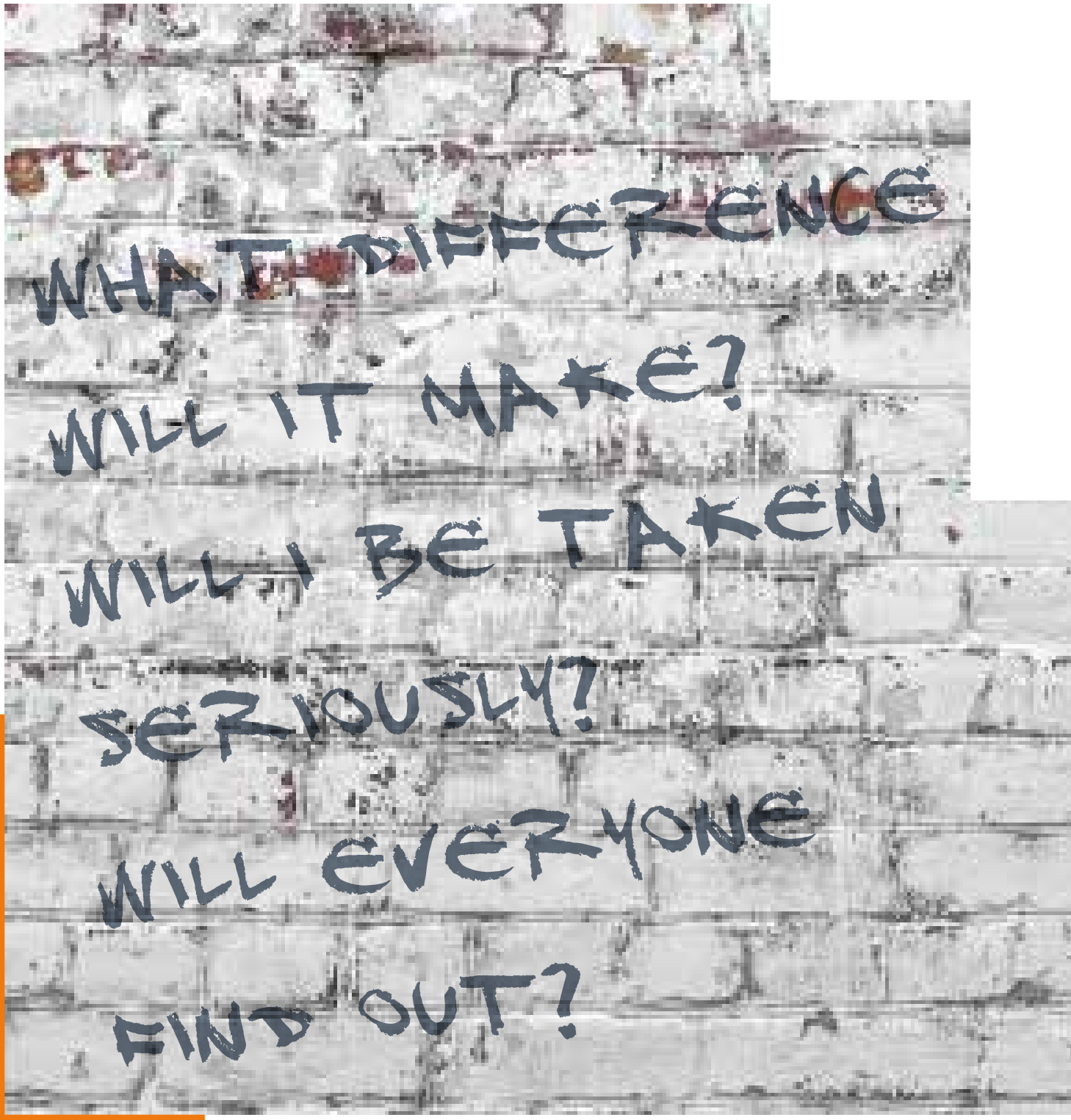
UNIVERSITY OF LEICESTER

THE CENTRE FOR HATE STUDIES

LGB&T Hate Crime Reporting:

Identifying Barriers and Solutions



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INTRODUCTION

Every year tens of thousands of people in England and Wales suffer prejudice and hostility because of their identity or perceived 'difference'. This can include acts of physical violence, as well as the more 'everyday' forms of harassment and intimidation. There is a growing body of research evidence to show that acts of hate crime cause significant emotional and physical damage to the well-being of victims, their families and wider communities.

A series of research studies – including most recently The Leicester Hate Crime Project, Britain's largest study of hate crime victimisation – have shown that the majority of hate crime victims do not report their experiences to the police or through available third-party reporting systems. This was particularly evident within the Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual (LGB) sample of the aforementioned study, of whom only 14% had reported their most recent experience of hate crime to the police. High numbers of LGB and Transgender (LGB&T) victims explained that the reason for not reporting their most recent experience was because they felt that they would not be taken seriously.

