

# Police Officers' Experiences as Victims of Hate Crime

## Abstract

- **Purpose:** This paper fills a research and literature gap by examining the nature and impact of hate crime victimisation on police officers, and their responses to it. The research explores victimisation due to the occupational stigma of policing and the personal characteristics and identities of individual officers.
- **Design/methodology/approach:** The research design is qualitative, based on 20 in-depth interviews with police officers in one English police force. Thematic analysis was applied to the data.
- **Findings:** All participants had experienced hate crime arising from their occupational or personal identities. Initially shocked, officers became desensitized and responded in different ways. These include tolerating and accepting hate crime but also challenging it through communication and the force of law.
- **Research limitations:** This research is based on a small sample. It does not claim to be representative but it is exploratory, aiming to stimulate debate and further research on a contemporary policing issue.
- **Practical implications:** If further research were to confirm these findings, there are implications for police training, officer welfare and support, supervision and leadership.
- **Originality/value:** The police occupy a problematic position within hate crime literature and UK legislation. This paper opens up debate on an under-researched area and presents the first published study of the hate crime experiences of police officers.

**Keywords:** dirty work, hate crime, intersectionality, occupational identity, police culture, victims

**Article classification:** Research paper

## Introduction

When policing features in hate crime debates, it mainly focuses on the service provided to victims; the experiences of police officers as victims of hate crime remain invisible in research terms. This paper examines police officers' hate crime experiences and how they make sense of, and respond to, these experiences. Drawing on qualitative interviews with 20 participants based in one English police force, the 'dirty work' and hate crime literatures are used to understand the targeted victimisation of police officers, both on an individual and group level. The findings speak to the importance of the intersectionality of officers' occupational identity with other aspects of their personal identity as a trigger to hate crime victimisation.

Hate crime is a social construct, culturally and historically situated, and evidenced by the different legal definitions across jurisdictions (Wickes et al., 2015). The consensus view is that hate crimes are motivated by the offender's bias, prejudice and/or hate towards the victim's identity. However, there is little agreement on whether anyone can be the victim of a hate crime or whether it should be restricted to members of historically marginalised and disadvantaged minority groups (Chakraborti and Garland, 2015). Even in the case of minority groups, there is much debate surrounding which ones should be covered by hate crime legislation, with some countries, such as Austria, restricting it to rather narrow boundaries of race, religion and ethnicity, whilst others, such as Belgium, are expanding the umbrella to include factors such as political conviction, wealth and health (Garland and Chakraborti, 2012).

Under such a framework, it is difficult to see how police officers could be included as hate crime victims. Indeed, police officers lack many of the characteristics that have been attributed to more traditional victims. They are neither marginalised nor disadvantaged and they do not lack power and authority. However, the police are a somewhat stigmatised group (Loftus, 2009). Given the 'dirty work' elements of their occupation, police officers are regarded as socially, morally and physically tainted (Huey and Broll, 2015) and may be targeted by members of the public, suspects and offenders because of their occupational identity.

In this regard, the stigma stems from the work done by the group, not from the personal characteristics of its workers (Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999). This becomes more complicated when their professional identity construction entails 'other' identities. This notion of double stigma is accentuated by the increasing diversity amongst police personnel in English and Welsh forces. Traditional recruitment patterns overwhelmingly enlisted white, heterosexual, male officers but in recent years there has been a gradual rise in those from minority ethnic, female, and gay and lesbian backgrounds [note 1]. As such,

police officers might experience hate crime because of the double stigma associated with the intersectionality of their occupational identity with other aspects of their individual identity such as race, religion, gender, disability and sexual orientation. However, their status as hate crime victims remains contested nationally and internationally.

