



ASD and Hate Crime

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Advances in Autism

Hate Crime & Flagging

- Has any person, regardless of whether or not this is the victim, perceived this as a hate crime? If yes – has it been flagged as a hate incident (where the conduct does not amount to a criminal offence) or a hate crime?

- Consider the evidence which makes this a hate crime-this will involve analysis of hostility, motivation and vulnerability.
 - (a) “that, at the time of committing the offence, or immediately before or after doing so, the offender demonstrated towards the victim of the offence hostility based on a disability (or presumed disability) of the victim”.
 - (b) “that the offence is motivated (wholly or partly) by hostility towards persons who have a disability or a particular disability.”

- Has the interview dealt with identification of hostility?

- Has the case been flagged as involving a vulnerable victim?

- Does the case fall within any other hate crime categories, for example domestic abuse; homophobic; transphobic; racial or religious?

- Does the perpetrator have Autism and, if so, should alternative disposal be considered?

Fig 1: Autism: Checklist for Prosecutors Version 1.0

Hate crime against people with Autism Spectrum Disorders

Introduction

It is estimated 15% of adults worldwide have a disability (Hughes et al, 2012), with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), affecting an estimated 1.1% of the adult population in England (Brugha et al, 2012). This article offers a perspective from the United Kingdom (UK), where there is significant legislation in place relating to ASD and other disabilities that are aimed at equality, inclusion and protection of rights as citizens.

The definition of Hate Crime differs across the UK. In England and Wales hate crimes are defined as 'any hate incident, which constitutes a criminal offence, perceived by the victim or any other person, as being motivated by hostility or prejudice'. Whilst in Scotland it is: 'crime motivated by malice or ill will towards a social group.' In Northern Ireland, although there is no definition of hate crime in law, this type of offence is still recorded by the Police. Hate crimes or incidents are motivated or thought to be motivated by prejudice and hostility towards a person's disability, race, religion, transgender identity or sexual orientation. It is these five strands that identify Hate Crimes. In Northern Ireland and Scotland, in some cases sectarianism is also included as a Hate Crime (Amnesty International, 2016).

The understanding of the concept of 'hate crimes' and how they are perceived by individuals has meant that there is, as such, no real consensus as to the key characteristics. One school of thought is that hate is secondary as a motive, with the primary motivation as seeing the individual as different (Gerstenfeld, 2004). Whoever the target of hate crimes the definition published within the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry¹ (Mac Pherson Report 1999) is

¹ The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry¹ conducted by Sir William Macpherson followed the racially motivated murder of Stephen Lawrence, and reported the original Metropolitan Police Service investigation had been incompetent with fundamental errors, e.g. failing to give first aid, failing to follow obvious leads or to arrest suspects. The report found the force to be institutionally racist.
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/277111/4262.pdf

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3 often seen as the benchmark and can be applied to other areas, i.e. 'any crime, which is
4 perceived to be racist by the victim or any other person'. So, for individuals with ASD Hate
5 Crimes are any crime which targets them because they have an ASD or that the person
6 perceives the crime has been committed against them because they have an ASD.
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13 Hate crimes cover a range of offences that are threatening or harmful to the person
14 including verbal abuse, harassment, bullying or intimidation, physical attacks, threats of
15 violence, abusive phone or messages or hate mail, online abuse via social media, posting of
16 discriminatory literature or posters, criminal damage to property such as graffiti or arson
17 and malicious complaints. Globally, about half a million adults die every year because of
18 interpersonal violence (Hughes et al. 2012). Hate crimes may be directed at individuals or
19 the group they are a part of, or identify with. Hate crimes aimed at an individual not only
20 affect that person but can also function to bring terror to all who are in that group and serve
21 to compromise its wellbeing and security (Perry 2001). Therefore, the emotional and
22 psychological impact hate crime, even attacks on individuals are seen as hurtful to both the
23 victim and the group they are seen to be a part of (Iganski, 2008).
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35 **Hate crime and People with ASD**