In December 2014 we began a programme of tailored work with LGB&T communities in Leicester and Leicestershire with the aim of encouraging greater levels of hate crime reporting. This project was awarded funding from the Equality and Human Rights Commission through the tender entitled 'Preventing and Tackling Homophobic, Biphobic and Transphobic Hate Crime'. This report presents the findings from this project and has been structured to outline LGB&T people's experiences and expectations of hate crime reporting, and to provide best practice guidance. We hope that the recommendations within this report make a real and sustained difference with respect to helping organisations and individuals respond more effectively to hate crime.

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BACKGROUND

According to recent figures the police recorded 44,280 incidents of hate crime in 2012/2013 (Creese and Lader, 2014). It is widely acknowledged that this number is a considerable underestimate of the actual number of hate crimes taking place within England and Wales. The Crime Survey for England and Wales, which provides an alternative measure of hate crime victimisation, estimated that 278,000 incidents took place within the same time-frame (Home Office, ONS and Ministry of Justice, 2013). Of these 39,000 were homophobic hate incidents, a figure which is nine times higher than the corresponding police recorded total of 4,267 (Home Office, ONS and Ministry of Justice, 2013).

Compared with the other four monitored strands of hate crime, incidents motivated by hostility towards the victim's perceived sexual orientation are more likely to be violent in nature (Creese and Lader, 2014). This finding is supported by research evidence which suggests that intimidation, harassment and violence are a feature of everyday life for many Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual (LGB) people (Chakraborti, Garland and Hardy, 2014; Guasp, Gammon and Ellison, 2013). For example, research conducted by Stonewall (Guasp *et al.*, 2013) found that:

- Eight in ten LGB people had been verbally abused and harassed
- One in eight LGB people had received unwanted sexual contact
- One in ten LGB people had been physically assaulted

Often transgender experiences of hate crime are subsumed under the 'LGBT' umbrella, which can present difficulties in teasing out the specificities within these groups' experiences of hate crime. Although transphobic hate crime is hugely underrepresented within police recorded figures (361 incidents in 2012/2013), research suggests that some victims of transphobia can be targeted over 50 times per year (Antjoule, 2013). One of the commonalities between homophobic and transphobic hate crime is the significant level of under-reporting to the police and to other third-party alternatives.

Research suggests that just three in ten victims of transphobic hate crime will report their most recent incident to the police, with even fewer LGB victims (one in ten) likely to share their experiences (Chakraborti *et al.*, 2014; see also Christmann and Wong, 2010). There are several factors which are thought to underpin this reluctance to report to the police, including the perceived severity of the incident; concern about the police response; and previous bad experiences with the police (Dick, 2008, Guasp *et al.*, 2013; Chakraborti *et al.*, 2014). Although there is considerable evidence to illustrate that reporting levels within LGB&T populations are especially low, little is known about ways to increase reporting and to make members of these communities feel safer and less vulnerable.

Through community consultation with LGB&T people in Leicester and Leicestershire, this project was designed to develop a more nuanced understanding of the barriers preventing hate crime reporting and to identify practical solutions to overcome these issues. The specific aims of the project were:

- To identify the extent to which LGB&T communities are aware of local and national hate crime reporting mechanisms;
- To assess the perceived barriers that contribute to LGB&T victims' and witnesses' unwillingness to report hate incidents;
- To create a new third-party reporting scheme to boost reporting rates amongst hate crime victims and witnesses from LGB&T communities;
- To provide an evidence-based template of good practice to inform the wider delivery of new and existing hate crime reporting strategies.

METHODOLOGY

How did we conduct the project?

Within this project we used two different approaches to access and engage with lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGB&T) people in Leicester and Leicestershire. First, we employed a conventional 'top-down' approach of accessing project participants through the partner organisations that formed the Advisory Group. These gatekeepers promoted the project through their networks and facilitated access to service users, staff and volunteers.

In addition to accessing participants through formal gatekeepers, the project team also employed a grassroots method of engagement. The project team visited a wide range of known LGB&T venues and community hubs, including cafes, bars, community groups, forums and other informal networks, in order to engage with a diverse sample of LGB&T people within their familiar environments and social spaces.

The team used in-depth face-to-face qualitative interviews to explore LGB&T people's experiences and expectations with regard to hate crime reporting. The majority of interviews were conducted individually, but where necessary and appropriate small group interviews were also conducted. Overall, 50 people who identified as LGB or T were interviewed.

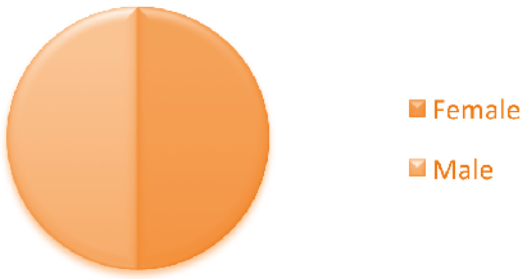
Who took part in the project?

