

Hate crime: what do victims tell us?

A summary of independent research into experiences of hate crime victims

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Contents

Foreword	3
Our main findings	4
The main themes	7
It isn't always easy to recognise hate crime.....	7
Hate crime has a huge effect on victims	8
Victims need support	8
There are many reasons why people don't always report hate crime	9

Foreword

In 2018, we carried out independent research to find out how victims of hate crime felt they were treated when they reported these crimes to the police. We wanted to better understand what they thought worked well and what could be improved.

NatCen Social Research carried out this research for us. Their findings should be read alongside our full inspection report, *Understanding the difference*.¹

Hate crime can have a profound and lasting effect on victims and communities.² Hate crime victims are more likely to be victimised on more than one occasion, more likely to suffer serious psychological effects as a result, and less likely than the victims of other crime to be satisfied with the police response.³

In our inspection report, we found that the police response to hate crimes is too inconsistent. To help the police improve, we made several recommendations. Some of these are about improvements to systems and processes. But most are about police forces supporting their officers and staff more, so they have the skills, confidence and professional curiosity to talk to victims and witnesses about all the facts and circumstances of a case.

The victims we spoke to, and whose words are set out in this report, underlined how vital it is for the police to get this right. We thank them for their time and feedback, and will work with the police to help them improve.

Wendy Williams

Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary

¹ [Understanding the difference: The initial police response to hate crime](#), HMICFRS, 2017.

² [Hate Crime, England and Wales, 2014/2015](#), Home Office Statistical Bulletin 05./15, 13 October 2015.

³ [Crime Survey of England and Wales 2016](#), Office for National Statistics.

Our main findings

From speaking with these victims, we draw three main conclusions:

Victims would like police officers and staff to be better at recognising hate crime.

This will mean police record these crimes properly, and victims get the right response.

Victims would like better-trained officers to deal with them.

Victims also said how important it was that officers showed an understanding of their personal circumstances. A lack of awareness and training may have a negative effect on the ability of the police to work with victims.

Victims would like clear information about support services in a format they can understand.

The effects of hate crime on victims are enormous. Victims report that the physical and mental effects of hate crime may last for a long time after the incidents. Help and support is essential for people who have been victims of hate crime to rebuild their lives.

You can find more details about these findings from page seven of this report.

NatCen Social Research's full research report is available here:

[The experiences of victims of hate crime](#)

About hate crime

We used the following widely accepted definition of hate crime for our inspection. NatCen Social Research used the same definition for the research.⁴

Any criminal offence or incident which is perceived by the victim, or any other person, to be motivated by hostility or prejudice towards someone based on a personal characteristic.⁵

Having a clear definition of hate crime helps make sure that police record it properly and victims receive a consistent service.

⁴ This definition was adopted by criminal justice organisations in 2007.

⁵ This common definition was agreed in 2007 by the Association of Chief Police Officers (now the National Police Chiefs' Council), Crown Prosecution Service, Prison Service (now the National Offender Management Service) and other organisations that make up the criminal justice system.

How police record hate crime

According to Home Office statistics from 2016/17, taken from police-recorded crime data, there were 80,393 offences in which one or more personal characteristic⁶ was considered a motivating factor. Compared with 2015/16, this was an increase of 29 percent across all five monitored characteristics.

Hate crime is a very complex issue. It is a crime which often goes unreported, for many different reasons. So the official crime figures for hate crime don't give us an accurate picture of how often this is happening across England and Wales.

The UK Government monitors police data on offending motivated by hostility towards these personal characteristics:

- race or ethnicity;
- religion or beliefs;
- sexual orientation;
- disability; or
- transgender identity.

Some police forces also identify, and record crimes committed against other vulnerable victim groups in responding to local concerns. For example, Greater Manchester Police also monitors hate crimes directed towards members of alternative subcultures.⁷

About the research

NatCen Social Research interviewed 26 victims of hate crime during March and April 2018. People taking part in the research were from all over England and Wales and included a mix of people by gender and age. The interviews were carried out at the same time as our thematic joint inspection of hate crime, which we published in July 2018.

⁶ Sometimes referred to as protected characteristic, which means 'protected in law under the Equality Act 2010'.

⁷ [Hate crime – Policy & procedure](#), Greater Manchester Police, 2017.

Figure 1 below shows the breakdown of participants by personal characteristic. Some people were victims of hate crime because of more than one characteristic.

Figure 1: Research participants' personal characteristics

Personal characteristic	Number of participants
Disability	10
Race	14
Religion	7
Sexual orientation	5
Transgender	2

Source: NatCen Social Research interviews

NB: This breakdown totals more than 26 because some people were victims of hate crime because of more than one personal characteristic.

The main themes

While hate crime is a complex area of crime and no two victims' experiences are the same, some victims told us similar things. We have grouped these into themes.

It isn't always easy to recognise hate crime

Victims told us they themselves were sometimes unsure about what constituted a hate crime.

