Hate Speech and its Impact on Albanian Youth

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Abstract

Background: The main topic of this scientific paper is based on what hate speech is, and how it affects young Albanians. The main problem raised in this paper is how hate speech is not much talked about in our everyday lives, and how young people do not have enough information about different examples of hate speech in their everyday lives and therefore not being aware how this can affect their mental health and emotional well – being. Purpose: The hypothesis that this scientific paper is based on is how today's society faces a current situation of co-existence, where there is a lack of information on hate speech, and how young people (students) do not know how to identify what can be considered hate speech or not. Method: The theoretical basis of this scientific paper focuses on relevant literatures, studies conducted on this topic from all over the world, as well as previous studies focused on Albania, with relevant references. This paper contains the main study conducted by the author, a survey named "Hate speech and its effect on emotional Wellbeing" with open and closed questions, the data of which have been analyzed and interpreted. Conclusion: The creation of new platforms where young people can be informed about hate speech, report experiences is a necessary need.

Key words: hate speech, communication, affect, mental health, emotional well-being.

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Introduction
Hate Speech and the "Paradox of Tolerance" by Karl Popper

Nowadays, one of the most open discussions for the public relates to the exercise of freedom of expression. What is the "line" that divides the freedom of expressing an opinion, and whether this opinion harms, offends, or discriminates an individual or a group of people? Today, a discussion arises to define discrimination and hate speech, and how much it affects people. When today this is a difficulty, we're faced with, there are many philosophers, sociologists, and researchers, who years ago, chose to focus on the dynamics between human tolerance and intolerance.

For the well-known philosopher Karl Popper, intolerance meant treating one group differently from another based on the beliefs of that group, whether differentiations of race, gender, religion, ethnicity, and so on, and Popper believed that "attacking" these groups based on these beliefs should not be tolerated. We can say that this kind of philosophy, like Karl Popper, is supported by many people even today, in a liberal society. If years ago, the term "intolerance" was the most used, there are many who argue that this term has now been replaced by the term "language of hatred" or "hate speech". There are many who believe that there is a "thin line" that separates hate speech or intolerance from "free speech" or the basic human right to practice freedom of expression and free speech.

The "paradox of tolerance" is more clearly defined by Karl Popper in his book "Open Society and its enemies (1945)" where his philosophy is expressed as it follows:

"Unlimited tolerance in communication will lead to the disappearance of tolerance. If there is unlimited tolerance even of those who are intolerant, if we are not prepared to defend a tolerant society against the onslaught of the intolerant, then the tolerant will perish, and tolerance with them. —In this formulation, I do not mean, for example, that we must always "suppress" the freedom of expression of intolerant philosophies. If we can counter them with rational arguments and keep them in check by public opinion, suppression would certainly be an unwise move. But we must demand the right to "oppress" them, if necessary, even by "force"; for it may easily turn out that they (the intolerant) are not prepared to meet us at the level of rational argument but begin by denouncing the whole argument; they can prevent their followers from being open to rational arguments. Therefore, we must claim, in the name of tolerance, the right not to tolerate the intolerant."(Popper, Open Society and its enemies, 1945)

Definition of Hate Speech

"The term "hate speech" shall be understood as all forms of expression that propagate, incite, incite or justify racial hatred, xenophobia, antisemitism or other forms of hatred based on intolerance, including intolerance expressed by aggressive nationalism and ethnocentrism, discrimination and hostility towards minorities, immigrants and people of immigrant origin." (Council of Europe, 2012)

The definition above is to be considered as an 'open' definition, just like the open definition of discrimination adopted by the European Court of Human Rights. There are many cases that can also be seen as examples of homophobic and sexist hate speech and cases of intolerance towards people with disabilities or people with different political views as well.