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38 In the UK, a substantial proportion of people with ASD live either in the family home, or with
39 support in their own home or a residential service. How much contact people have with
40 their community and the support to access their community safely often depends on where
41 they live and their level of ability (Emerson and Hatton, 2008). Adults with ASD have
42 persisting negative effects on learning and development of independence in adulthood
43 (Howlin et al. 2004). In 2007, the yearly cost to society of each adult with ASD in the UK was
44 estimated to be £90,000 (Knapp et al. 2007). It is recognised that significant numbers of
45 adults with ASD are more vulnerable to co-existing conditions such as intellectual disability
46 (ID). Those adults with more severe presentations of ASD or who have severe ID are more
47 likely to be recognised and supported so may be less at risk of being a victim of Hate Crimes.
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3 Those with higher levels of functioning tend to be overlooked in the community and are less
4 likely to receive or seek the necessary support from social and local authority services
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6 (Gravell, 2012). (National Audit Office, 2009). This lack of engagement makes them more
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8 vulnerable to victimisation (Archer & Hurley, 2013).
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13 The evidence as to how hate crime, affects people with ASD is limited and most of the data
14 available on this offence is related to overall disability discrimination (Hughes et al. 2012).
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16 Given the overlap and scarcity of studies on hate crime that are ASD specific, literature into
17 hate crimes against people with ID is a valuable source, with rates of 31% of adults with mild
18 or severe ID living in communal care establishments having ASD (Brugha et al, 2012). In
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20 2004, the National Learning Disability Survey for England found that 43% of people with ID
21 had reported being bullied at school, 32% did not feel safe in their home or community; 9%
22 had been a victim of crime, and 2.8% had been assaulted, which is above the population
23 average. Those with lower support needs were more likely to be the victims of crime and
24 bullying. Additionally, within the ID population, those who were younger and those from a
25 lower socio-economic background were also found to be more vulnerable to crime and
26 bullying. Furthermore, rising numbers of media reports emphasise cases of physical
27 violence, sexual abuse, and hate crime inflicted on individuals with ID and ASD in homes,
28 institutions, communities, and other settings (Quarmby, 2011; BBC news reports 2009,
29 2011, 2014; Krug et al. 2002; Guardian news report, 2011). However, whether this increase
30 indicates a rising prevalence of violence against individuals with disabilities, more consistent
31 reporting to authorities or greater media coverage than historical coverage previously, is
32 unclear as stated previously.
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47 In general people with disabilities seem to be at an increased risk of interpersonal violence
48 (Hughes et al. 2012; Quarmby, 2011) because of several factors: exclusion from education
49 and employment, the need for personal assistance with daily living, reduced physical and
50 emotional defences, communication barriers that hamper the reporting of violence, societal
51 stigma, and discrimination (Quarmby, 2011; Nosek et al. 2001, Saxton et al. 2001; Beadle-
52 Brown et al. 2014). The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) research (2009) into
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3 the safety and security of disabled people reported that violence and hostility is a daily
4 experience for some people with disabilities. The nature of victimisation is varying,
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6 however, the report found that it is persistent and re-occurring.
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11 As mentioned earlier the evidence on ASD and hate crime is limited and it is only since 2012,
12 has there been a concentrated interest in autism 'hate crime'; this is partly in response to
13 legislative pressure as a result of the Autism Act 2009, the first disability specific legislation
14 in the UK. This has coincided over the last decade, with an increasing interest in disability
15 hate crime and victimisation in general (EHRC, 2009; British Crime Survey, 2013). Although
16 the term 'hate crime' is part of common language; awareness of it has not translated into
17 better understanding or reforms within the public sector (Roustone et al. 2011; EHRC, 2009;
18 Hemmings et al. 2013; Department of Health, 2010; Garland, 2012). With the introduction
19 of the Autism Act 2009 and Autism Strategy 2010, there has been a momentum to provide
20 better provisions for adults with autism; and although an increasing amount of research has
21 been done to quantify violence against individuals with disabilities, there is a significant gap
22 in the literature with regards to autism hate crime or victimisation (Beadle-Brown et al.
23 2014; Archer & Hurley, 2013; Garland, 2012; King & Murphy, 2014). Study methods and the
24 definitions of autism, victimisation and violence vary widely, and the literature is
25 inconclusive on quantitative syntheses of hate crime relating to autism. Often in studies ASD
26 is poorly defined, for example, ID has been used interchangeably with autism (Beadle-Brown
27 et al. 2014; Hughes et al. 2012).
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44 **Hate Crime and ASD**

45 **Bullying**

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48 A survey from the National Autistic Society (2013) reported that more than half of people
49 with ASD including Asperger syndrome they spoke to had been bullied or harassed as adults,
50 and furthermore let down by the criminal justice system. Fisher et al (2010) compared
51 adults without disabilities to individuals with ID, who were more likely to experience social
52 victimization, related to money/theft, teasing/persuasion, and abuse. Their narrative results
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3 and findings indicated that although individuals who were higher functioning were more
4 aware of vulnerable situations, they still experienced victimisation at rates similar to those
5 less able to detect risk (Risk ratio – 1:5).
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10 **Victims of sex crimes**