For example, some victims said they weren't sure if what they had experienced was a hate crime and whether it would be taken seriously if they reported it. One person told the researcher:

'There's a massive disjunct between [...] how you feel about experiencing racism and then how seriously you think anyone will take it as a crime.'

Some victims of hate crime told us that the police didn't always acknowledge that they had been a victim of hate crime.

One example was of a victim of a common assault who believed that she had been targeted because she had a disability. She said the police officer refused to include reference to the hate crime in her statement.

'The steps I've had to take to get them to record it as a hate crime have been phenomenal. I should not have had to go to [an elected official]. I should not have had to keep saying, "This is a hate crime, this is a hate crime".'

What our inspection found

This evidence matches what we found in our inspection. We found that victims of hate crimes weren't always asked about why they thought they had been targeted. This meant that some hate crimes weren't recognised and recorded properly. In our report, we recommended changes to control room practice to make sure victims were asked why they thought the perpetrator had acted as they had done. This will help make sure victims get an appropriate response.

We also recommended that the College of Policing review the hate crime training for police officers and staff. The College should then give details of effective training to all forces for them to use, so they can give victims of hate crime a better service.

[Full inspection findings are available on HMICFRS's website.](#)

Hate crime has a huge effect on victims

We know that hate crime is very distressing for victims because it is based on who you are or what you believe. The impact of this is huge.

Victims in this research project reported that they felt shock, anger, confusion and isolation because of what had happened to them. These feelings often lasted for a long time after the incident. Some people described how they changed how they lived their lives after an attack, because of fear.

One person told the researcher:

'It's destroyed my life, really. I don't even go out. [...] Before, everyone will tell you [...] 'he constantly used to be out'. [...] I just don't feel comfortable going out no more.'

Victims need support

For some victims, having someone who understands what they are going through can be a great help in the weeks and months after an incident.

There are some services which specialise in helping people who have experienced hate crime. These agencies are widely available and known to police forces.

Police can help victims access these services either by referring them directly or by giving them information on the services available. Giving people information in this way is sometimes called 'signposting'.

Victims of hate crime have told us that knowing about these services is important to them.

'Sometimes it's the fact you can talk about things and put them out there, and hear that someone is listening and understanding, that can make a difference – having a group for people to talk to is maybe as good for [some] people as reporting [the hate crime].'

However, victims said they weren't always referred to victim support services or given information about services which could help them.

Some people told us that the police did refer them to victim support services or gave them clear information about services that were available. But others said the information given to them wasn't clear. Some people told us that support organisations were mentioned briefly but they weren't given any further details. Others said they weren't offered any help or information at all about services that could help them.

'I think they talked about victim support, but you know I can't...I didn't come away feeling like there were some things I could definitely go to.'

What our inspection found

We also found in our inspection that victims need support. We found that police forces don't always give victims enough information about support groups or what happens next with their cases. Sometimes, when the police do give victims information, police don't always consider the victims' circumstances enough (for instance, by making the information available in different formats or languages).

We recommended that the National Police Chiefs' Council lead for supporting victims should urgently review how much information forces give victims of hate crime. We also recommended that they should give chief constables guidance about how best to communicate with victims of hate crime, while taking the victims' personal circumstances into consideration.

[Full inspection findings are available on HMICFRS's website.](#)

There are many reasons why people don't always report hate crime

Some people told researchers that they felt shame and blamed themselves for what happened. Some people couldn't easily get to where they needed to go to report what had happened. Sometimes this was because of where they lived or because they had limited mobility. Others were put off because they thought it would take a long time to go through the criminal justice process.

We know, from talking to victims of hate crime, that it is essential that police get things right at the first point of contact. People are more likely to report any further incidents if they are confident that the police will understand and listen to them. Some people told us they had received a poor response when they reported hate crime in the past and so were less likely to report any further incidents.

Victims agreed that it was important to them that officers were understanding, polite and professional at all stages of the process.

'[The police officer] was somebody who was doing their best to listen attentively, and take down details, and was polite and professional.'

Those people who had a good initial response and who were kept up to date about the ongoing investigation were positive about the experience. Even where their cases had been closed, victims told us they were pleased with how the police handled their case because they were kept informed of developments throughout.

'He has been phenomenal. He has been, not only the most practical, efficient, handler of this matter, he's kept me up-to-date with absolutely everything.'

Victims also said how important it was that officers showed an understanding of their personal circumstances. For example, we were told by one transgender woman that one officer insisted on knowing her assigned birth name and surgical status before he could take a report. This shouldn't have happened and was due to a lack of knowledge and training.

'Why was he sent out to take my report when they should have sent somebody out that had trans training, that knew how to deal with trans people.'

What our inspection found

Our inspection also found examples of the lack of understanding, and training on, people's differences. We saw examples of where this lack of awareness and training had had a negative effect on the ability of the police to work with the victim. We made recommendations about police training in our report.

[Full inspection findings are available on HMICFRS's website.](#)