To further add to the definitions of hate speech, we can also mention the additional protocol of the Convention on Cybercrime, regarding the criminalization of acts of a racist and xenophobic nature carried out through computer systems (Strasbourg, 28.I.2003): *"Hate speech by 'racist and xenophobic material' means any written material, any image or any other presentation of ideas or theories, which advocates, promotes or incites hatred, discrimination or violence, against any individual or group of individuals, based on race , color, descent or national or ethnic origin, as well as religion if used as a pretext for any of these factors." (Strasbourg, 28.I.2003)*

Objectives and hypothesis

This paper comes because of the immediate need to address discussions and focus more on cases of hate speech in our country. Given that hate speech is one of the main topics in every country in the world, especially nowadays, such a study should be carried out in our country as well. In a period where the world is facing war, protests and civil marches, a world pandemic that brought various damages on a global scale, or leaving serious consequences in the world economy, the world is facing more and more cases every day that bring attention to human rights, a safe life and the well-being of the individual, whether it is physical or emotional.

And while today we refer to mass communication, we will refer to a process through which a complex organization, with the help of one or more devices, produces and transmits public messages that are addressed to wide heterogeneous and distributed audiences. (Dominick, Joseph R., 2010).

We no longer refer to a "mouth to mouth" form of communication, i.e., eye to eye with the other person, but communication has already broken the barriers that define time and place.

Due to digitalization, we have new forms of medias, and information now spreads at marvelous speed, regardless of where you are located. Anyone can connect with anyone everywhere, through just a click online or phone call away.

"The new medias have made the whole world a 'global village', encouraging social interactions between citizens, they have now erased borders between countries." *(McLuhan, Marshall, 2008)*

Another element that should be mentioned, is that social media can also be considered as a 'foster' of differentiations between people, thus influencing the social isolation of certain groups or individuals, where they can face many cases of vigilance of hate speech on social media. They might face insulting, even bullying forms of communications against certain individuals, or certain categories of individuals. This "freedom of expression" does not only promote social differences in society, but this phenomenon can promote social isolation, alienation and discrimination of individuals from virtual as well as real life.

The objectives of this paper

- Raising awareness regarding cases of hate speech in a global dynamic form
- Raising awareness on hate speech in our country, opening discussions on this issue, if we lack information or not
- Cases of hate speech among young Albanians and the impact that hate speech has on them

Research questions

The research questions that will be addressed in this scientific paper are listed as it follows:

Q 1: Is there enough information on cases of hate speech in our country?

Q 2: Do young Albanians have enough information to identify forms of hate speech in our country?

Q 3: Do verbal or non-verbal forms of communications that are considered as hate speech directly affect the emotional well-being of the individual?

Q 4: Can we say that the emotional well-being of individuals deteriorates as a result of exposure to hate speech?

Hypothesis and counter hypothesis

The central hypothesis on which this scientific paper is based is the fact that there is a lack of information that addresses hate speech in our country, and that there is not enough space to discuss and raise attention on topics that affect or harm different groups due to of the differences they have, which can lead to them being confronted with cases of hate speech.

So, the **central hypothesis** is:

1. "In our country, there is a lack of information on hate speech, and for this reason young people do not know how to identify what is hate speech. If we can find a way to better identify it and focus on raising awareness against hate speech and discrimination, then we can change the current situation."

Counter hypothesis: "Young people know how to identify hate speech and have enough information on hate speech."

But also, a **sub-hypothesis** arises, on which the study will be based:

2. "Hate speech has an impact on the emotional well-being of the individual. Exposure to hate speech has consequences on the mental health and emotional well-being of Albanian youngsters."

Counterhypothesis: "Hate speech has no impact and leaves no consequences on the emotional well-being of the Albanian youngsters/students".

