

Community Voices April 2019 – March 2020: Hate Crime

Executive Summary

The 2019/20 Community Voices project focused on hate crime. Specifically, it sought to develop greater understanding of the scale of hate crime in the city and identify barriers to reporting by engaging with people whose opinions are often unheard. This is predicated on the rising numbers of hate crimes recorded by North Yorkshire Police, and anecdotal evidence and survey data indicating that hate crimes are considerably under-reported in York (e.g. the LGBT People in York report found that one in four participants had experienced hate crime, but 78% had not reported it to the police - <https://www.yorklgbtforum.org.uk/reports/>).

Summary of Findings:

1. Data recording for hate crime is inconsistent across several systems, and no one of these systems is universally considered to be accurate
2. There is no city-wide reporting scheme or record of hate incidents across the city
3. Many people understood hate crime only in the context of violence against the person, or damage to property, and would report only on this basis, if at all
4. Understanding of the definition of hate crime was compromised by widespread misunderstanding of the distinction between a hate crime and a hate incident
5. Verbal abuse, harassment and threats, along with more minor acts of discrimination, were considered to be commonplace, but often not recognised as hate crime
6. Limited understanding of what constitutes a hate crime appeared to influence a perception that hate crime is not common in York
7. Where people experienced hate crimes and hate incidents repeatedly over extended periods of time within their own neighbourhoods, and/or as momentary random acts by strangers, they appeared less likely to report them as hate crime
8. Reporting non-violent hate crimes and incidents to the police was generally viewed as futile (mainly due to practical and resource reasons, rather than issues of trust)
9. Awareness of anonymous / non-police-based reporting options was minimal
10. Discriminatory attitudes were thought to be endemic in the city, leading to suggestions that hate crime must be tackled via societal means
11. People highlighted the importance of engaging positively with those who hold contentious views (including those who have, or are thought to have perpetrated hate crimes) as valid stakeholders in reducing hate crime
12. People do not believe that emotional support is available to people who have experienced hate crime

Contents

Glossary
Introduction
Background
Community Voices Activities Discussion
Resolving Statistical Data Inconsistencies
Findings
Suggested Next Steps

Glossary

BIH	City of York Council’s Business Intelligence Hub
CYC	City of York Council
HREB	Human Rights and Equalities Board
LGBT	Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (often used to encompass any sexual orientations or gender identities that do not correspond to heterosexual norms).
NYP	North Yorkshire Police
OPFCC	Office of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner
YHRCN	York Human Rights City Network

Introduction

The Community Voices project is funded by City of York Council (CYC) and aims to gather the views and experiences of people living in York whose views are not often heard. Previously, this project was carried out by York CVS, through quarterly meetings which sought to involve representatives of those groups and organisations which were not part of any other voluntary sector forum. It was hoped that these representatives would act as a conduit for people in their networks to participate and contribute to discussion about various issues within the city.

In April 2018, York CVS transferred the project to the York Human Rights City Network (YHRCN - of which York CVS is a core member), which chose to pilot a new methodology (in two strands), in addition to continuing with the quarterly meetings. The pilot involved working thematically (seeking out the views of people who were homeless, as a constituency likely to be disenfranchised and marginalised), and geographically (aiming to identify commonalities in the issues affecting people in two distinct and apparently differing parts of York). The pilot differed from the existing quarterly meetings in that it attempted to engage with people who were not already active in a civic or political context, whose opinions were not often sought, and rarely offered.

The evaluation of the three approaches indicated that the thematic variant was the most appropriate and effective approach, and it was agreed to continue this going forward.

In March 2019, in response to data highlighted in YHRCN's Annual Human Rights Indicator Report (https://www.yorkhumanrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/43502_Applied-Human-Rights-Booklet-LR3.pdf) the city's Human Rights and Equalities Board (HREB) agreed to include hate crime within its 2019/20 workstreams. To align with this, YHRCN's steering group agreed a thematic focus on hate crime for Community Voices in 2019/20.