Following shootings in 2016 that targeted police officers in Dallas and Baton Rouge in the United States, Louisiana became the first state to pass a bill (HB 953) extending legislation to treat attacks on police officers as hate crimes. Consequently Louisiana's police officers are now a protected group alongside vulnerable minority groups who face abuse, intimidation and harassment because of their race, religion, disability, gender, or sexual orientation. In Congress, the House of Representatives and Senate have considered similar legislation (S.2034: Thin Blue Line Act). In contrast, police officers in the UK remain invisible as victims of hate crime.

In the English context, legislation is centred on the five strands of disability, race, religion, sexual orientation, and transgender (College of Policing, 2014). Occupational status in general, and police identity in particular, are not included in these five 'protected characteristics'. At a practical level, the UK employs a victim-oriented approach whereby a hate crime is recorded *if the victim or any other person* feel a criminal offence is motivated by bias, prejudice or hate. Although the law applies equally to majority or minority communities in each strand, it is commonly understood to have been designed with victimisation of minority communities in mind (Hall, 2013). Despite commitments to victim-centred definitions based on perception, the current approach is limited in capturing *all* victims of hate crime. As a result, the hate crime experiences of police officers are not recorded in official statistics. This highlights the disjuncture between victim perspectives of hate crime and the legal definitions adopted in the criminal justice system in the UK.

### **The dirty work of policing**

The policing functions of crime prevention, protecting the public and maintaining public order ensure that police officers are placed in conflictual situations in which they encounter hostility, aggression and violence (Emsley, 2014). This is part of what William Westley called the 'dirty work' of policing, in one of the founding ethnographies of policing cultures, based in 1950s Indiana. Observing that much of the police officers' job comprised 'dealing with drunks, with the insane, with the dead, with the vice-ridden, with the ill', Westley (1970:18-19) concluded that the police role was a necessary but 'an exceedingly unpleasant and in some sense degrading one'.

The notion of jobs with degrading elements, that society requires, but which are regarded as tainted, has been studied as 'dirty work'. Hughes (1951) argued that work is essential to one's identity, that individuals define themselves and are defined by the work that they do. Yet some work is dirty due to its physical, social or moral taint. Workers who are physically tainted endure dangerous and unpleasant conditions, socially tainted workers regularly engage with stigmatised groups and, thirdly, morally tainted workers are those whose work is morally dubious or whose work includes ethically questionable methods. Subsequent research has taken occupational stigma research further by examining the breadth and depth of dirty work in different occupations and by investigating the tactics used by employees to normalise dirty work (Ashforth et al. 2007). These tactics include, first, developing ideologies that 'reframe, recalibrate and refocus' their work (Mawby and Worrall, 2013:10). Reframing imbues the work with positive value. Recalibrating adjusts the standards used to evaluate the extent of 'dirt', minimising what most would consider a major, undesirable part of the job. Refocusing shifts attention to the non-stigmatised more rewarding aspects of the job. Secondly, dirty workers engage in social weighting tactics, using neutralisation techniques to close ranks 'condemning those who condemn them, supporting those who support them' (Ashforth et al., 2007:150). Such analysis allows dirty work occupations to be examined in terms of: whether the stigma is partial or comprehensive, strong or mild, everyday or episodic, and whether the job comprises high or low prestige dirty work.

It is not difficult to place everyday operational police work within the dirty work framework. First, police officers identify strongly with their work. Skolnick (2008: 35) argues that 'being a police officer is a defining identity, almost like being a priest or a rabbi'. Similarly, Loftus (2009) has argued that officers derive their self-identity from their work. Secondly, police officers can work in dangerous conditions (physical taint), they frequently engage with stigmatised others (social taint) and the trail of historic and recent policing scandals (Rowe, 2007) evidences unethical practices (moral taint). As policing tasks and roles vary, the dirty work elements will differ in breadth, depth and frequency. Thirdly, well-established characteristics of police culture resonate with normalising dirty work. Westley's (1970) work identified aspects of police occupational culture – in-group solidarity, preoccupation with danger, isolation from the public, sexism and racism, willingness to use force, relations with minority groups, discretion in decision-making – which others (Skolnick, 1966, 2008; Silvestri, 2003; Reiner, 2010; Loftus, 2010; Cockcroft, 2013; Cosgrove, 2016; Loftus et al., 2016) have explored as dimensions of police cultures. As discussed later, cultures within increasingly diverse police organisations can be both forces for good – a dimension of coping with hostility, and bad – reproducing inequality and isolation. We demonstrate below that dirty work is a rich concept for understanding the hostility that is targeted at police officers

because of their occupational identity, and particularly their responses to this abuse. Before doing so, the next section considers how the existing hate crime framework relates to the experiences of police officers as victims of hate.