Theoretical Framework

Hate speech and international legislation

The International Convention on Political and Civil Rights (ICCPR), which is seen by many actors as one of the most important and significant documents regarding hate speech (Gagliardone et.al, 2015), since it includes article 19, with a particular focus on the individual's right to expression. This article states that: *"Everyone has the right to freedom of expression; this right includes the freedom to receive, seek and have information and ideas of all kinds, without distinction of barriers, through writing, orally, or in print, in the form of art, or through any channel, media and form they want."*

In point 20/2 of this article, it is stated that:

"Any kind of advocacy with a nature of nationalistic, racial or religious hatred, which aims to incite discrimination, enmity or violence, is prohibited by law."

Hate speech and Albanian legislation

In terms of Albanian legislation, we can say that hate speech is directly related to Article 14 of the Constitution of Albania, which deals with the "prohibition of discrimination", as well as 15, 16, 17 - the law on protection against discrimination, no. 10 221, dated 4.2.2010; law no. 97/2013 for audiovisual media in the Republic of Albania. According to the "amendment of law no. 10221 on protection against discrimination":

"Hate speech is any form of expression in public by any means of promotion, incitement of denigration, hatred or defamation, any concern, insult, negative stereotype, stigmatization or threat against a person or group of persons, as well as any justification of all forms of expression based on a descending list of causes according to Article 1 of this law."

Regarding the existing laws for the regulation of media content in our country, which are also related to the regulation of the activities of media operators to avoid the use of hate speech and discrimination, we have:

The Law on Audiovisual Media 97/2013, the Broadcasting Code, as well as the Complaints Council "AMA" - which take care of the monitoring and regulation of ethics codes in the media. On the other hand, discrimination is subject to Law No. 10 221 "On Protection from Discrimination" approved in 2010. In this law, the term discrimination is defined as:

"Discrimination" is any difference, exception, limitation or preference, based on any of the reasons mentioned in Article 1 of this law [gender, race, color, ethnicity, language, gender identity, sexual orientation, political, religious or philosophical beliefs, condition economic, educational or social, pregnancy, parental affiliation, parental responsibility, age, genetic condition, disability, belonging to a special group, or for any other reason, which has as its purpose or consequence the obstacle or making it impossible to exercise in in the same way as others, of the rights and fundamental freedoms recognized by the Constitution of the Republic of Albania, by the international acts ratified by the Republic of Albania, as well as by the laws in force." Also, Article 265 of the Criminal Code states:

"Inciting hatred and fights, due to race, ethnicity, religion or sexual orientation, as well as preparing, spreading or storing, with the aim of spreading writings with such content, carried out by any means or form, is punishable by imprisonment from two to ten years."

The phrase '…writings with such content, carried out by any means or form…' can be considered inclusive of online media as well, but so far there has not been any public case of the use of these articles against the media (Londo, 2014).

Hate speech and its impact on mental health.

The effects that hate speech can have on the mental health of individuals can be short-term as well as long-term. Apart from the fact that hate speech can pose a threat to a person's physical health (cases of crimes that have occurred because of hate speech), these cases can result in other consequences that are harmful to mental health and emotional well-being in the long run. (Benisek, Alexandra, WebMD, "How Do Hate Crimes Affect Health", 2022)

Hate speech communications can lead to emotional damage, with consequences such as:

1. Loss of trust in oneself and in others
2. The feeling of shame, the fear of being targeted by others
3. The feeling of insecurity and vulnerability
4. Self-denial and identity crisis, etc. (Ratini Melinda DO, WebMD, "How Do Hate Crimes Affect Health", 2022)

Cases of hate speech can cause mental health disorders and symptoms such as anxiety and depression. They can also cause post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Different researches according to "WebMD" show that groups or minorities that have been exposed to cases of hate speech on a regular basis have a high risk of having post-traumatic stress disorders. Also in the most extreme cases, studies show that cases of hate speech can lead to human behaviors with self-harming or suicidal tendencies. (Jennifer Casarella, MD, WebMD, "How Do Hate Crimes Affect Health")