The profile of project participants was extremely diverse in terms of:

- Age
- Area of residence
- Disability and impairment
- Ethnicity
- Faith
- Gender
- Sexual Orientation

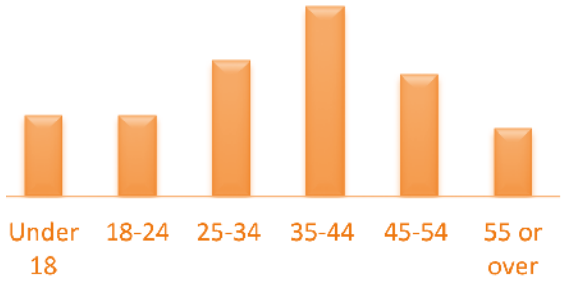
Figure 1-5 and Table 1 provide a breakdown of how participants within this project described themselves.

Figure 1: Gender of participants



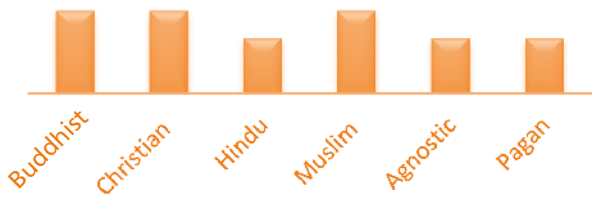
50% (n=25) of those taking part in the project were women, and 50% (25) were men. 10% of these participants described themselves as transgender.

Figure 2: Age of participants



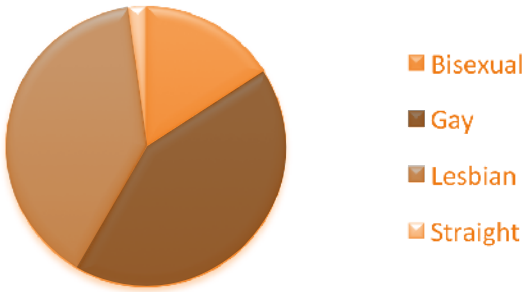
28% (14) of participants were aged 35-44. The next largest age group was 25-34 which made up 20% (10) of the sample, followed by 18% (9) who were 45-55. 12% (6) of the sample were under 18, and the same number were 18-24. 10% (5) of the sample were 55 or over.

Figure 3: Denomination of participants who specified a faith or religious identity



30% (15) of the total sample can be described as having a particular faith or religious affiliation. Small proportions identified as being Agnostic (2), Buddhist (3), Christian (3), Hindu (2), Muslim (3) or Pagan (2).

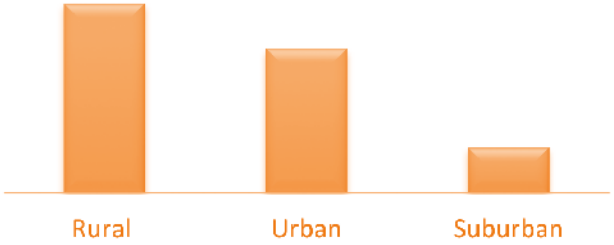
Figure 4: Sexual orientation of participants



42% (21) of participants described themselves as gay, and the sample included a similar proportion of lesbians (40%, 20). 16% (8) of the sample identified as being bisexual, whilst 2% (1) identified as straight.

34% (17) of participants described themselves as having some form of disability, including long-term health conditions such as HIV and diabetes; physical disabilities such as visual impairments and issues with mobility; and mental health conditions such as anxiety and depression. Some participants (18%, 9) also described having issues with self-harm and substance misuse.

Figure 5: Gender of participants



38% (19) of participants referred to living in an urban environment, whilst 50% (25) were based in rural towns and villages within the county of Leicestershire. 12% (6) of participants stated that they lived in a 'suburban' location.

Table 1: Ethnicity of participants

Ethnicity	Breakdown of participants (%)
White British	58%
White English	14%
Asian British	10%
Mixed Ethnic Heritage	6%
White Western European	4%
Black African	2%
White American	2%
White Irish	2%
White Scottish	2%
Total	100%

58% (29) of participants described their ethnicity as White British, followed by 14% (7) who identified as being White English. 10% (5) of the sample described themselves as Asian British, whilst 6% (3) were of mixed ethnic heritage. Small numbers identified as Black African, White American, White Irish and White Scottish.

BARRIERS TO REPORTING

Of the sample of LGB&T people who took part in this project 88% (*n*=44) had experienced some form of homophobic, biphobic or transphobic hate incident. These experiences ranged from extreme acts of physical and sexual assault to the more 'everyday' forms of verbal abuse and harassment. Participants were asked a series of questions about whether they had ever reported a hate crime as either a victim or witness to the police or a third-party alternative. The following section outlines a range of factors that were identified by participants as influencing their decision to report.

Isn't it just something you have to put up with?

Although the majority of the LGB&T people we spoke to had heard of the term 'hate crime', it was commonly associated with violent acts exclusively. Consequently, when participants were asked whether they had experienced a hate crime the overwhelming response was "No". However, when participants were asked whether they had ever received homophobic or transphobic verbal abuse, the majority of the sample could recall multiple incidents. It was the normalisation of these experiences that was found to be one of the key barriers to reporting hate incidents.

