Recommendations for Improving Reporting and Recording of Disability Hate Crime: Some findings from a PhD thesis

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**What is Disability Hate Crime?**

"Any criminal offence which is perceived, by the victim or any other person, to be motivated by a hostility or prejudice based on a person's disability or perceived disability" (College of Policing, 2014).

This thesis was concerned with exploring the experiences of victims of disability hate crime and understanding the perspectives of disabled people, policymakers, interested parties and criminal justice personnel when it comes to reporting and responding to disability hate crimes. As a consequence, the research questions were:

1. What are the experiences of victims of disability hate crimes?
2. What impact does this form of victimisation have on people with disabilities, impairments or conditions?
3. What should be done to improve both the reporting and recording of disability hate crimes?

**Safeguarding Adults Boards:**

Whilst acknowledging the complexities involved in multi-agency working, this research recommends additional targeted training to all agencies engaged in safeguarding to ensure that they recognise and are aware of how to report disability hate crimes, particularly for those dealing with individuals with learning disabilities. The nature of safeguarding adults policy focuses on the victim first and foremost and there needs to be a sea change in reacting to reports by disabled victims of hate crime, towards a criminal justice response where appropriate. Accurately and knowledgeably engaging within multi-agency safeguarding hubs and panels has the potential to increase disability hate crime awareness and reporting and prevent further victimisation occurring to others. Interventions, in response, must be adequate and swift, and must ensure assumptions are not being made about the ‘vulnerability’ of victims (Sin, 2016). Local authorities should promote increased awareness of hate crime policy across all safeguarding agencies and, when risks are identified, the response should not be restricted to protecting or removing the victim but also to considering police referral. A holistic response thus means all agencies acknowledging responsibility, sharing information and collaborating to provide a unity of service to the victim.

**Dedicated Hate Crime Units:**

This research advocates for an assessment of hate crime practices within police forces in England and Wales, echoing previous findings of inconsistency in tackling hate crimes (Mencap and OPM, 2011). This is in addition to the review of hate crime resources currently being undertaken by the National Policing Lead and should include cost-benefit evaluations of the Units, alongside other measures of success. Whilst acknowledging that each force has to adapt its services according to the needs of the community it serves, on the basis of this thesis, this research recommends a dedicated hate crime unit within all police forces. Units have the potential to undertake more investigations with statistical accuracy and enhance results and community relations (College of Policing, 2014). However, rather than a Unit focused solely within a police force, the research recommends a holistic, multi-agency approach to such a unit, including embedding the statutory links now required with adult safeguarding hubs (Cooper and Bruin, 2017), as discussed above, and alignment with third party reporting centres.

**Third Party Reporting Centres:**

The research identified a lack of reporting to Third Party Reporting (TPR) Centres. Extensive evaluation of the success of TPRs is needed to identify if they are providing value for money, particularly in a time of austerity and shrinking budgets. This evaluation needs to include how services are tendered, the history of the tendering agency/ies, the social, cultural and economic demographics of the neighbourhood or region within which the services are to be provided, and the current trends and patterns of hate crime within that area. Combining those factors should enable local authorities to identify a bespoke TPR service designed to best meet the needs of service users, victims and communities. The promotion of TPR services across communities is paramount. Without individual victims recognising their experiences as hate crimes, even the most intelligent of TPR systems will not produce an increase in reporting figures. As one participant said: “people don’t see it themselves, it’s up to the rest of us, and by the rest of us I mean the whole of society” to identify and report hate crimes.