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13 Brown-Lavoie et al. (2014) explicitly explored the risk of sexual victimization in individuals
14 with ASD and what increased that risk. They compared ninety-five adults with ASD and 117
15 adults without ASD through questionnaires regarding sexual knowledge sources, actual
16 knowledge, perceived knowledge, and sexual victimization. Individuals with ASD obtained
17 less of their sexual knowledge from social sources, more sexual knowledge from non-social
18 sources, had less perceived and actual knowledge, and experienced more sexual
19 victimization than controls. The increased risk of victimization by individuals with ASD was
20 partially mediated by their actual knowledge. Individuals with ASD were between two and
21 three times more likely to experience sexual contact victimization, sexual coercion
22 victimization, and rape than comparison group. Regardless of sex, both male and female
23 individuals with ASD were more likely to be sexually victimised. This is the first study to use
24 self-report to ask adults with ASD about their actual and perceived sexual knowledge and
25 experiences of victimisation. With the link between knowledge and victimization having
26 important clinical implications for interventions.
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41 **Responses to ASD hate crime**

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43 The countries in the UK have their own prosecuting bodies, so procedures may differ. In
44 Scotland it is the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS), whereas in England
45 and Wales it is The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS). The function though is similar, which is
46 to follow strict criteria to establish whether there is enough evidence to pursue a
47 prosecution and whether it is in the public interest to proceed. The CPS is given as an
48 example in Figure 1.
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3 Many police services have publicly acknowledged that previously they have neglected the
4 problem of disability hate crimes and have failed to give it the same status and attention as
5 they have to racial, religious, or homophobic hate crimes (Gravell, 2012). The research and
6 campaigning work of charitable organisations such as the National Autistic Society and
7 MENCAP, has greatly helped to bring attention to the issues of hate Crime relating to ASD
8 and ID in the public domain. One example is that hate crimes has been a topic and key focus
9 of discussions by the All Party Parliamentary Group (AAPG) on Autism. APPGs are informal,
10 cross-party, interest groups of Members of Parliament and Peers i.e. those interested in a
11 particular issue, including civil servants, advocates, carers and most importantly individuals
12 with autism, for 2014. There are also other organisations who provide support and continue
13 to raise awareness for the needs of those subject to hate crimes, such as the National Police
14 Autism Association who have developed a network of champions to provide local support in
15 to police Forces raising awareness and helping with discussion of personal, work and service
16 delivery issues. This type of support is crucial in promoting awareness given the fact often
17 people with Autism may go unidentified whilst at the police station. In terms of helping
18 someone to report crime there are resources such as the True Vision webpage
19 <http://report-it.org.uk/home> which explains about hate crime and how to get support and
20 report it. Some police forces will now also offer cards which have numbers for victims to
21 report hate crime, or to give in at the police station to inform the police they have autism,
22 one such scheme is operated by Bedfordshire Police. To support individuals, it is necessary
23 to have a variety of effective reporting mechanisms to ensure that any disabilities are
24 identified, including hidden impairments, or 'hidden disabilities', such as, 'autism' and
25 'learning disability'. Victims must then be supported sufficiently, their evidence given in the
26 most effective manner and kept fully informed of what is happening in their case. This is the
27 idealised version of how disability hate crime should be dealt with. (Challenge it, Report it,
28 Stop it, 2012).

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51 Change has come about, mainly due to concerns that have been raised in relation to how
52 the police have dealt with disability hate crime in recent years because of this interest.
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54 Whilst there is an acknowledgment that progress has been made in relation to certain hate
55 crimes, there is a lack of confidence that society's attitudes towards those with disabilities
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3 has progressed at the same pace (Gerstenfeld, 2004; Garland 2012). It is the case it is often
4 tragedy that can create the greatest awareness and acts as a catalyst for change. Fiona
5 Pilkington, killed herself and her severely disabled daughter in 2007 after years of
6 harassment and intimidation. The family had complained to police about the abuse on 27
7 separate occasions between 2004 and 2007, and twice petitioned their local MP on two
8 separate occasions. The Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC), which
9 investigates police complaints, published its review into the Pilkington case in May 2011.
10 The investigation concluded that among the failings of the police was not identifying the
11 family as vulnerable, which meant police did not provide a structured, cohesive response to
12 the prolonged antisocial behaviour they endured.
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21 Although this may have changed opinion and helped bring about changes in the way we
22 support and treat victims hate crimes, societal change still needs to be worked on. A recent
23 newspaper article on the area where the Fiona Pilkington tragedy occurred suggests little
24 has changed for residents locally with incidents of abuse common place.
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28 [http://www.independent.co.uk/news/long_reads/fiona-pilkington-frankie-pilkington-](http://www.independent.co.uk/news/long_reads/fiona-pilkington-frankie-pilkington-suicide-learning-disabilities-bullying-hate-crime-a8004526.html)
29 [suicide-learning-disabilities-bullying-hate-crime-a8004526.html](http://www.independent.co.uk/news/long_reads/fiona-pilkington-frankie-pilkington-suicide-learning-disabilities-bullying-hate-crime-a8004526.html)
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34 **Discussion**