Within this project, we heard from many participants who referred to homophobic and transphobic verbal abuse as being 'part and parcel' of being LGB&T.

Young LGB&T people have to accept the fact – not accept the fact – have to understand the fact that they are going to experience some abuse at some point. Which is really sad to say.

Gay male, 40s[1]

When someone shouts something at us, we don't class that as abuse. We don't class that as a serious offence.

Lesbian, 20s

I think you face it on a daily basis sometimes and you just become kind of numb to it, don't you?

Gay male, Muslim, 30s

I think that people don't know actually what is a homophobic crime or incident, it just comes with the territory of being Black, Asian or LGBT. I think a lot of LGBT people, along with other minorities, well, you just put up with it.

Gay male, 50s

I think to tackle the issue of under-reporting, you need to make LGBT people aware that what they're experiencing is actually hate crime.

Lesbian, 20s

The normalisation of this victimisation was particularly evident from interviews with transgender participants. Transgender people regularly experienced a range of hate incidents, including being called abusive names, intimidated and harassed on a daily basis whilst doing everyday things such as shopping, eating out and travelling on public transport. It was the frequency with which transgender people experienced hate incidents which resulted in many regarding this form of victimisation as an 'accepted' consequence of being transgender.

Often generic assumptions are made about the LGB&T 'community' because of the broad and homogenised way in which they are labelled and categorised. It was apparent that the intersectionality between multiple identity and lifestyle characteristics played a significant role in the context of hate crime experiences and the normalisation of these experiences. For example, those participants who regarded themselves as being more identifiably 'gay' or 'trans', often due to dress, appearance and gender presentation, referred to having experienced higher levels of victimisation.

I think your appearance is going to come into it, and I think I probably 'pass', in inverted commas. So unless I out myself, I think it's assumed I'm not gay anyway.

Lesbian, 50s

Obviously the way I dress, I do dress pretty feminine. And most people do, like, sort of, stare when I walk down the street. It might be the skinny female jeans.

Gay male, Muslim, 20s

I used to get quite a lot of people telling me to leave the women's toilets when I was younger, because I looked more boyish than I do now.

Lesbian, 60s

They're [gay people] *judged purely on how gay they look, as in whether you can accept that gayness. It's okay to be gay as long as you don't look too gay.*

Gay male, Mixed Ethnic Heritage, 20s

These individuals were also more likely to regard the more 'everyday' forms of verbal abuse and harassment as being something they had "to put up with". This emotional resilience was also apparent amongst participants who came from a minority ethnic community or who identified as having a disability. These individuals reported having experienced targeted hostility on the basis of their ethnicity, religion and disability, as well as their sexual orientation. The normalisation of 'everyday' forms of verbal abuse and harassment helps to explain why these forms of targeted hostility were often not considered serious enough to report to the police.

[1] Unless otherwise specified, the quotations referred to within this report are taken from interviews with participants describing themselves as either White British or White English.

Will I be wasting police time?

It is often assumed that one of the main barriers which prevents LGB&T people from reporting hate incidents is their negative perception of the police. Within this project the legacy of poor police and LGB&T community relations appeared to have little bearing on a participant's decision to report hate crime. However, one of the main concerns about reporting to the police was the sense that the victim would be wasting police time and resources. Many considered the more 'everyday' forms of verbal abuse and harassment as not being serious enough to report to the police.

If it was just a small thing, I'd feel like I was wasting their [police] *time.*

Bisexual female, 20s

I don't think I've ever thought that it would be necessary to report it because it's not like I would be able to identify who'd done it, you know? I'd be reporting it because I needed to do it for myself but I'm not like that because I deal with my own problems myself.

Lesbian with visual impairment, Western European, 40s

I don't know, somehow I feel like I could be wasting police time for what someone's just yelled at me.

Gay male, 20s

The police would be the last people that I'd signpost to. Mostly because I think they're too busy and they're not interested in that kind of thing.

Gay male, Hindu, 40

To explore this theme in greater depth, participants were asked to describe the forms of hate crime that they thought would warrant police involvement. It became apparent that frequency and severity were key factors in shaping a victim's decision to report. As the comments below illustrate, if a participant was being repeatedly targeted, or if the incident involved violence, then they would be more inclined to report the experience to the police.

I've never been a victim of prolonged verbal abuse. If you've got somebody who's literally being verbally abused every day, then it's different.

Lesbian, 30s

If they [group of men] *were to start following me and to carry on yelling homophobic abuse, then I would start calling the police because then I would feel I'm in danger because they mean business.*

Gay male, 20s

I think [I would report] *at the point where it actually became physical and there was a point where I felt in danger of actually getting harmed physically.*

Transgender female, 30s

If I was to be assaulted, absolutely I'd report. If I was to have damage to my property, absolutely. Somebody calling me a poof … I'm too old, I've heard it far too many times. Life's too short.

Gay male, 40s

Will everyone find out about me?

One of the main concerns expressed by participants within this project was that reporting homophobic and transphobic hate crimes could lead to them being 'outed'. This fear was underpinned primarily by a mistrust of how the police would respond to the victim and how they would use this information. Perceptions of the police varied within the sample, with transgender people, young people and those from a minority ethnic background expressing the greatest levels of apprehension.