### **Police officers and hate crime: unlikely victims?**

Across jurisdictions, hate crime sits within a 'conceptual quagmire' (Wickes et al., 2016); its definition remains contentious and as a concept 'its precise meaning [is] elusive and its parameters vague' (Garland and Chakraborti, 2012: 48). Nevertheless, in the UK it is a significant subject that attracts government, public and academic attention, highlighted through cases including those of Stephen Lawrence, Sophie Lancaster and Fiona Pilkington in which individuals were targeted due to core aspects of their identity (Garland and Hodgkinson, 2014; Chakraborti and Garland, 2015). Definitions of hate crime privilege particular disadvantaged groups with a history of discrimination, implicitly positioning some groups as more deserving of legal protection than others (Garland and Chakraborti, 2012). This approach sets up an ideal victim status (Mason, 2009) unavailable to those belonging to less socially desirable groups, subcultural groups (Wickes et al., 2016) or occupational groups such as police officers. Indeed, as victims of hate crime, police officers find themselves at the margins of the debate.

Hate crime has been defined in different ways for reasons of legal process and agencies' endeavours to understand its dimensions and possible responses. Perry's (2001:10) influential framework includes 'acts of violence and intimidation, usually directed towards already stigmatised and marginalised groups'. However, she also notes the importance of 'context, structure and agency'. For Perry (2001, 2009), hate crime centres on the exercising of power by the dominant over the weak and is a mechanism of oppression enacted in order to maintain society's rigid hierarchies, be they racial, sexual, physical or mental ability or gender identity. Using the term 'targeted victimisation', Walklate (2011) repositions the debate away from structural disadvantage and minority group membership towards perceived difference and vulnerability. Recently Chakraborti and Garland (2015:5) have used the broader definition of hate crime as 'acts of violence, hostility and intimidation directed towards people because of their identity or perceived "difference"'. A similarly inclusive approach is supported by Wickes et al. (2016) on the basis that it encourages a higher level of reporting by victims and facilitates better agency responses. What many hate crime scholars do agree on is that hate crime does not have to be a notable offence; rather, it can be an event, incident or process. Also, hate crimes 'hurt more' because they target a core element of the victim's identity.

The police occupy a problematic position within the hate crime literature. Effective policing is acknowledged as a key part of supporting victims and prosecuting perpetrators, and the police have an important role in the UK Government's plan to address hate crime (Home Office, 2016a). To play a part in successfully implementing the plan requires the police to build levels of trust and confidence with members of minority, victimised and marginalised groups with whom they experience strained or distant relations. Typically, studies have tended to focus on the need to improve police responses and practices (Chakraborti, 2009; Wickes et al., 2016) and, in recent large-scale hate crime studies (Chakraborti et al., 2014; Williams and Tregidga, 2014), a substantial number of victims perceived the police as unable or unwilling to address hate crime. To date, studies have not focussed on police officers as victims of hate crime. Rather, when researching police officers as victims, the literature has tended to focus on the equipment and training aspects of officer safety (Stokstad, 2000; White, 2014) and the post-incident stresses and traumas of policing (Anderson et al., 2002; Ménard and Arter, 2013).