Background

According to statistical and anecdotal data provided by CYC and North Yorkshire Police (NYP), hate crime recorded in the city of York is increasing. We can speculate that this is due to some combination of the following possible contributory factors: a genuine increase in the number of hate crimes committed, improved recognition and recording by North Yorkshire Police, increased awareness amongst the population leading to victims of such crime recognising a hate element. However, we do not know for certain the extent to which each factor applies, and whether/what other factors may be involved.

Statistics from 2018/19 indicated that two wards, Micklegate and Guildhall accounted for almost 50% of recorded hate crime; some people have speculated that this is because these wards cover the city centre, and are more likely to be the sites of alcohol-fuelled weekend

crimes than are other wards; others have queried whether this relates to the above-average-for-York BAME population in these wards.

It is widely believed that hate crime is significantly under-reported, but the size of this problem, and the reasons behind it, are poorly understood. The numbers reported are drawn from North Yorkshire Police data, and therefore exclude any unreported hate crimes and all non-“crimed” hate incidents. The other designated reporting centre within the North Yorkshire Police area is the Supporting Victims team, which is part of the Office of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (OPFCC). This accepts anonymous reporting and could be reasonably expected to hold additional reports where people do not want to talk to the police, for whatever reason.

With so much uncertainty about the scale and range of hate crime in York, we decided to use the Community Voices approach to develop understanding of hate crime in York, using the following questions as a guide:

1. What do people understand by the term “hate crime”?
2. Do people perceive hate crime to be an issue in York?
3. Have the people we talk to, or people they know, experienced hate crime?
 - a. If so, did they report it, and if so, to whom?
 - i. If not, what are the reasons they chose not to do so?
 - b. If they have not experienced hate crime, but were to do so, do they think they would report it?
 - i. If so, to whom?
 - ii. If they did not report, what are the reasons for not doing so?
4. Is the current definition of hate crime appropriate?
5. What support should be available to those experiencing or who have experienced hate crime
6. What would you like to see in the context of reducing hate crime?

Community Voices Activities Discussion

Initially, the YHRCN steering group decided that we would use a focus group methodology, arranging these via organisations working with protected characteristic groups across the city.

Some of the organisations that we contacted identified logistical issues (transport, timings and the availability of translation services) and advised against this method. Some stated that their members would be unlikely to attend a focus group convened only to discuss hate crime. Others facilitated such meetings and/or suggested talking to people within existing meeting structures. Where focus groups were arranged specifically for Community Voices, they were poorly attended.

After the first six months, we reverted to the previous year's model of visiting people at drop-ins or using other informal conversations centred around the core lines of enquiry.

During the course of the twelve months from April 2019, the Community Voices project has engaged with thirty-four individuals from the communities linked to the following protected characteristics:

- LGBT
- Race/ethnicity
- Disability
- Age
- Gender

In line with the rights-based approach that underpins YHRCN's work, our discussions were participatory rather than observational. This meant sharing data, discussing definitions of hate crime and providing information on reporting options at appropriate times within the conversations (usually after ascertaining the participant's pre-existing viewpoint).

We also engaged with individuals who described themselves as allies (three), service-providers, members of North Yorkshire Police, the OPFCC's Supporting Victims team, and the City of York Council's Community Safety Team to try to understand discrepancies in the statistics (see below).

As well as negotiating access to groups and individuals, and conducting focus groups, formal and informal interviews, the other significant activity associated with Community Voices is the recruitment and training of volunteers to assist in data collection.

Limitations

There are some significant gaps. For example, within the project we did not engage with anyone with a learning disability. People from other disability types were also under-represented. We had not yet attended a meeting convened around religious beliefs, although some people we spoke to via services working with BAME minorities described experiencing crimes or incidents in relation to religious manifestations. We did not speak to anyone from the Travelling community, York's oldest ethnic minority group.

In 2019/20, as in previous years, most people who expressed an interest in volunteering were students. This always raises a number of challenges in terms of availability because of their timetables not being fixed throughout the year, and lack of availability during holidays. Students are also (we have found, in this and other contexts) very keen to sign up, although very few actually go on to volunteer. In 2019/20, this was further complicated by the Community Voices being run in two blocks of six months, meaning a second wave of recruitment. We have attempted to recruit from outside of the student body, for example, through York CVS's Voluntary Voice as well as through our own website and mailing list, but without much success.