I would say that lesbians and gays are probably the most out, the bisexuals are probably close behind, and transgender – I would say less than 1% ever get out of their own house.

Transgender female, 50s

They might be fearful that the police will be unsupporting [sic] or uncaring, or unsympathetic or homophobic themselves.

Gay male, 30s

With people on websites and that, you don't know who you're talking to … you don't know who you're giving the information to.

Bisexual female, Asian British, 16

I think a lot of it is the fact that they [transgender people] *are frightened that the police will not take them seriously and perhaps even laugh behind their backs.*

Transgender female, 40s

Interestingly, there was a strong sense of discomfort expressed by some of the youngest and oldest participants about the police and other statutory agencies keeping data which 'officially' denoted them as LGB&T. This was a concern that not only created barriers in terms of reporting to the police but also in using online reporting mechanisms. There was a clear lack of trust about whose hands this data could fall into and how it would be used.

In the case of many of the transgender and minority ethnic people who took part in this project it was common for their family members, the broader community, work colleagues and even friends to be unaware about their gender and/or sexual identity. These participants expressed significant concern about the ramifications of people finding out about their sexuality or transgender status, and this fear prevented them from attending social groups and known LGB&T venues. Unsurprisingly, these participants stated that they were unlikely to report any form of homophobic or transphobic hate crime to the police.

I think most people who face that kind of crime are those that are doing it on the sly, and so if they were ever to go to the police they would be exposed to their families.

Gay male, Hindu, 40s

Well, it's really interesting for people in the trans community. The terror of being outed, particularly if somebody isn't out, the terror of driving a car and the thought of having to stop at the traffic lights next to another car, or being in an accident and having the fire brigade and the ambulance and the police and everything turn up is enormous. And it's a constraint on lives – that fear of being outed, that fear of being caught or seen or whatever. It's extraordinary.

Gay male, White Scottish, 30s

If you're LGBT and come from a BME background in Leicester, you're facing a double whammy of prejudice. The commercial scene is nearly all white. You perhaps can't use it because you might be seen by somebody in your family, so if you're going to use the commercial scene, you have to go to other cities. There's racism in the LGBT scene, as there is anywhere else. And then equally, in your own BME community, you're faced with isolation around your sexuality, that often you have to hide it for fear of being rejected by your family.

Gay male, 40s

Participants were asked to consider what strategies the police and other frontline practitioners could use to improve levels of confidence within LGB&T communities. Most suggested greater engagement with LGB&T people in informal settings, including attending events and socialising in known LGB&T venues and community 'hubs'. Through a more flexible engagement approach it was felt that the police could develop trust and rapport with LGB&T people, which would undoubtedly make them more likely to report their experiences. Participants were also asked to consider how they would like frontline practitioners to treat them when they reported a hate crime. Of high importance to the sample was being taken seriously, and being treated with empathy and sensitivity.

Be understanding. Make you feel like it does actually matter and that you're not actually wasting their time, that they actually do care about these sort of things.

Bisexual female, 20s

Empathetic, sympathetic. And then just be honest … be more honest about what they can and can't do.

Gay male, Muslim, 40s

What is the point of reporting?

Throughout the process of engaging with people from LGB&T communities it became apparent that one of the key barriers to reporting hate crime to the police was the perception that the reporting process was time-consuming, confusing and unlikely to yield a successful outcome. Therefore, many participants felt that there was little point to reporting hate crime to the police or a third-party alternative. This resulted in a general sense of apathy about the issue of reporting.

In many instances where the crime is reported, there's not enough evidence to charge the individual and that unfortunately has a negative impact on the victim. That individual will now think 'Well, why did I report it at all, nothing can be done.'

Gay male, White American, 50s

I would feel a bit like … not that I was wasting their [the police] time because they should be, you know, willing to communicate with people on these types of issues. But I just think that you would be quite low down the list. And it wouldn't surprise me if they took down a few notes and went, "Right… we'll get back to you." And that would be the last thing you ever heard. If that's reporting it, there's no incentive there for that person to do it, so why would you?

Lesbian, 20s

I do have people who say, 'Well, if I report every little thing that's shouted to me in the street, I'll be in the police station all day.' That's very common.

Transgender female, 40s

I think most people who face that kind of crime are those that are doing it on the sly, and so if they were ever to go to the police they would be exposed to their families.

Gay male, 40s

I wouldn't know who to phone. If it was verbal abuse or even a punch in the face, I wouldn't want to phone 999 to report that. Depending on how serious it was, I don't think I'd bother the next day to go to the police station and go in and say, "Last night I was abused here". I just wouldn't bother.

Bisexual female, 20s

I think probably what puts a lot of people off is wondering what difference is it [reporting] *going to make? Like, if I report somebody shouted dyke at me, what's going to happen? Nothing's going to come from that, you're not going to catch the person that's done it.*

Lesbian, White Irish, 50s

Many of the participants had a realistic, and at times quite pessimistic, perception of the police and their capacity to locate and arrest perpetrators. They felt that the investment needed from the victim to report hate crime far outweighed the benefits of doing so. Most of those who had reported hate crime to the police on previous occasions felt jaded from that experience, particularly when they had received no further information or updates about the incident.