Police officers, then, are not seen as 'ideal' hate crime victims but as overly-powerful and adding to frameworks which reproduce relationships of power and privilege. Further, moving from policing to occupations as a whole, to date there has been little examination of hate crimes and types of worker, the notable exception being sex workers (Chakraborti and Garland, 2015: 97-8). However, scholars have debated the case for including groups on the boundaries of hate crime, namely Garland and Hodkinson's analysis of hostility targeted towards Goths (Garland and Hodkinson, 2014). In doing so, they have been mindful of walking the line between being inclusive and not widening hate crime to the extent that it lacks coherence and meaning.

In step with this spirit of inclusivity, this paper examines the hate crime experiences of police officers. As members of a tainted dirty work occupation, police officers are often seen as 'out-groups' and thus legitimate objects of hate crime who must be punished for their identity performance. In this thinking, police officers are likely to be perceived by outsiders to have chosen their dirty work occupation, thereby inviting blame. Unlike other sources of stigmas, occupational stigmas are perceived as controllable and individuals can be blamed for their career choice despite that career being necessary for a functional society (Crandall, 2000). Additionally, police officers might be seen as ideal targets for hate crime attacks when their occupational status intersects with their other identities, in terms of religion, race, disability, gender and sexual orientation. However, currently, neither the hate crime legal framework nor the research literature recognise police officers as victims of hate crime in the UK. The present study and its findings challenge this orthodoxy.

## Methods

This paper is based on a qualitative interview-based study, which recorded the experiences of police officers as hate crime victims in one medium-sized provincial English police force of approximately 3,300 personnel, covering a mix of urban and rural locations. Due to the potential sensitivity of the research, particular consideration was given to the methods of recruiting participants, choosing locations for interviews and protecting the identities of those involved. These considerations were discussed with the force and addressed in the request for ethical approval submitted to, and approved by, the University of Leicester Ethics Committee. Participants were recruited by placing a message on the force intranet inviting all personnel who had experienced hate crime to directly contact the authors. Participation in the study was voluntary and 19 police officers and one Police and Community Support Officer agreed to take part. Each was sent a 'Participant Information Sheet' covering purpose, logistics and anonymity, plus an 'Interview Guide' of open-ended questions to think about prior to their interview. These asked about the nature of their daily work and their experience of, and responses to, acts of victimisation that they felt had been targeted directly towards them because of who they were as individuals and as police officers.

The research aimed to: (a) identify the nature and frequency of hate crime directed towards police workers, (b) explore the impacts of this victimisation, and (c) determine workers' coping mechanisms and responses. In-depth interviews were chosen as the research method as they allow rich data to be collected (Hennink et al., 2011). The individual face-to-face interviews, undertaken by the authors, ranged from one to two hours, with an average interview length of one hour. These took place at the participants' choice of location: in police offices, in police canteens and in the authors' university departments. With the exception of one police officer, who declined to be recorded for fear of being identified, all interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed and then analysed using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Names and places have been changed in order to preserve anonymity though the pseudonyms indicate gender and ethnicity. The sample was diverse in terms of age (from mid-20's to mid-50's), gender (16 males and 4 females), ethnicity (11 self-described as Asian, 5 as White British, and 4 as Black British/African Caribbean), sexuality (18 straight and 2 gay/lesbian officers), religion (7 practised no religion, 5 were Christians, 5 Hindus, 2 Muslims and 1 Sikh), rank (Constable to Inspector level), role (detectives, uniformed and custody officers), and length of service (from less than five years to more than 20). However, the sample is not statistically representative. The aim of the study was not to quantify police officers' hate crime experiences in a statistical fashion but to understand the nature and impact of hate crime amongst participants, both individually and collectively.

