequently allocated code in the analysis of the interviews. Especially the social workers involved with the DnH programme considered this factor to be especially relevant. They reported that many participants were not aware of the existence and influence of algorithms, neither were they conscious of the existence of filter bubbles or the

impact these could have on online behaviour. Hobbs (2019) states that media literacy includes being *„Aware of how media constructs representations of ideas". Algorithms ensure that* only certain ideas or one side of an argument is presented – because that is what is favoured by the user. Such algorithms prevent the Internet from being a ‚marketplace of ideas'. One interview partner explained that people often believe their opinion is shared by the vast majority of the population simply because they are never exposed to counter arguments and have no experience of opposing opinions. Fake news is another commonly mentioned phenomenon. The skill described by Hobbs (2019) of being able to „critically analyse messages to evaluate credibility and quality" is evidently missing.

2. **Need for recognition and belonging:** The findings from the interviews made clear that appreciation, recognition and a sense of value and belonging is missing in some OHS offenders' lives. There are parallels to an example provided by Böhnisch where a child receives no recognition or attention at school (cf. KATHO 2019: from minute 1:45). However, according to Böhnisch, one can't live without recognition, self-worth, self-efficacy. So, the child acts up, misbehaves, plays the class clown. Then for a short period of time they are the ‚king' – they have the full attention of the class and the teacher. For this student misbehaviour gives rise to the desired outcome of recognition. So it is with some OHS perpetrators. The ‚raised thumb' is the currency of recognition online. One's value is defined by how many likes you get. People who feel they have too little recognition in everyday real life see an opportunity to gain this online. Even negative attention (as in the example above with the school child) can be perceived as recognition. Polarising content often gives rise to the most reactions. The fact that a large number of people respond to something they post can make a person feel seen and important and can increase feelings of self-worth. The processes described by Tajfel and Turner in SIT can also be seen at work in OHS. A person identifying with a certain group will adapt their behaviour to conform with the expected behaviour of the group. One situation described in the interviews illustrates this well – a group of 16-year-old boys are in a *WhatsApp* group. Some members post Hitler memes – then there is a general call to the group that everyone should do the same. To belong to this group, it was necessary to follow this behaviour. In SIT there is also the stage of social comparison which is important when considering self-esteem. Like Böhnisch, Tajfel and Turner (1986) presume that individuals strive to increase their self-esteem, *they* however, link a person's self-esteem to that of a

group‘s self-esteem. If the social comparison shows the ‚out-group‘ in a negative light compared to the ‚in-group‘ this can lead to increased self-esteem (‚they‘ will try to rape your daughters, steal your property; *‚we‘* are fighting to protect your family and property – *‚we‘* want to rid the town of *‚those‘* who would do that).

3. **Invisibility of the Victim:** Of the six factors described in Suler‘s Online Inhibition Effect, this research found that the invisibility of the victim had the greatest influence. The effects of OHS on the person seeing the post, their reactions to it, are not visible. In real life conversations body language such as a frown, shake of the head, raised eyebrow, look of disgust are often used to regulate behaviour. One perpetrator explicitly explained that he was „convinced that this effect of not having a counterpart, of having distance, of not seeing a victim, in turn lowers the threshold for posting online hate“.
4. **Perceived Unfairness:** Perpetrators often view themselves as being disadvantaged in life and in some way the victim. Especially, in connection with xenophobic OHS this was a central factor. Sometimes this is due to personal experience with specific situations. One perpetrator reported: „They were allowed in everywhere. They were allowed to go to the football field and swimming pool for free and we had to pay. I don‘t see why“. Other times fake news is to blame for believing unjust situations exist. One interview partner explained that participants really did believe that „every asylum seeker gets an iPhone“ and deem this to be unfair because „the homeless Austrian gets nothing“. This subjective feeling of being disadvantaged in some way, paradoxically leads to the perpetrators seeing themselves as victims. One interviewer took this a step further and explained what he referred to as the ‚Batman syndrome‘. Here the perpetrator does not see himself as an ‚offender‘ or ‚criminal‘, rather they are the ‚hero‘. They are the only one brave enough to say/post something – in this way they stand up for justice and take action. Referring again to Böhnisch‘s „Theory of Coping“, it can be argued that for some perpetrators, OHS is a coping strategy – a way of maintaining subjective agency. Through OHS perpetrators can focus their anger, disappointments or frustrations on external targets and this does not require them to look inward into maybe more painful aspects of their lives (cf. Böhnisch 2012).
5. **Societal Influences:** Our modern neoliberal society places a big emphasis on material profits and individual responsibility. Several interview partners were of the opinion that Austria has changed significantly since the 1970‘s/80‘s and that there

has been a reduction in social interaction and that a lack of solidarity with those less fortunate exists. Lack of social contacts leads to stunted emotional intelligence as well as a lack of communication skills and empathy. Boredom and loneliness, which provide fertile soil for OHS are also a symptom of social isolation.