You know, I phoned him [the investigating police officer]*, he wasn't in and I spoke to a colleague and I left messages on his phone. And I haven't heard anything. I gave up.*

Gay male, 40s

The police, you see them once, they give you a number. Nine times out of ten, they don't enter the number or get back to you.

Bisexual male, Mixed Ethnic Heritage, 17

The only major criticism that I have with the police – and it seems to happen time and time again – is that there is very little communication once an incident is reported.

Gay male, White American, 50s

In order to overcome this barrier participants suggested that the police and other relevant agencies could communicate much more effectively, specifically in the context of explaining why reporting hate crime is important and what happens with the data once it is recorded. In particular, participants wanted to know whether hate crime data was used to inform police practices, such as increased patrols in specific areas where hate crimes are known to be taking place. If the process of recording, investigation and prosecution was explained more clearly then, as participants suggested, victims would be more inclined to report.

Another suggestion raised by participants was for greater publicity of successful cases. Many remarked that they had never heard about any positive experiences of reporting to the police or where the victim had received 'justice'.

I think what there's got to be are some more high profile cases where the people who have been attacked are protected but the people who have been caught doing it are named and shamed.

Transgender female, 40s

I think we need to get better as a police service, or I would want to see in the press and the media…the outcomes of cases being publicised more.

Gay male, 40s

What is a third-party reporting centre?

In recent years many local authorities, voluntary and community organisations have worked hard to develop a range of third-party reporting mechanisms which offer an alternative to reporting hate crime directly to the police. Within this project, participants were asked about their knowledge and use of third-party reporting strategies in Leicester and Leicestershire. Unfortunately, very few participants had ever heard of any national third-party reporting schemes, including Stop Hate UK and True Vision, or of any regional alternatives.

After the aim of third-party reporting mechanisms had been explained to participants, the majority thought that having alternative pathways was a good idea. Participants stated that the likelihood of reporting would be increased if the mechanisms available to report hate crimes were more straightforward. Suggestions from the sample included a dedicated hate crime phone-line, website or mobile phone app that allowed both victims and witnesses to share information quickly and anonymously.

An online form, that would be quite quick and easy, and you wouldn't have to tell anybody. So for those people that don't want people to know that something's happened to them and they don't want to have to book any time off work to go to a police station or anything like that, then that's going to be a lot easier.

Gay male, White Scottish, 30s

Online would be alright. You can imagine an app really where you just put the location, level of abuse. What do you think it relates to? And then log it, something as simple as that. So it's just being recorded.

Transgender female, 30s

I think the more ways that people can report hate crime the better, because people like to communicate in different ways. Maybe some people like to pick up the telephone, some people like to do it online. So I think, yeah, it just captures more people.

Lesbian, Mixed Ethnic Heritage, 20s

I would do it [report] if I felt that it was actually useful to somebody … and that it would not in any way come back to me.

Transgender female, 30s

However, there were also some concerns expressed about having third-party reporting alternatives. One of the main sources of apprehension was the potential for multiple strategies and methods to cause confusion. There was also a fear that digital formats such as websites and mobile phone apps could potentially exclude those who are not familiar with or unable to use such technologies. Equally, participants voiced concern about the locations of existing third-party reporting centres, viewing many of the venues as inappropriate.

What about older gay or trans people who don't use the Internet?

Gay male, 40s

I guess the more [third-party reporting centres] *there are, the more you'd know about them. But then my worry would be that you'd pick the wrong one. So if you were in the city, you'd hit the county one; if you were in the county, you'd hit the other one. Does there need to be two, county and city?*

Lesbian, 30s

Probably the best place is hospitals. The police ought to pay for a counsellor to be somewhere like A&E at Leicester 24/7, so they can wander round, talk to people.

Transgender female, 50s

There are so many different reporting methods now and so many different reporting forms and stuff. Which one do you use, you know?

Gay male, Muslim, 30s

But what happens with it [the report] *once it's in the app, like, where does it go? Because police can't go, "Oh, well, there's a guy sitting in a restaurant and someone's called him a fag". Then what happens? … What are the police going to do, go in and go, "Can you stop calling this person a fag?" No.*

Lesbian, Asian British, 30s

As stated, relatively few participants had prior knowledge or experience of using third-party reporting strategies locally or nationally: five participants had heard of either a local or national third-party reporting strategy, and only one participant had used one of these strategies to report hate crime. Their feedback on third-party reporting was overwhelmingly negative. Specifically, these participants questioned the effectiveness of current third-party reporting strategies in terms of their capacity to encourage higher levels of reporting.

Third-parties for me don't work. I don't see the benefit of going in to tell somebody, to sit there watching them pick the phone up or filing out an online reporting form.