## Findings: Experiences of Hate Crime

Participants reported experiencing hate crime because of their occupational identity. They perceived that certain individuals or groups were anti-police and, as a result, would verbally and/or physically attack them because of their police identity. This conforms to the stranger danger aspect of hate crime, whereby victims are potentially interchangeable, having been selected due to their membership of an identifiable out-group. Hostility is prompted by an extreme dislike of their stigma or difference, as manifested here in the police uniform:

Abuse for being a police officer happens all the time from all sorts of people. They see a guy in uniform and they target that.  
(Thomas)

This links to the stigmatised dirty work of operational policing but, as mentioned above, the police are not an ideal victim group; they are relatively high status and are entrusted with powers to question and regulate citizens' activities and behaviours. Accordingly it is to be expected that they will attract abuse in circumstances where they are exerting power over others, for example:

.... being called a pig, I got used to that [...] I have been spat at by someone with hep c. I'd rather be punched in the face than being spat at. Are they spitting at me because I'm a police officer? [...] Some people in the community just don't like the police, you can feel their hatred. I dealt with a stabbing last week and the IP [ie the victim] wouldn't cooperate, wouldn't give up clothing as evidence and wouldn't give a statement. You sense they're anti-police by watching their body-language, by how they look at you, you can feel it. (Matt)

We get people saying 'we are going to chop your heads off' when working with certain members of the Muslim community that we are investigating for Islamist extremism. (George)

Nevertheless, the interview data suggests that while abuse arises when the police are exerting overt power and may be a manifestation of resistance to state authority, this is not always the case. It also arises in cases where the police are providing a general reassuring presence. Amjad, for example, spoke of an incident one evening when he was parked in the city centre:

This chap walked past my police car and spat on it. I shouted 'oi' and he ignored me, I walked up to him, asked him why he'd spat on the car, he started getting verbal, saying he hadn't done it. Another officer turned up and asked what the problem was and the male said 'your paki mate is the problem'. (Amjad)

Sometimes, verbal abuse and the threat of violence spilled over into physical violence. Stephen told us about an off-duty encounter with an individual who knew he was a police officer:

A known criminal mouthed off at me at a petrol station and approached me. He watched me drive off and park at home nearby. A week later a brick was thrown through my bedroom window in the night, it was terrifying. I knew it was the criminal but there was no proof. (Stephen)

Participants also experienced hostility from people who had called the police specifically for assistance and where questions of police power were not at stake. This could be overt or subtle:

I knocked on the door and the little child, a six year old girl, said 'Mummy, there's a paki at the door'. So the mum comes to the door and says 'I don't want to talk to you, I want to talk to a white officer'. I said fine, I went back to the car, got in touch with the control room, and said that particular person does not want to talk to a paki officer, they want to talk to a white officer, so my control room said 'fine, leave it, we'll give them a ring, if they don't talk to you, then there's no other officer available'. (Meera)

Sometimes the abuse is non-verbal, when attending incidents and people speak to my partner but not me, they ignore me. I know they are racist when there are two of us, and one is white and one is not – it's not the uniform, its *personal* identity not *police* identity. (Arjun)

These incidents illustrate that targeted hostility towards police officers is not always a reaction to the implementation of police powers or the unwanted intervention of police officers, although sometimes it is. The examples thus far illustrate also that the hostility may be targeted at the police occupation or an officer's personal identity or a combination of both. Participants reported suffering hate crime because of core aspects of their personal identity such as ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation and gender. They argued that experiencing racism, homophobia, sexism, religiously motivated hate crime, and intolerance towards difference was prevalent in day-to-day policing.

Specifically, every single one of the participants had suffered verbal abuse including name-calling, swearing and threats of physical violence related to core aspects of their personal identity. As indicated in the following comments, the language used by the perpetrators revealed their hate crime motivation in relation to racism, religiously motivated hate crime, homophobia and sexism, respectively:

### ***Racism***

On numerous occasions I've been referred to by racist names when dealing with incidents like 'get your hands off me you black bastard', public order wise or transporting prisoners into police custody. (Raymond)

### ***Religiously motivated hate crime***

As a front line officer, I've come across hate crime lots. I've had things like when I've sat at the back of the police car with someone I've arrested saying 'people like you, all you do is bomb cars' because they look at me and they think I am a Muslim but I am not a Muslim, in fact I don't follow any religion. (Preeti)