Also, another unhealthy tendency of how hate speech can affect the emotional well-being of the individual is by leaving consequences such as emotional suppression, or suppression of the feelings of individuals. Those who are victims of hate speech, whether they were witnesses of it, find it more difficult, if not impossible, to express their emotions. They have the tendency to hide their emotions in this way by closing them in themselves. This makes it very difficult in the long run for them to be able to heal through therapy and deal with the damaging effects that hate speech has had on their mental health. (Benisek, Alexandra, WebMD, "How Do Hate Crimes Affect Health", 2022)

Methodology

Regarding the methodology of this scientific paper, mixed methods were used. Mixed methods can be thought of as a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods in the way that best fits the specific project. (Bob Matthews, Lizz Ross, Research Methods, 2010). Qualitative research methods are methods that primarily deal with stories and narratives that deal with people's subjective meanings, feelings, thoughts, and beliefs. Qualitative approaches provide the opportunity to explore concepts with research participants (respondents) in a deeper way by listening to the explanation of concepts in their own words and experiences. (Bob Matthews, Lizz Ross, Research Methods, 2010)

To achieve the maximum result in the collection of data to support and analyze the topic of this scientific paper, it was decided to formulate the questionnaire on the language of hate in our country entitled "Survey on hate speech/discrimination and its impact on emotional well-being ". In this case, the aim was to investigate how the young students of the Universities of Tirana who participated in the survey, conceptualize the language of hate, and whether it affects their emotional well-being. Qualitative approaches help to understand these respondents' perceptions more deeply. In this survey semi-structured interviews were used.

Quantitative research methods are methods that mainly deal with the collection and processing of data that are structured and can be presented numerically. (Bob Matthews, Lizz Ross, Research Methods, 2010) In this scientific paper, quantitative approaches collect and process data that is structured and categorized in such a way that it can be counted. They are constructed and structured by the researcher, deciding both the questions that are asked and the types of responses that respondents can choose from (in the form of a set of categories or responses).

Quantitative data analysis

The data that was collected from this study was then analyzed through the program "Google Forms", which is a survey management software as part of the package of editing documents from the company "Google". The primary data were presented in the form of tables, graphs and descriptive analysis as well as demographic data where each of the sectors includes the respective percentages and characteristics of the respondents.

Measuring instruments of scientific research

In this scientific paper, the measuring instruments that were used are questionnaires containing semi-structured interviews. The types of questions are varied, ranging from yes/no questions to semi-structured interview questions that allow respondents to express themselves more freely, as well as questions that give the possibility to give one or more of the choices depending on the experiences of the respondents. The questionnaire was divided into 3 sections. The first section required general information of the respondents, such as the variables of gender, age, field of study, etc. The second section focused on how much the respondents are aware of hate speech, identification, and concrete cases with mostly closed questions as well as alternatives, while the third section contained questions about the relationship between hate speech and emotional well-being/mental health in respondents. The questions were formulated by the researcher.

Study population

In the statistical sense, the population is the total number of cases that can be included as research subjects. (Bob Matthews, Lizz Ross, Research Methods, 2010). The population of this study resulted in a total of 270 students, who were from different branches at the Universities of Tirana (coming from private and state universities). A high number is noted because the questionnaire was conducted online and distributed on social platforms as well as active student groups on social platforms. In this questionnaire, extra care was taken to keep the questions simple or well explained as well as including examples so that the students were clear in their choices.

Sampling and study data

The time distribution of the questionnaire lasted from June 1-st to July 1-st, 2022, giving students a whole month to respond on the online google forms website. The participants of this survey were informed in advance about the framework of this study, due to the fact that their data would be analyzed and interpreted within the framework of this scientific paper. The target group chosen for the study was 18 - 24 years old, taking into account that the focus was the collection of interviews with young students of the bachelor cycle (and this is the age group that affects students of the 3-year cycle or 4, 5 depending on the field of study) . The target group was focused only on students who are

registered in the Universities of Tirana (not in the universities of the districts) The purpose of the questionnaire was to understand the connection between hate speech among Albanian youth, whether they have experienced it or as witnesses, and to understand if hate speech has affected their mental health/ emotional well-being. In total, this survey resulted in 20 questions which were then analyzed and interpreted.