6. Ignorance of Legal Implications: Quite simply users are very often not aware of what the laws concerning OHS are. They do not know that what they are posting may be illegal Specifically they are not aware of the two main aspects that come into play here in Austria:

    1. Public vs. private. Some comments directed at individuals/small groups although discriminating, racist, homophobic or whatever are permissible since they fall under ‚freedom of expression', however if over 30 people potentially have access to the offensive statement it can be illegal.[i]
    2. The language used is inappropriate. One's opinion can be expressed but the language must be appropriate and cannot be interpreted as incitement to violence against the target of the statement.

5.3 How Social Work Can Help in Online Hate Speech Prevention

Considering the factors above that contribute to posting hate online there are several ways social work could be useful in preventing OHS. Considering the first factor (Lack of digital/media literacy) it is clear that social workers themselves first need to be digitally and media literate. Media literacy is not something that generally plays a central role in social work education. In practice, after some forced online interactions during the COVID pandemic, most social workers were relieved to ‚get back to normal' and focus on relationships and human interactions taking place in the real world. However, the fact remains that many social work clients spend significant amounts of time on various social media platforms and for many their social interactions take place primarily online. Social workers cannot be left behind. It is not only imperative to ensure ethical professional use of social media (cf. Voshel/Wesala 2015; Singh-Cooner 2021) but as pointed out by the *British Association of Social Workers* (BASW):

> „Social workers, in their practice, should support service users of all ages to use social networking with awareness of its potential and risks. Social workers and their organisations should be offering clear, prominent and accessible advice about Internet safety to ensure people can safely get the most from the services on offer and when using the social networking sites." (BASW 2018)

Although digital and media literacy should be a given for all social workers, conceivably it could be most useful to those working with children and young people. School social workers for example would be in a good position to offer workshops on issues surrounding OHS. The topics of media literacy and OHS awareness could be addressed at youth centres by responsible social workers. Community social work, if it succeeds in reaching all members of a community could prove to be an especially useful preventative measure. Community centres would have the advantage of also reaching those older members of society who were found to be well represented in the OHS perpetrator figures. As well as offering courses and support to keep the third generation up to date with new technologies, community centres can bring different people with different backgrounds and experiences into contact with each other through joint projects or social events. Social workers should work with members of the community to facilitate the implementation of creative ideas. Inclusion is a key concept here and social workers should endeavour to reach and include the whole community and encourage interaction and cooperation between marginalised groups and others. Meeting in person individuals belonging to a group that up until now have been an invisible online enemy, usually results in realising that what you have in common outweighs any differences and one is more able to see things from a different perspective.

The factors ‚need for recognition' and ‚perceived feeling of unfairness' have a close connection to the factor ‚societal influences'. From a social work perspective, it is important to realise that posting OHS is a behaviour which makes up for something that is missing elsewhere. One IP pointed out that: „[W]e need to focus on where it is missing" and said that this is the task of society and politics. It could, however, be argued that this is also one of the tasks of social work. Turning back to the Global Definition of Social Work we see that one of the core mandates is ‚social change and development' meaning that social workers have a duty to support the next generation in their efforts to improve society. In the accompanying notes to the Global Definition it states that social work „is driven by the need to challenge and change those structural conditions that contribute to marginalisation, social exclusion and oppression" it also explains that social work „does not subscribe to conventional wisdom that economic growth is a prerequisite for social development". Social work is by its very nature political and although it is a daunting task, some of the causes of OHS may only be removed with significant and lasting changes in society. The American *National Association of Social Workers* (NASW) even goes so far as to encourage social workers to run for political office, pointing out that they are well suited to the job because they „are trained communicators with concrete ideas about how to empower communities". They go on to explain that „social workers understand social problems and know human relations" and that social workers' „commitment to improving the quality of life brings a vital perspective to public decision-

making“ (NASW n.d.). Clearly, it is not necessary for a social worker to change professions and become a politician to make a positive change in society, they can support those who are trying to make positive changes and advocate for those in society whose voices are not heard.

6 Conclusion

In conclusion, what appears to be missing in OHS prevention are measures that prevent OHS being posted in the first place, in other words universal or selective prevention. OHS is a multifaceted problem which requires a comprehensive response. Social work seems ideally placed to assist in this task on various levels. On the micro level this would involve working directly and individually with clients for example giving support on using social media appropriately. On a mezzo level this could be providing seminars on OHS or media literacy in schools, youth centres and community centres. On a macro level, politically astute social workers are needed to address the challenges of alleviating societal problems and working towards social change and development. This paper‘s aim was to show why OHS is a concern of social work. It has found numerous factors which contribute to OHS and given indications of ways social workers can be useful working towards a reduction in online hate. More research from a social work perspective could provide new and effective ways of preventing the spread of online hate and reducing the damage to society it causes.

Verweise

[i] For exact details cf. § 283 Abs. 1 Z 1 StGB.

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