

# Working with Victims and Perpetrators of Hate Crime

**Robyn Thomas and Neil Denton** recommend that training should define the specific nature of hate crimes and the context within which they are perpetrated.

**T**raining for those who carry out specialist work with both the offenders and victims of hate crime needs to develop an understanding of the particular nature of such crimes. In the first place the policy and legislative framework within which this work is conducted needs to be taken into account. Broadly this would include requirements under, for example, the *Race Relations (Amendment) Act (2000)* or *Protection from Harassment Act (1997)*. Staff working with perpetrators need information about their legal and agency-specific responsibilities. More specifically knowledge of the relevant legislation can empower victims by enabling them to make an informed choice about the management of their case.

Specialist work and training with both victims and perpetrators should be underpinned by theoretical explanation, of power for example (Duluth wheel for domestic violence) and scapegoating (Allport, 1954). This helps to develop understanding of the impact of such crimes and why hate crime is frequently viewed by the victim as being a targeted attack on their fundamental right to exist. Similarly, explanations of perpetrators' behaviour needs to be understood in order to develop effective, appropriate interventions.

The relationship between a victim, perpetrator

and repeat victimisation should also be examined. A common factor of hate crimes is that victims are likely to suffer multiple incidents, though different perpetrators may commit them. Victims therefore view their harassment as part of a pattern and not as a series of isolated incidents. It has been argued (Bowling, 1998) that this disparity between victim perception and agency response accounts for the lack of confidence and dissatisfaction victims feel in reporting crimes and seeking support. This aspect of training would recognise the effects of multiple discrimination experienced by, for example, black and minority ethnic women suffering domestic violence, and the compounded barriers to their access to appropriate service provision.

Perpetrators of hate crimes have often committed a number of incidents against a range of victims, partly because they are unlikely to be identified and charged. Training for dealing with perpetrators should explore trigger situations and contributory factors. Issues of collusion and cross transference are particularly pertinent to this type of work. Workers often feel anxious about 'doing something wrong' or causing offence. Such wariness may partly be explained by their own prejudiced attitudes.

Victims of all hate crimes may have internalised

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and incident is complex. Training should reflect the different impacts of crime on individuals. It should also facilitate understanding of the socio-political context and perceptions of empowered and disempowered communities. Responses of an individual to their experience of hate crime can only be understood once the multi-faceted nature of the self and its complex interaction with society has been recognised. Levels of social capital within a community and cohesion between communities are critical to this response. It is also important to examine institutional discrimination and its impact on service provision.

Challenging myths and stereotypes is integral to this work. This can be done by providing accessible, factual information in order to explore and undermine assumptions and prejudicial attitudes. The influence exerted by the media and peer groups should also be acknowledged.

some of the 'reasons' given by perpetrators for their victimisation. For example in domestic violence the perpetrator frequently tells victims that the abuse is their fault. Victims may also try to conceal or downplay the extent of the violence. Workers need to be vigilant about colluding with these belief structures, and responsibility should clearly be placed with the perpetrator. Complex trauma victims invariably present with very low self-esteem and a learned helplessness. Workers need to be cognisant of this, and to ensure that decisions taken regarding options for the victim do not simply mirror the desires of the worker. Collusion is also an issue faced by, for instance, white workers working with white racially motivated offenders. If racist or prejudiced attitudes are expressed without challenge, it is easy for the perpetrator to assume that the worker is in agreement.

Identification and dissemination of best practice is an effective way to demonstrate the implications of

theory, and to support and develop the confidence of staff in this complex and sensitive work. Good practice will vary according to the particular form of hate crime but broadly will include the following.

- **Confidentiality**

Confidentiality is of particular importance. In relation to victims of domestic violence, workers need to be made aware that it is common for abusive partners to try to gain information about their partner/ex partner. Disclosure of information can pose a significant risk to the victim's safety.

Different issues arise when dealing with homophobic and racist crime especially when the victim is from a small, marginalised community. For example, victims may be reluctant to seek help from within their community for fear that professional boundaries will be breached and that private disclosure may become public knowledge. There will be different issues of confidentiality when dealing with perpetrators. Whilst data protection legislation still applies, recent guidance from the Home Office indicates that sensitive information relating to perpetrators can be processed without their consent.

- **Offering a choice of worker**

Workers should approach this in a sensitive and open manner. It needs to be recognised that one of the key emotional benefits to some victims is the ability to discuss the emotional and practical effects of the crime with someone outside their immediate group of family, friends and community. This can be particularly helpful to victims of hate crime, as

people may feel guilty about sharing their feelings with others who have also experienced similar victimisation. Conversely, other victims welcome the opportunity to seek advice and emotional support from a worker of a similar background. Perpetrators would not be granted this choice as it could collude with their prejudicial attitudes.

- **Guarding against assumptions**

Excessive enthusiasm to engage and empathise can lead workers to make assumptions about victims. Staff therefore need to be trained to ask the client seemingly irrelevant or trivial questions such as 'Is this a convenient time?' and 'Where would you like me to sit?' Such an approach will form the foundation for the empowerment of the client and will generally avoid causing offence. It is similarly important to allow perpetrators to explain what happened in their own words.

- **Case management**

Structured case management and supervision should be an integral part of any work, but is of particular importance when dealing with the victims and perpetrators of hate crime. A structured, well managed approach to casework involving line management, co-working, case conferencing and external supervision can help highlight issues such as cross-transference and collusion, and identify appropriate solutions.

- **Regular training**

The dynamic nature of this area of work, with both victims and offenders, means that training needs of staff should be identified and updated on a regular basis.

Training related to victims and perpetrators of hate crimes has traditionally been regarded as separate and distinct. There is however an increasing awareness that the components of the training are similar, although the emphasis will differ. As partnership working evolves, so will multi-agency training. All training needs to be relevant and accessible in order to develop the confidence and skills of workers required to do this work. It must however be recognised that staff will only undertake such complex and challenging work on a consistent basis when they feel supported by managers, colleagues and the institution. Training is one component of this. Policy and procedural guidance is also crucial. ■

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**References:**

- Allport, G.W. (1954), *The Nature of Prejudice*, Cambridge, Mass.: Addison-Wesley.  
Bowling, B. (1998), *Violent Racism: Victimisation, Policing and Social Context*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.



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