

Securing victim support in hate crime investigations

Published on 1 August 2024

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Practice note: Addressing crimes that have a disproportionate impact on minority communities

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High levels of victim attrition in hate crime cases were noted in the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS). Consequently, we discussed testing an evidence-led approach with a view to improving positive outcomes, victim experience and public trust and confidence.

The problem

The MPS strategy 'A New Met for London' places at its centre the objectives of more trust and less crime. There is a particular focus on securing the trust of minority communities by effectively addressing crimes that have a disproportionate impact.

In this context, we know that minority communities are disproportionately impacted by hate crime. Improving the policing response is key to securing trust. Victims of hate crime report greater loss of confidence, feelings of vulnerability and psychological side-effects compared to crime victims generally. Hate crime can also have a detrimental impact on the wider community and can constitute a 'signal crime' (a crime that signals to the public that they are unsafe), impacting broader perceptions of crime and safety. Consequently, the effectiveness of the police response is vital to improve public confidence and increase hate crime reporting.

Hate crime investigations take twice as long as comparable non-hate crime offences. This risks waning victim support and attrition where the victim may withdraw support for the investigation. In the MPS, victims withdrew support for 31% of 2021/22 hate crime investigations. Lack of victim support and subsequent difficulties in prosecuting may leave communities at risk of repeat victimisation.

The response

We noted the best available evidence on [second responder programmes for domestic abuse](#) (see the College of Policing [crime reduction toolkit](#)) increased victim reporting and uptake of services, indicative of increased victim confidence. We sought to test whether a secondary response following reports of hate crime would improve victim experience and reduce attrition. We called this intervention a secondary reassurance contact (SRC).

Given the community impact of hate crime, we used neighbourhood teams. The SRC constituted direct contact with the victim delivered by a local neighbourhood constable or police community support officer in the weeks following reporting. The SRC made contact either in person or over the phone and was distinct from the investigation.

Key to maintaining victim support is demonstrating an understanding, supportive approach, flexible to victim needs. Consequently, officers delivering the SRC were given loose guidance focused on acknowledging the impact on the victim, demonstrating that the police took the matter seriously and were committed to assist. Guidance on the form or content of contact was intentionally not prescriptive. This gave officers flexibility to adapt to the wishes of victims and alter their approach based on their professional judgement.

The impact

We assessed the impact of SRC using 250 cases and a randomised controlled trial design (a methodology that tests the treatment – in this case SRC – with a comparison group to measure levels of victim withdrawal). We found that the risk of victim withdrawal was reduced by 22 to 26% with SRC relative to the control ‘business as usual’ approach to hate crime. If applied to all hate crimes reported to the MPS, this may prevent victim withdrawal in 1,500 to 1,800 cases a year.

This trial was delivered as part of normal officer duties. No additional resource was used. The majority of contacts were made via telephone and took little time to complete. It is therefore considered that SRCs are a viable tactic, with considerable gain to be made at minimal cost.

As a result of these findings, the South West Basic Command Unit (around 1,800 staff for a general public population of 907,000) have resolved that all victims who report hate crime will receive an SRC from a local neighbourhood officer. In addition, consideration is being given to how this approach can be used to improve victim care and hate crime outcomes across London.

Further reading – Practice Bank

[Secondary reassurance contact \(SRA\) for victims of hate crimes | College of Policing](#)

- This article was peer reviewed by Julie Inns, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Manager, Norfolk Constabulary

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