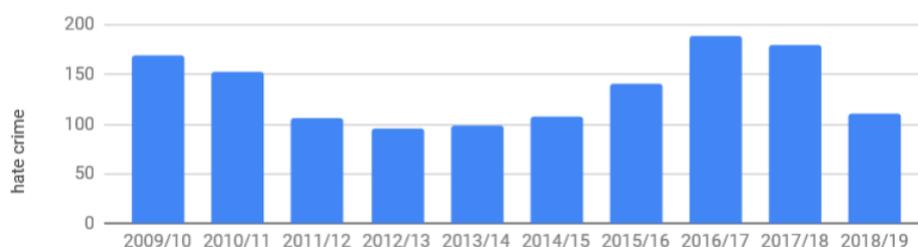
During the course of data collection, several participants suggested finding ways to engage with those who might perpetrate hate crimes (see below). Attempting to secure interviews with people who were prepared to identify themselves as perpetrators of hate crimes or incidents was not straightforward. Instead, to provide some perspectives of a more general population, it was intended to open the discussion beyond members, allies and service providers of protected characteristic groups through use of locality/community venues.

Unfortunately, the national lockdown due to Covid-19 meant that four attendances at local community centre drop-ins, as well as two further protected characteristic group meetings (planned for March 2020) had to be cancelled.

Resolving Statistical Data Inconsistencies

The decision to investigate the rise in hate crime draws on the dataset reproduced below, which is published for the city by City of York Council’s Business Intelligence Hub (BIH), based on figures from North Yorkshire Police. The data peaks in 2016/17, levels off in 2017/18, and then shows a significant reduction in hate crimes reported in the 12-month period to March 2019.

hate crime and incidents recorded by North Yorkshire Police,
reported by City of York Council
(<https://data.yorkopendata.org/dataset/kpi-crime-community-safety>)



This differs significantly with the views of hate crime specialists within North Yorkshire Police. Whilst the CYC data purports to be *hate crimes and incidents* recorded by North Yorkshire Police, the data reported by NYP themselves relates only to *hate crimes*. A comparison between the two datasets for 2017/18 and 2018/19 is shown below (both periods running April to March for both datasets).

	2017/18	2018/19
NYP data	147	213
CYC data	180	111

Since the focus of this phase of Community Voices is premised on rising hate crime, we needed to understand the relationship between different datasets. This has been challenging.

NYP transitioned to a different database for their audited (accurate) system during 2016/17 but CYC do not have access to this dataset. The older system continues to be populated, but while one system records the date of a crime, and the other the date of the report, some differences are due to timing. Data in the older system are not checked, and NYP recommend not publishing from this source.

2018/19 NYP data from the newer system are reproduced below – misogyny and crimes against sex workers were not categorised as hate crime until some time after the system was introduced, which may explain why these categories are not shown.

Hate crime	2018-04	2018-05	2018-06	2018-07	2018-08	2018-09	2018-10	2018-11	2018-12	2019-01	2019-02	2019-03	Total
Disability	1	2	3				3	1	2	2	3		17
Hate - Other		2	6	2		2	1	1					3
Racial	5	19	17	11	11	6	8	12	7	9	11	15	131
Religion	1		4	7	1	2	2	3		1			22
Sexual Orientation	4	3	5	3	1	2	3	2	2	1	3	7	36
Transphobic	1												1
Total	11	25	35	21	12	12	16	18	11	11	17	24	213

NYP report and refer victims of crime to the OPFCC’s Supporting Victims team, who categorise and triage. The triage system identifies those who they consider to be in highest need in order to offer varying levels of support. Supporting Victims maintains a third dataset relating to hate crime, but this counts the number of victims rather than the number of crimes. We were told that in the year ending March 2019, referrals from North Yorkshire Police accounted for nearly all of the referrals to Supporting Victims; a further 10 reports came via British Transport Police, and four victims reported directly to Supporting Victims, without a police intervention. This is across the whole of North Yorkshire and York, as figures for York only were not available.