### ***Homophobia***

When you search people's pockets it's the usual homophobic type of abuse that they will come out with, and that has happened in numerous occasions. So they say 'Oh you just grabbed my penis' or 'You are touching me up' or 'Get off me you fucking poof'. I go 'OK, heard it before'. (Mark)

[I've] been called a dyke and 'lesbo' a number of times. A classic key incident occurred six months into my service. I had arrested a drug dealer and he said I was only wearing a uniform so I could go and get women, and I was there in the van with my new shift, wishing the ground would open up and swallow me. I thought they're all going to know, I just wanted him to shut up. (Laura)

### ***Sexism***

I've seen female colleagues being called 'ugly'. (Amjad)

Debates on intersectionality in hate crime scholarship have begun to unpack how individuals' various identities interact in rendering them ideal victims of hate crime. For example, literature reporting on the intersectional nature of Islamophobia and sexism (Chakraborti and Zempi, 2012) and homophobia and transphobia (Beyond Barriers, 2003) highlights the role of individuals' multiple identities in their hate crime victimisation. Consequently police

officers can experience hate crime because of the intersectionality between core aspects of their identity and their occupational status:

I've been called a 'white bitch' and 'dyke' a number of times.  
(Laura)

I get problems when I deal with Somali males. They don't like female authority. They treat us differently, they ignore us. They will speak to male colleagues with more respect, right in front of me. I struggle to deal with them. On numerous occasions, they try to intimidate me, I've been sworn at. They call me a 'paki bitch', 'fucking slag'. (Raksha)

Participants also felt targeted based on personal characteristics related to their physical appearance, namely, body shape and size, wearing glasses, hair, nose and eye shape, as well as their perceived social class. Although the following statements are not examples of hate crimes *per se*, it is important to recognise that they can generate a drip-drip effect harmful in its own right, especially when considered in the wider context of a continuum of hate crime victimisation:

I am small, I've had comments about my size. They say 'oh, aren't you small? I thought there's a height limit' or 'what are you going to do?' (Preeti)

A colleague was called a 'bald twat' because he did not have hair. (Jermaine)

### **Context and Triggers**

Participants were questioned concerning the contextual circumstances which they believed had contributed to their hate crime victimisation. The consensus view was that the visibility of their police identity, evident through their uniforms, triggered hate crime attacks, which often escalated to suffering hate crime because of their personal characteristics. In other words, the visibility of their out-group status as police officers triggered further personal attacks. This demonstrates the affinity between police identity and personal identity:

Attacking the uniform can move to attacking the individual – 'coconut pig'. (Thomas)

Obviously I am a Sikh officer, I wear the turban, I am Asian, these aspects of my identity stand out. In my opinion, people are very visual. If they want to say something hate related, they will

use race or religion because these are more obvious. If they see an officer who is black, it will be 'you black', if they see an Asian officer it will be 'you paki', people will abuse you based on what they see. (Nihal)

Additionally, participants highlighted the nature of the job itself, including geographical and time aspects, as well as the role of intoxication in triggering hate crime attacks:

In most cases, people are drunk or on drugs when they make hate related comments. People are more aggressive and say or do things that they would not do when they are sober but that's not to say that I have not had problems with people who are sober. (Nihal)

Every day as a response officer, twice a shift probably. You pull people over and you're their worst enemy. (Matt)

Geography makes a difference i.e. where you are policing. The typical experience is on response policing, working nights, dealing with public order incidents, arrested people gobbing off in a holding cell. (Arjun)

This suggests that hate crime occurs in situations and locations where dirty work is most evident and where police officers deem it necessary to impose their authority and exert their physical and legal powers. Hate crime arose when people were being challenged and arrested in public order situations, especially if they were on drugs or had consumed alcohol. Response officers were prone to abuse and location was important; late shifts in city centres, custody suites, calls to public order and domestic incidents – these were points of tension and conflict where the police uniform triggered a hostile response.