Gay male, 40s

I went round the houses actually and tried to contact various people. If you go on the county council website it's all 'We want to hear about things' … I messaged them [local authority] through their website, but then the problem with website messaging services is they never actually respond. And then I emailed someone, I think she had a government email address, but she never responded … I have to say, reporting something that you're not sure about and probably isn't a crime is horrendous.

Lesbian, 40s

Do they work? I have to honestly say no. Is there something better we can do? Yes. I don't know what that better is. There must be something better we can do, because all I can look at is the end result. I know with certainty that the number of hate crimes that are taking place out there are much greater than are being reported.

Gay male, White American, 50s

When discussing the existing range of alternative reporting mechanisms and the barriers associated with these, there were some participants who remarked on needing a 'one-stop' approach to third-party reporting. This would entail having a local hate crime reporting service offering a series of options to victims, including:

- A physical venue for those who prefer reporting face to face
- An online presence through a website and social networking sites
- A mobile phone appEthnicity
- A dedicated phone line
- A streamlined campaign throughout the city and the county

It was suggested that this service should be delivered by an independent organisation which could also provide an advocacy function. Participants felt that having an advocate with specialised knowledge and skills would not only provide valuable support to victims but would also encourage more victims to come forward.

It would probably make it feel more personalised.

Bisexual female, 20s

I think you need one … you need somebody to take you through the entire thing. I think it would be seen as being more serious.

Lesbian, White Irish, 50s

What is a hate crime?

As a result of undertaking this process of consultation with LGB&T communities it became clear that the overarching barrier to reporting homophobic and transphobic hate crime is a lack of awareness relating to three key areas:

- What the term 'hate crime' refers to
- Why victims and witnesses should report hate crimes
- How victims and witnesses can report hate crimes

For this reason, participants were asked what awareness-raising strategies would enhance knowledge of hate crime and reporting pathways.

A range of initiatives were identified by the sample, including having one streamlined and sustained hate crime campaign for Leicester and Leicestershire; making better use of digital media such as Twitter and Facebook; having more meaningful and extensive engagement between the police and LGB&T communities; and using a more positive publicity campaign. The following comments from participants identify a variety of strategies which they felt would encourage higher levels of hate crime reporting.

The bus one [Stonewall poster campaign] *was brilliant because not only did they have all the buses and the billboards, they had the Twitter competition. If you saw one of the buses, you'd have to tweet a picture of the bus and say which city you saw it in. And that was massive. That was really successful.*

Lesbian, 30s

I think posters work. I think we should never just solely rely on the Internet. And in the reducing budgets, it's very easy to say we'll design a poster and we'll email it out or tweet it.

Gay male, 40s

It may be that we need to be more intensive. We need to literally go out to communities quite frequently and to remind them, because every day there are more LGBT people who, the day before, didn't identify that way. So it's not as if we talk to one stagnant group and we talk to everybody, and we don't need to go back for ten years.

Gay male, 50s

I think Pride's a good place to get information out to LGB&T people … Also is there a leaflet? Because we all read the leaflet.

Bisexual female, 50s

CONCLUSIONS

Over the course of three months the project team engaged with hundreds of people from LGB&T communities in Leicester and Leicestershire, and conducted in-depth interviews with 50 LGB&T people. Verbal abuse, intimidation and harassment on the basis of sexual orientation and/or gender identity were identified as regular experiences within the context of many participants' everyday lives. Moreover, the findings from this project illustrate that many people within LGB&T communities are unaware of and unfamiliar with reporting pathways. Decisions about whether to report hate crime were found to be influenced by several factors, including the normalisation of 'everyday' victimisation, concerns about being 'outed', a lack of awareness, and an inability to see how reporting benefits the victim or the police.

This project and its findings have relevance beyond Leicester and Leicestershire, and we were keen to use the lessons that we have learned from this community consultation to produce best practice guidance for agencies and partnerships regionally and nationally. These recommendations are based on the needs and expectations of the LGB&T communities with whom we engaged. They are important, achievable and victim-centred, and their implementation will improve existing reporting strategies for LGB&T communities.

Identify the specific support needs of LGB&T communities

Many participants within this project held the view that frontline practitioners were unaware of the day-to-day challenges faced by many LGB&T people, and therefore lacked the necessary knowledge and skills to be able to appropriately support such individuals. This was particularly true for transgender people who expressed irritation at having to explain about their gender identity on a regular basis. Often the intersections between identity characteristics and situational factors, and the relevance this has to people's experiences of hate crime victimisation, are underappreciated or overlooked altogether. Participants who were under 18 years old, 'trans' or from a minority ethnic community were most likely to voice concerns about frontline practitioners being 'out of touch' with the lived reality and complexity of being LGB&T in today's society. This perception of frontline staff results in many LGB&T people not feeling comfortable or confident about reporting experiences of homophobic and transphobic hate crime.