Reliability considerations

All data obtained from the responses of students who chose to participate remained confidential. It was made clear to the students at the beginning of the survey that each of their answers remains anonymous, and that this survey aims to preserve their privacy. No private data of the participants has been made public. It should be said that regardless of privacy, the google forms format requires each respondent to create a personal account in the online format, in order to verify that the data is correct from real individuals (not online robots).

Results

The 20 questions that were raised in this survey are listed as below:

1. What is your gender?
2. What is your age?
3. Where is your birthplace?
4. Are you a bachelor student at a state or private university?
5. What is your field of study?
6. After given some examples to read, do you think these cases you read are examples of hate speech?
7. Do you think you have enough information about the types of hate speech in our country?
8. Have you ever been exposed to hate speech/discrimination?
9. How has this exposure to hate speech been?
10. In cases where hate speech was directed at others, which of the cases was it?
11. Where did this exposure to hate speech occur?
12. Which of the following cases was the discriminatory comment you found?
13. What cases of hate speech online and in audiovisual media have you noticed?
14. On which of the platforms listed below have you noticed the most instances of hate speech?

15. Do you think hate speech affects an individual's emotional well-being/ mental health?
16. If you think it does, in what way do you think it has affected your emotional well-being or that of others?
17. Please share your experience as a student with hate speech.
18. When you were exposed to hate speech/discrimination, did you do anything to stop this situation?
19. If not, what was the reason for not responding?
20. Have information/awareness campaigns against hate speech been carried out at your university?

After reading all the questions of the survey, 270 students have given their answers which have been analyzed. Most of the students partaking in this survey were female (75.6%), the minority were male (24.4%). About their age, there was an equal distribution of students from the age of 18 till 24. Out of 270 students, the birthplace of most of them (57.8%) were from cities outside of the capital, and 42.2% of the students were born in Tirana. Regarding whether they study in a private of state university, 66.7% of them said that they studied at a state university, 33.3% said that they studied in a private university, and about their field of study, they mostly were studying medicine, journalism& communications, political sciences, architecture etc.

After gathering their general information, the students were given 4 examples of news titles/comments online in Albania, to read and analyze. After reading these examples, most students (88.9%) answered that they believed the examples above were forms of hate speech. Then, 58.9% of the students said that they believed that they had enough information on hate speech, and 41.1% believed that they did not have enough information on hate speech.

After this section, the survey asks students to get into detail about their experiences with hate speech. Out of 270 students, the majority of 71.5% claimed "yes, I have been exposed to hate speech", 17% claimed that they have not been exposed, and 11.5% of the students said they weren't sure.

Getting more into details with the type of hate speech they had been exposed to, and the most important discovery of this study, most cases of hate speech that the students have been exposed to, were towards the LGBTQI+ community, with 187 cases, followed by hate speech based on sexism, with 177 cases, and third overall were hate comments based on xenophobia and differences of ethnicities in Albania.

Moving on with the survey, out of 270 students, the majority by 97% claimed that they have been exposed to hate speech on different platforms such as social media & TV. Out of all the platforms they have been exposed to hate speech, 78.5 % of the students claim that social media has the most cases of hate speech. The

platforms include Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, YouTube, Telegram, Tik Tok etc. Second place with 8.9% we have audiovisual media platforms such as TV and radio stations, followed by 5.9 % of students that claim that have seen cases of hate speech on different blogs or online media comments.

Going to the last part of the survey, regarding how hate speech affects mental health, out of 270 students, the leading majority by 97.8% claim "yes, hate speech has affected their mental health and emotional wellbeing". Going more into detail, 94.8% of them said that hate speech has affected them negatively. The survey also asked students to share their subjective experiences through short sentences (not mandatory), how hate speech has affected them, and a total of 84 students chose to share their experiences, but with identities kept anonymous.