Findings

What do people understand by the term “hate crime”?

Hate crime is broadly defined as a crime motivated by hatred or prejudice against someone based on the perception of their belonging to one or more of five protected characteristic groups. These are: race, disability, religion, sexual orientation or transgender identity. NYP have expanded this definition to include misogynistic crimes and crimes against sex workers as hate crime.

Thus, there are two elements: i) a crime has been committed, and ii) that crime has been motivated by perceptions of the identity of the victim(s). Where an incident has taken place that is motivated by perceptions of the identity of the victim(s) but is not classified as a crime, then it is classed as a hate incident.

The majority of people we spoke to had a good understanding of the role of protected characteristics in hate crime, although NYP's inclusion of misogyny was contentious for some.

However, the issue of whether a crime has taken place was not well understood. Understandably, violent crime and damage to property were easily understood to be crimes. Verbal abuse and harassment were generally not considered criminal – rather, a manifestation of discriminatory attitudes.

“about disability, race, sexuality”

“I saw that North Yorkshire Police class misogyny as hate crime. That's good, but how many reports do they actually get?”

“I don't agree that domestic violence is hate crime. If a man is violent towards his wife, he's not attacking her because she's a woman, he's attacking her personally. Obviously, it's still a crime, but is it really hate crime?”

“I don't think name-calling is a crime, or threats, unless they're acted on”

“assault, property damage, that sort of thing”

Whilst almost everyone we spoke with answered from the perspective of the person being subjected to hate crime, one person stated that she knew some people who had claimed a hate motivation that did not exist when the crime was committed. She said they did so either to conform to stereotypes or fit in with a group, or to validate a thoughtless act of vandalism or similar.

“sometimes people might say they've done something because of race, or something – they [the perpetrator] call it hate crime, but they're using it to try to justify why they've done something, or to fit in with their peers”

[Do people perceive hate crime to be an issue in York?](#)

After talking in general terms about hate crime, we asked people specifically about their perceptions of hate crime in York. Slightly less than half of the participants had moved to York within the last few years, and these people tended to contrast York favourably with their place of origin (whether this was within the UK or otherwise).

Considering the lack of clarity about what is a crime, it is unsurprising that few people indicated that they thought hate crime was a widespread problem in York.

“plenty when I lived in Leeds – not here but I’ve only been living in York a few weeks. I know other people say it’s a problem”

“I come from [South America], and violence against women there is a real problem. Things are much better in York, so, no, I don’t think there’s a problem”

“it’s very friendly here. I feel safe”

“not much crime, but incidents, they’re all the time”

One individual expressed concern about the statistics, and our speculative interpretation of them. Rather than considering a rise in recorded hate crimes being (perhaps) due in part to improved police recording, the person suggested that NYP were intentionally inflating hate crime figures, to meet internal targets.

“there are some problems, but the police over-report. They’re encouraged to classify things as hate crime even when they’re not. They’re targeted to increase reporting of hate crime, you see. I know, because I’ve worked for them. If you’re not sure, but there’s any possibility of a hate element, put it down as hate crime”

Have the people we talk to, or people they know, experienced hate crime?

If so, did they report it, and if so, to whom?

If they did not report, what are the reasons they chose not to do so?

Despite the participants being broadly consistent in their perception that hate crime is not widespread in York, when we asked about personal experience, a different picture emerged. They talked of cultural and institutional low-level discriminatory behaviour, especially (but not limited to) verbal racism, sexism and ableism. Again, people tended not to see this as hate crime but as hate incidents, even where it was aggressive, abuse or threatening.