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37 Even though progress has been made in the UK there is still a need to create further
38 awareness of what disability hate crime is, its scope and its victims. Increasing the reporting
39 of disability hate crime has always been difficult for a number of reasons, such as lack of
40 support, not knowing the process or just through fear. Processes to manage disability hate
41 crime need to be embedded within the routine working practices of the police and CPS who
42 should work together to enhance how to identify and progress these cases. (Gravell, 2012).
43 The Joint Disability Hate Crime Review (Brereton, 2013) came about following a culmination
44 of pressure from the public as well as other bodies with regards to tackling the issues of
45 victimisation. The review recommends that together with the Challenge it, Report it, Stop it
46 report (HM Government, 2012) there is sufficient scope given recent progerias to “provide a
47 unique opportunity for the police, CPS and probation trusts to implement changes to
48 policies and procedures. Practices need to be changed to work towards improved outcomes
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3 for victims and contribute to changing society's attitudes." In April 2005 section 146 of the
4 Criminal Justice Act 2003 (s.146 CJA 2003) was introduced which created the 'sentencing
5 provision' relating to the punishments for perpetrators of disability hate crime. There is still
6 argument that disability hate crime requires additional status given that social attitudes are
7 still ill informed (Gravell, 2012; Beadle-Brown et al. 2014; King & Murphy, 2014). There is
8 still a lack of clarity and understanding as to what constitutes a disability hate crime and
9 confusion between policy definitions and statutory sentencing. Currently the court can
10 regard the defendant's behaviour as an aggravating feature if (a) the offender has
11 demonstrated hostility based on a disability or (b) the offence was motivated by hostility
12 towards persons who have a disability. This causes difficulties not only for practitioners in
13 the identification and recording of disability hate crime but also for members of the public,
14 including victims who are disabled (Joint Disability Hate Crime Review, 2013; Brereton,
15 2013). A clear recommendation from public reports is that, improvements need to be made
16 by the police and CPS in how they identify and record disability hate crime. All police, CPS
17 and probation staff need to be fully aware of the statutory provision in and there needs to
18 be a common policy definition that is universally recognised and applied at 'ground level',
19 which is simple to interpret. This has been outlined very concisely in the Joint Disability Hate
20 Crime Review, 2013. The under reporting of disability hate crime remains a significant
21 concern and needs to be addressed (NAS Hate Crime Survey, 2013; Brereton, 2013). It is still
22 the case victims are not empowered or getting the support and help to report disability
23 related hate crimes. This means is that those being targeted and most vulnerable are not
24 able to reach out for adequate support which in turn perpetuates their situation further and
25 threatens both their mental health and general wellbeing and negative impact on their
26 quality of life. There is also evidence to suggest that those with ASD and ID in these
27 situations will be more likely to present in forensic and clinical settings (King and Murphy,
28 2014).

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48 A key recommendation from the Joint Commissioned report (2013) is that the CPS needs to
49 improve its performance in relation to the quality of case preparation to ensure that
50 disability hate crimes are effectively prosecuted. For this to happen there needs to be
51 greater awareness of autism throughout the Criminal Justice System (CJS). This follows the
52 admission that people can feel uncomfortable around and about disability and have widely
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3 varying levels of experience of interaction with disabled people (EHRC 2013). This may go
4 some way to addressing the low levels of reporting that exists. It is these attitudes and
5 current experiences that need to be challenged to ensure disability hate crimes are treated
6 on an equal footing to the other strands of hate crime such of race, religion, sexual
7 orientation or transgender identity and remember that many people with ASD will also
8 belong to one or more of the other groups at risk of hate crime.
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16 **Conclusion**

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19 In summation, the current academic literature is not very clear with regards to how it
20 defines hate crime or victimisation for adults with ASD and ID. It is crucial to take in to
21 account the experiences of this vulnerable population, as public policy currently is reflecting
22 that there is a need for further provisions and support for these victims. The CJS, police and
23 probation want to tackle this; however, the academic literature is sparse in its
24 understanding of the issues. The literature is mostly on the experiences of children and
25 adolescents. Clearly, reports in the public domain are arguing that adults with ASD are being
26 targeted. Therefore, it would be useful to map what understanding is present in the current
27 academic literature on adults with ASD and does it reflect the discussion above.
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29 Additionally, it would be useful to see where the gaps are to inform future research.
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