Discussion

This sector deals with the interpretation of the analysis of the answers to the questionnaire above, as well as the analysis of the data that have been ascertained up to this part of the scientific paper. Referring to the first research question of this study:

1. "Is there enough information on cases of hate speech in our country?"

Based on the materials treated in the literature review as well as the studies collected in our country, there are treatments and discussions on cases of hate speech in Albania, as well as relevant institutions and organizations that conduct continuous studies, but we can say that there is always a place for improvement. Based on the results of the last question of the questionnaire, if awareness campaigns against hate speech were carried out in their universities, out of 270 students, the majority, 78.1% in total, 211 students chose "No", thus concluding that according to their experience, awareness campaigns against this phenomenon have not been carried out in their respective universities.

Regarding to the second research question of this study: 2. "Does Albanian youth have enough information to identify hate speech in our country?", most young people surveyed answered yes, stating that they think they are capable of identifying cases of hate speech in everyday life, regardless of whether or not they are exposed to information on hate speech. According to the chart, 58.9% of them answered with "Yes", so 159 students think that they have enough information on hate speech and the minority, 41.1% answered with "No", so 111 students who do not think that they have enough information about cases of hate speech in our country. Regarding the third research question of this study:3. "Do verbal or non-verbal communications that are considered hate speech directly affect an individual's emotional well-being?", most young students answered yes, confirming

that they think hate speech affects everyone's mental health or emotional well-being. Out of 270 students that took part in this study, 97.8% of them, a total of 264 people, think that "Yes, hate speech affects their mental health", while the minority 2.2% of them, a total of 6 students, think that "No, hate speech does not affect their mental health".

Regarding the fourth research question of this study: 4. "Can we say that an individual's emotional well-being deteriorates as a result of exposure to hate speech?" To the last research question, most students who participated in this survey answered with " hate speech negatively affects mental health", thus confirming that according to the results of the survey, the emotional well-being of the individual worsens because of exposure to hate speech. To be precise, out of 270 respondents, most of them 94.8%, so 256 people answered that hate speech affects them or others in a negative way. On the other hand, the minority with 4.4% think that hate speech does not affect their emotional well-being, and 0.7% think that hate speech has a positive effect on emotional well-being/mental health. Regarding the central hypothesis as well as the counterhypothesis that was raised at the head of the scientific paper, they are as below:

The central hypothesis: "In our country there is a lack of information on hate speech, and for this reason young people do not know how to identify what is hate speech. If we can find a way to better identify it and put the right focus on awareness of hate speech and discrimination, then we change the current situation." Counterhypothesis: "Young people know how to identify hate speech and have enough information about hate speech."

As can be seen from the results of the survey, the young people found, despite a small difference in percentage, that in fact they have information on the hate speech in our country and that they can identify it, thus **proving the counter hypothesis.**

Regarding the second hypothesis: "Hate speech has an impact on the emotional well-being/mental health of the individual. Exposure to hate speech leaves consequences on the mental health and emotional well-being of Albanian youngsters." The results of the questionnaire above show that most students think that hate speech has an impact and has consequences on the mental health/ emotional well-being of the individual, **confirming this sub-hypothesis** and rejecting the counterhypothesis.

Conclusions & Recommendations

To move towards a future where young people are more informed, more aware and alert to hate speech, so that they understand the impact that cases of discriminatory language have on mental health, it is necessary create

environments of discussion on this phenomenon. The creation of new platforms where young people can be informed about hate speech, report experiences is a necessary need. The conduct of awareness campaigns against hate speech, various activities, should be implemented as early as possible in the educational life of students. If such activities are implemented from an early age, there is a probability that cases of hate speech are lowered in the future, thus making a change. In this way, a space of communication would be given to victims of hate speech to express their difficulties and to connect bridges with other people with whom they can identify, by helping them heal from their negative experiences as well.

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