“sometimes people at work, people who are supposed to be your friends, say things that are really quite offensive, but if you challenge it, they make out that you’re imagining it, or being over-sensitive, and go all passive-aggressive on you, and you back down”

“it’s like white noise – you switch off to it”

“all the time, everywhere, people look at you, they mutter, or they talk loudly about you, but not to you, complaining about you, moaning about not being able to get past your wheelchair, or ignoring you when they’re in your way and they can see you need them to move so you can get past. I say *excuse me, I need to get past* and they go *oh, I’m sorry, I didn’t see you...*”

“micro-aggression”

“it’s the guy in the van driving past and yelling something – you can’t even tell what - out of the window, or honking his horn, the kid who pulls your scarf, people asking where you’re from, what you’re doing here”

When we asked about reporting, it was clear that people perceived significant barriers, mainly aligned to one or more of four themes:

1. The perpetrator being someone in geographic proximity (often in relation to longer-term, periodic or sustained non-violent hate crime)

“it was a family member, so no-one wanted to know”

“it’s within the community – neighbours, even family – so you can’t report it, because then the people would know you’d reported it, and it would make things worse”

2. The perpetrator being totally unknown to the victim or witnesses (usually a single, short-lived, non-violent incident)

“what’s the point in reporting it? You don’t know who it was, and it’s over, and done, and they’re away”

3. Expectations that reporting to the police is futile and/or might exacerbate an already difficult situation

“the police won’t have time to investigate”

“the police were lovely, but actually, they couldn’t do anything. I told them I was fine. It was just verbal abuse”

“even if you report it, no-one ever gets back to you, so you don’t report it the next time”

“it’s just a statistic. No-one does anything”

“imagine what would happen if the police turned up – everyone would know it’s you who’s rung them”

4. Just two people were aware of the alternative, anonymous reporting option offered by Supporting Victims (and one had used it and found the process challenging)

“I didn’t know you could report anonymously. How do you do that? Could you give me the contact details?”

“have you tried the online reporting? It takes forever to fill the form in. Then it crashes. Then you try ringing and it takes ages to get through. I don’t think they actually want people to report”

We had speculated previously that, although they are independent of NYP, the Supporting Victims team might be perceived as being a part of NYP and that this might put people off reporting. Because just two people were aware of this reporting mechanism, it was not possible to assess this.

One participant highlighted that part of what defines hate crime is an assumption about the perpetrator’s motivation that is made by witnesses and the person experiencing the crime. In some cases, this might be unclear, or contested.

“some people I know have experienced verbal and threats, and it’s really obvious to me that it’s because of their [protected characteristic] but *they* insist it’s random. It’s like they don’t want to admit that some people see them as anything other than a typical British citizen”

If they have not experienced hate crime, but were to do so, do they think they would report it?

If so, to whom?

If not, what are the reasons for not doing so?

The majority of participants said they had not experienced hate crime personally, and therefore had not had to make decisions about reporting. All participants considered reporting only in terms of NYP, and there were mixed views on whether or not they would do so.

“I’d like to think I would. That if I saw something, I’d ring the police. But you have to think about your own safety – am I someone who’s likely to be a target as well? – and if I report it, will it make it worse?”

“I don’t know if I’d want to report. There’s a lot of shame and stigma about it, admitting that you’re a victim, in a society where we’re all supposed to be strong and cope with stuff”

“I personally would report to the police, and I have done, but I think a lot of people in my position are wary of authority and probably wouldn’t want to call them”

“it shouldn’t be the responsibility of the victim to report – always [the onus] is on how the person who has been abused has to report it because if you don’t it’s your fault if it happens again, or if you don’t report it, how will anyone know what’s really happening. But you’re already a victim, and now you’re being shamed”

“where I’ve come from, you can’t trust the police. But here, police are very good. I would tell the police in this country”

As previously, there was little knowledge of alternative reporting options, but some participants thought they would discuss what had happened with people they know.

“Supporting Victims? No, never heard of that”

“I don’t know where you could report it apart from the police. The council?”

“who would I tell...? I probably wouldn’t tell my family, because that would make them afraid. I’d talk to friends about it, I think”

[Is the current definition of hate crime appropriate?](#)

NYP’s decision to categorise misogynistic crimes as hate crime in 2017, and more recently crimes against sex workers, offers some precedent for other vulnerable groups and individuals to be included at a later stage. Despite some doubts about categorising misogyny as a hate crime (above), most participants were in favour of a broader definition of hate crime. Several groups were highlighted as being affected by discrimination, and more vulnerable to crime.

