



Hate Crime Focus Groups

Purpose:

- Understanding of what a hate crime is
- Victims experiences of hate crime and reporting
- Expectations of the police service
- What barriers exist which prevent victims from reporting
- Solutions to overcome those barriers and increase hate crime reporting
- What can PCC / OPCC and HC do to help
- Awareness and knowledge of support available to victims

1. Executive Summary:

- It was felt hate crimes are not regarded as a priority by the police
- Participants had very low expectations of the police service
- Police response to hate crimes is slow
- The reporting process is onerous
- Education is needed to raise awareness which should not be police led
- Victims must see some action from the police in response to their complaint
- Victims of hate crimes have to make changes not perpetrators
- Alternative reporting mechanisms are not well known
- Awareness of the Victim Care Service is limited

2. Findings¹:

2.1 What is a hate crime?

2.2 Neither group knew the exact legal definition of hate crime used within the criminal justice system but recognised it was based on hate and discrimination.

2.3 Both sets of groups identified that a hate crime was a form of discrimination based on a particular characteristic such as race or sexuality. It can be hatred motivated by a person's personal prejudices against persons of different races, sexuality, religious beliefs or disabilities. Everyone felt that anybody could be a victim of hate crime irrespective of who they were.

3. Hate crime experiences:

3.1 Below are some brief statements from attendees of their own personal hate crime experiences

¹ Quotes from participants have been used and highlighted within this report

“It is the same with numbers of people with learning disabilities, they just accept it they don’t report it as they feel there might be consequences”

*“Growing up as a child in London I was in the pushchair and my mum was walking along the road and a group of men came up called her a n****r and actually spat at me in the pushchair. My mum couldn’t do anything she went home and called the police and they didn’t come out”*

“I was on my way home walking over a bridge and there was a wedding reception going on and there were lots of lads outside drinking. Before I got there I saw they were shouting at an old lady walking past calling her names. I thought if she is a target I’m going to be a target. They started calling me the n word”

3.2 The impact on the victim of a hate crime can be immense, often on the surface the impact cannot be seen, victims can feel isolated, alone and live in fear. They can often change how they live their lives to avoid becoming victims again.

“I don’t go out, I struggle because of anxiety issues, I can’t work, and I don’t work as I was targeted at work a decade ago. I go to a club now and am a qualified instructor, it’s a good hobby”

“Being wary of your surroundings if someone targets you and takes your doorbell or bike. You are constantly thinking who is behind me who is following me”

3.3 Attendees felt the impact on a victim of a hate crime is greater than on a perpetrators, as it is the victim who has to make changes and adjustments to how they live their lives, not the perpetrators.

“The people who experience hate crime they are the ones that have to make all the changes. I know I’m an easy target so I have to make the changes, getting CCTV etc. Whereas the perpetrators nothing happens they just carry on”

4. Expectations of the police:

4.1 The attendees in both groups had little or no expectations from the police if they were to be victims of hate crime. The attendees felt hate crime was not a recognised priority for the police, especially on the frontline despite what police chiefs may say. The police do not respond when you need them to and by the time they arrive, the perpetrators have disappeared.

“I don’t have an expectation, if I hear or see a hate crime contacting the police doesn’t even cross my mind, it’s not even on my radar”

4.2 The police’s response to hate crimes is very slow which can lead a person who has been a victim to not bother reporting their experience as they feel nothing will be done and the police don’t see it as a priority. A lack of response can lead a vulnerable person feeling isolated and worry more. The police should automatically follow up hate crimes to support victims and make them feel less vulnerable.

“My daughter’s boyfriend is Jamaican and we came down here and we were walking together as a family. Some white kids punched him in the face saying what you are doing with this white girl? They started throwing stones at us and we reported that. There was no response we had to wait a week before someone came out to us. In

Islington no one bothers with the police anymore because there is no response. There is no faith in the police anymore”

5. Events which can affect hate crime:

“The impact is not only on the victim but the wider community”

5.1 There was a recognition particularly with the group in Portsmouth that external events can have a big effect on hate crime levels. Events such as BREXIT and terror attacks can increase levels of hate crime in local communities. Such external events can have a drastic effect on community tensions and heightened insecurities within individuals and communities. Entire communities can feel unsafe and unwelcomed.

“In the mosque the doors used to be open all the time but now since all these issues have happened the doors are locked after a certain time. It stops people being able to worship whenever they can it is restricted now”

“Communities are being affected since we have started talking about Brexit this has particularly affected the university students and they do not feel safe after seeing hate comments coming up even with their own classmates”

5.2 Social media had enabled people with messages of hatred and prejudice to reach a broader audience. Previously these individuals did not have a forum to express and share their views openly with others but the likes of Facebook and Twitter has provided this platform. Individuals can hide behind the anonymity of their computers.

“The division and there is more anger, there has always been division but it is more acceptable because of Brexit. Brexit has given people permission to air those views”

6. Barriers to reporting a hate crime:

6.1 The process of reporting a hate crime can be daunting in itself particularly for those who are already vulnerable. The actual process is far too long for many and those who do end up reporting don't feel that they are supported through it, as there is no advocacy support.