Use more extensive methods of engagement with LGB&T communities

Research evidence shows that hate crime policy is commonly shaped by narrow engagement with a limited number of community leaders and representatives. Reporting strategies based on organisational assumptions are often ineffective, as evidenced by this project, and participants wanted to see wider engagement between frontline practitioners and LGB&T communities. It was felt that this would not only lead to a greater understanding of LGB&T people, but would also help to inform appropriate and relevant policy and practice. Participants suggested that frontline practitioners should spend time informally engaging with LGB&T communities through groups and community 'hubs' to develop rapport and trust.

Develop positive campaigns to encourage LGB&T hate crime victims to report

Participants within this project felt that existing hate crime campaigns were often too negative, with their focus being on the emotional and physical impacts of this form of victimisation. While these campaigns are important, it was felt that producing more positive forms of publicity about sexuality and gender identity would encourage more people to share their experiences of targeted hostility. Equally, generating greater publicity around real-life successful criminal justice outcomes was thought to be a key way of challenging the widespread scepticism and indifference that surrounds hate crime reporting.

Produce hate crime awareness campaigns which connect with people more effectively

Over the course of this project a range of awareness-raising initiatives were identified by LGB&T people. On the basis of these suggestions it would seem that the use of a variety of methods to promote what a hate crime is, and where victims and witnesses can report, is key to raising awareness amongst different sections of different communities. Participants proposed a range of ideas to promote greater awareness, including making better use of both the mainstream media and the minority press, developing poster campaigns in appropriate community venues and 'hubs', and utilising social networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook. These suggestions might seem surprising in one sense given that many of these strategies are already in use within certain contexts and environments. However, the very fact that most participants had not seen them before demonstrates that existing awareness-raising campaigns are failing to connect with LGB&T communities on a grassroots level. Importantly, it was felt that these awareness-raising mechanisms should be tailored, and where necessary adapted, to recognise the diverse profile of LGB&T people from different age groups, ethnic and faith backgrounds and from different walks of life in order to be sufficiently far-reaching.

Locate third-party reporting centres in more appropriate locations

Many of the decisions made around awareness-raising campaigns and third-party reporting centres are made without any consultation with those groups and communities who are the intended beneficiaries. This could explain why many third-party reporting centres are located in inappropriate locations. Very few of the participants within this project had any prior awareness of where existing third-party reporting centres were located, nor did they understand why these locations had been chosen. When asked to suggest more appropriate venues a series of alternative locations were proposed, including educational settings, community 'hubs', health centres and GP surgeries. When deciding on locations for alternative reporting centres, practitioners should take the time to involve LGB&T communities in these decisions and to put themselves in the victim's shoes when considering whether such locations would be used.

Tailor reporting pathways to meet the needs of a specific group or community

Research evidence shows that generic assumptions are often made about why victims do or do not report, without accounting for differences across backgrounds, cultures, ages and prior experiences of victimisation. This project found that decisions around reporting hate crime could be influenced by age, ethnic and religious background, and how confident or comfortable someone is with their own sexuality or gender identity. Consequently, organisations should avoid using a 'one-size fits all' approach to reporting and instead tailor different reporting pathways to meet the needs of specific groups.

Make reporting procedures more victim-friendly

The findings from this project suggest that many victims are unlikely to share their experiences of targeted hostility because of the perceived amount of time and emotional stamina required to report a hate incident and because these factors were often underappreciated by statutory and voluntary organisations. Many participants also spoke of being unfamiliar with and confused by existing reporting mechanisms. In order to break down these barriers the police and other relevant organisations should evaluate their own reporting processes in consultation with people from LGB&T communities, and take steps to simplify them.

Allow victims and witnesses to report hate crime anonymously

This project illustrates that for a variety of reasons victims are reluctant to report their experiences of targeted hostility to the police or through a third-party alternative. At the same time, one of key themes to emerge from interviews with participants is that both victims and witnesses would be more inclined to report hate crime if they could do so anonymously. The desire for anonymity is a factor that should be considered within awareness-raising campaigns, as is the need for members of the public – and not just victims – to take collective responsibility for tackling prejudice within their communities by reporting hate incidents. Participants suggested that having the option of a website or mobile phone app which permitted quick, easy and anonymous reporting would encourage greater reporting of homophobic and transphobic hate crime from both victims and witnesses.

Provide regular updates about investigations

One of the biggest causes of frustration for hate crime victims is a lack of follow-up once an incident has been reported. Over the course of this project participants often remarked on how they would be better equipped to deal with the consequences of an incident not resulting in an arrest if the actions of the police and the process of investigation were explained to them. Not being kept updated about the progress of their case, or about the reasons for it not being pursued, left many victims feeling reluctant to invest the time and effort into reporting again.

Offer the option of an independent advocate

Many of the participants within this project were unfamiliar with the reporting process, and those who had gone through the process found it time-consuming, confusing and emotionally draining. One of the suggestions to overcome these issues was to have the option of a fully-trained advocate who would support the victim through the process. Participants felt that having an independent advocate who could offer advice and support, and who could liaise with the police on the victim's behalf, would make their experience of the criminal justice process feel less intimidating and more manageable. Moreover, this approach would enable the reporting of hate crime to feel more personalised and to be tailored around the needs of the individual.

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