“most crime is linked to identity, so you could say that it’s all hate crime. In particular, crimes against children, and the vulnerable should definitely be included. Mate crime, for example, that’s another form of hate”

“homeless people get a lot of abuse. That should be counted as hate crime”

“people living in poverty get a lot of abuse. I hear people saying things like *she can’t be that poor - she can afford to dye her hair*”

“a lot of people in York are vulnerable because of age and declining health. They’re at risk. Particularly fraud and telephone or online scams – they should be treated as hate crime”

What support should be available to those experiencing or who have experienced hate crime

Because so few of the participants indicated that they had personally been subjected to hate crime, they were generally unable to comment on support currently offered. However, where people had experienced and reported hate crime (to NYP), only one remembered receiving a telephone call asking if she needed further assistance.

Participants felt that hate crime affected people in multiple ways, not necessarily connected with the perceived severity of the crime [which is the main factor on which the Supporting Victims team decide what options are offered to an individual]. Peer-support and counselling were suggested as possible interventions that should be available to all, irrespective of whether the crime had been reported through statutory channels.

“it’s really up to the individual, but there should be things available. I don’t think there’s anything around at the moment. And it shouldn’t just be for people who’ve been to the police about it. People are affected differently. It could make you a bit more wary, and that’s enough to change how you behave.”

“there needs to be some help for people who can’t report because it’s their neighbours, or people they work with”
“counselling”

“If it happened to me, I think I’d want to talk about it with other people who’d gone through the same thing”

What would you like to see in the context of reducing hate crime?

Two distinct views were observed:

1. Embedding respect in society, starting from a young age, and continuing to promote respect and non-discrimination throughout people’s lives

“it has to start in school. My son is autistic and even in school, you can see that teachers have him written off as a bad child, and the other kids see that, and that leads to bullying, and they think it’s ok to treat him badly because he’s been labelled a naughty child”

“it’s got to be everywhere, repeating the message over and over”

“better social care”

“we have to teach respect”

2. Engaging positively rather than combatively with those who demonstrate discriminatory behaviours, and/or who perpetrate hate crimes

“The trouble with people calling out racism, sexism, ageism, etc., although I get why we’re encouraged to do that, is that we need to engage with the people who perpetrate hate crime. If we demonise them, we entrench their views and prejudices. They hide their real opinions and then we can’t challenge them. If we just write them off as bad people, nothing will change. We’ve got to start an open dialogue and understand where they are coming from, why they behave in these ways.”

“Some people really feel that *they* are the ones who are being marginalised and hate crime is a backlash to that. I don’t want to use the B-word, but it has definitely made it easier for people to say things they’ve been feeling for a long time but haven’t been able to express. Maybe that’s a good thing if it means people are re-engaging with society, an opportunity, even”

“Actually, you’re talking to all the wrong people. The people you should be asking about hate crime are the people who do it. I know that’s really difficult – no-one’s going to out themselves as a hate-crimer – you’d have to find a way to do it so that people could be really honest, without worrying that you’re going to report them. But they’re the people who can make it stop, so they need to be part of the conversation.”

Suggested Next Steps

Based on the findings so far, next steps might include:

1. Disseminate this report to the Human Rights and Equalities Board and more widely for input and further action
2. Further investigate how hate incidents can be reported and recorded effectively
3. Develop an online survey tool to seek wider perspectives on the issues of hate crime and hate incidents
4. Investigate the effects of Covid-19 on hate crime and hate incidents
5. Once Covid-19 lockdown has relaxed sufficiently that Community Centres and similar drop-ins reopen, resume the hate crime work but extend the focus to include those who do not identify as members of protected characteristic groups as well as those groups who do but were under-represented in the work to date for the reasons stated
6. Advertise more widely that Supporting Victims is a hate crime reporting option for those not wanting to contact the police
7. Investigate community-based alternatives to Supporting Victims for hate crime and hate incident reporting to increase options and access to appropriate and person-centred support
8. Develop a mechanism for people to report and highlight behaviours that may not be considered hate crime but contribute to the sense of low-level, constant discrimination (a possible model could be The Everyday Sexism Project <https://everydaysexism.com/>)