“Reporting wise – it's very difficult on 101 as it takes ages to get through. The hate crime app is very good you do get a response. Its online you can download it”

6.2 The police don't take hate crimes seriously, they don't listen to victims, and victims don't believe they will be listened to.

“My sons often get picked on, I have said I will report it to the police and they have told me not to”

6.3 If English is not your first language reporting a hate crime can be very stressful especially if you are already in distress. Some vulnerable victims i.e. those with disabilities or learning disabilities may not even realise they have been victims of a crime, they just accept such behaviour as being part of their normal everyday life. Victims wish to talk to somebody about their experience but often can't whilst victims also felt that there is little or no follow up. The attendees accepted and agreed this was most likely due to reduced police resources following austerity.

“I get things shouted at me all the time, but as someone with a disability I just accept it. Most people with disabilities have come to accept it and will not report it as they think that’s how it is. So a lot of disabled people don’t even know it is hate crime”

“Some people just want to vent and talk to someone rather than reporting it. There are no follow ups from the police which is why people think the police don’t care”

7. Alternative reporting mechanisms:

7.1 In both groups the level and knowledges about alternative mechanisms which were available to report hate crimes was limited. Some had heard of third party reporting centres but didn’t know what they did or where they could locate them within their communities. Whilst the few who were aware of third party reporting centres felt these were not very well publicised or promoted.

7.2 Both sets of attendees were made aware of online reporting portals such as True Vision through which they could report their hate crime experiences but issues were raised. Victims may not have access to the internet to be able to go online and report, while the majority of victims (of any crime) want to speak with someone, to help them overcome the anxiety of their experience.

7.3 To increase reporting attendees in Portsmouth felt, victims should be provided with several options of how they could report their experience. Generations have changed, some would prefer to report face to face to somebody whilst some may prefer to report online but having the variety of options is important.

7.4 Victims need to see that there will be some form of a response or an outcome otherwise they will think what is the point. Individuals need to be able to access community facilities where they can receive help and support which are not associated with statutory services such as a community hub.

8. Support victims receive:

8.1 Those who had been victims of hate crime explained that they had not received any formal support from organisations. The support they had received had come from their families, friends and communities.

“When I had to move I didn’t have any support but some people from the club helped me move and I was very grateful for that”

“I involved my neighbours shared my story and they helped me”

8.2 Whilst informal support mechanisms existed it was recognised that society has changed, where once individuals would step in and help or support a vulnerable person who was being picked on. Today individuals turn a blind eye, they do not want to get involved, in fear of reprisals or getting stuck in a long process.

9. Victim Care Service:

9.1 Awareness of the Victim Care Service which is funded by the Police and Crime Commissioner amongst the participants was very low, whilst some had heard of Victim Support the national charity. Few were aware that the VCS existed, that it was a free service and victims could self refer without having reported their experience to

the police. One participant felt that the service was only accessible for high level cases.

“Most learning disability organisations have never even heard of victim support”

9.2 Raising awareness of the VCS was an important priority to help victim’s access help and support that they are entitled to. But some felt barriers would still exist particularly for young people, especially males who are too proud to ask for support and those with disabilities.

10. Changing perceptions:

10.1 It was agreed that only education can help raise awareness of hate crime and help tackle prejudice and discrimination in society. This should be led by youth workers and in schools but not the police, as there is a stigma attached to the police.

First thing is education, actually telling them what hate crime is. Getting to that generation

10.2 Employers of large businesses or those who have a lot of contact with the public, such as bus companies and taxi firms need to help educate their staff, so that it becomes every body’s responsibility.

11. Expanding the definition of hate crime:

11.1 Both sets of attendees were informed that the government had instructed the Law Commission to conduct a review of the current definition of hate crime. As part of this review the Law Commission would be exploring and gathering evidence on whether the five existing characteristics should be expanded. To potentially include new categories such as misogyny and ageism. Both groups were asked how they felt about the potential definition being expanded.

11.2 Both sets of attendees felt it would be inappropriate to expand the current definition. They felt that the authorities had yet got to grip with the current five characteristics, in terms of raising awareness and encouraging reporting.

11.3 The groups felt expanding the definition would set a precedent with potential further future expansions of the definition, where would this stop? The present priority should be the current five characteristics, expanding the definition may dilute the importance of the existing recognised characteristics.

“Yes expanding it (the definition) is great on paper but in practice it’s very difficult”

12. Recommendations:

- To increase awareness of the Victim Care Service, emphasising that it is a free service which is accessible without having
- To raise awareness of alternative hate crime reporting mechanisms
- To make the process and ease of reporting easier and quicker (online)

The points raised and discussed during these focus groups will be used to steer and develop the Police and Crime Commissioner’s work on hate crime. The findings will

be shared with Hampshire Constabulary and will be used to lobby for improvements in service delivery to victims of hate crime.

When:

Southampton: Monday 25th February 2019 - Ropewalk Centre, 53 Derby Road (19:00 – 21:00)

Portsmouth: Saturday 02nd March 2019 - Fratton Community Centre, Fratton (10:00 – 12:00)

Attendees:

12 members of the public attended both focus group sessions, four in Southampton - two males and two females and eight in Portsmouth - two males and six females.

The attendance level at Southampton was lower than expected however this did not detract from the level and depth of conversation with participants.