



Living in Fear: how hate crimes blight the lives of many with learning disabilities and autism

Almost half of all adults with learning disabilities and autism surveyed during 2010 to 2013 Kent and Medway based research reported they had suffered some form of disability hate related incident when they were out in the community.

Led by voluntary organisation MCCH and supported by the Tizard Centre at the University of Kent and Kent Police, the research found that a third of those who were living in the Medway area said they had been attacked and victimised, while others surveyed suffered verbal abuse, damage to their property and name calling. Most victims did not report incidents to the police and some told nobody at all. While perpetrators were of all ages, children and young people were often involved. The situation for victims became so bad in some cases that people were forced to move home and make other significant changes in their lives, stopping activities, avoiding places, no longer seeing friends and family. Police officers taking part in the research were concerned there is a lack of support for victims with autism and learning disabilities as well as for officers seeking specialist advice and support. The report concludes that the problem is likely to worsen as cuts to funding reduce or remove the funded support provided to people with autism and learning disabilities. Researchers recommended multi agency approaches to tackling the problem, involving police, local authority and health planners, commissioners and providers.

Supported by Medway Council, Kent Police, Medway Community Safety Partnership and Kent Police and Crime Commissioner, a one year pilot project, titled 'Jigsaw', is now aiming to reduce victimisation and improve responses to reports of it by implementing several of the key research recommendations. The pilot project is raising awareness of the victimisation issues through Information Sessions co facilitated by people with autism and learning disabilities who visit workplaces, schools, colleges and community centres. The project is also producing guidance for (a) GPs carrying out health checks for people with learning disabilities and (b) social workers carrying out Fair Access Care Services assessments, so they can recognise and respond to signs of victimisation.

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