### **Impacts and Responses**

The research literature demonstrates that hate crimes hurt more than everyday crimes lacking the bias, prejudice and/or hate motivation (Botcherby et al., 2011; Chakraborti et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2012; Williams and Tregidga, 2014). Hate crimes can shatter victims' self-worth and confidence and can cause emotional trauma as they attack victims' core identities. Correspondingly, participants described the impact of hate crime victimisation as frightening, hurtful, embarrassing, annoying, upsetting, and worrying. However, they pointed out that being attacked because of their personal

identity affected them more than when they were attacked because of their police identity. As the following quotes demonstrate, abuse because of the uniform was something they brushed off, or recalibrated in dirty work terms, as it felt like an impersonal attack, part of the acknowledged dirty work of policing. In contrast, abuse of personal characteristics lingered:

Abuse received as a police officer because of the uniform is easier to shake off. Abuse as an Asian is more personal and you take it home more. (Arjun)

When you arrest people on drink or drugs you expect all the time to be called names, run of the mill names, and it doesn't really bother you, but when they call you names about your ethnicity, your skin colour, just come out with it, you're not expecting it. They've made a conscious effort to look at me, decide my ethnic background and call me that name. Effort's gone into it. It's personal. (Adam)

A common finding across the interviews was that participants had gradually grown so used to targeted hostility as to become immune to it. With experience, for some desensitisation occurs and abuse is accepted as a normal part of policing:

You put your professional mask on, you do become desensitised. You have to build up that immunity. (Thomas)

While many participants reported becoming desensitised to hate crime on duty, others reported tolerating or ignoring it. This response eschewed confronting abusive behaviour and normalised its occurrence as part of necessary dirty work which at times they were obliged to accept:

I make it clear I'm not interested. Paperwork, officer time it takes. Hurtful as it is if I'm called a 'fucking nigger', I get on with it, I'm not interested. In the main, life's too short. (Dwayne)

Minorities have had a tough time in the police. I'd expect a minority officer who joins the cops, they would expect to get a level of abuse over their identity. (George)

Although individuals may ignore the abuse, it is questionable whether this approach is psychologically healthy or tenable in the long term. Some officers may exit the occupation and encourage others not to join. However, the acceptance of hate crime experiences contrasted with the responses of other officers who challenged the abuse in different ways. For example, some

participants attempted to build a rapport and even change their abusers' perceptions by encouraging dialogue:

Sometimes I get verbal abuse and say to them 'look, there is no need to be abusive. I am not abusive to you, I am speaking to you as a human being, I am also a human being' and when they think about it, they calm down and we have a normal conversation. I build rapport with the prisoners who come into our custody. It's about treating them with respect. (Paresh)

Experience has made me more sophisticated in challenging people. I don't jump in and arrest people. I appeal to reason and dialogue and take context into account. I never ignore it, there has to be a reason so I will challenge abuse. I simply ask them why – they normally will give a reason. (Thomas)

Other participants used humour to diffuse situations and, similarly to other dirty work occupations, joined-in gallows humour with colleagues to normalise their hate crime experiences through sharing their experiences, enhancing their self-esteem and creating distance from their abusers. As Waddington (1999) argues, police humour can be a valuable tool for releasing the tensions associated with the working environment.

Encouraging dialogue, however, was not always successful and it would be necessary to challenge the hate formally through reporting or arrest in order to send the message to perpetrators that they would not tolerate the abuse.

I initially took the attitude of 'I have heard it all before' but after 4-5 years I changed my mind-set to 'this is not right!' I will always report it. (Arjun)

I was in the police van, and two girls walked past the van and as they walked past us I heard one of them say 'oh there's too many foreigners in this town, I fucking hate them'. I didn't say anything, I thought it was a conversation between them but as I was putting the window down, she said 'what are you looking at blacky?' I thought 'what the hell, I am just sitting in a van' so she was arrested as well. Why should I put up with it? (Jermaine)

### **Support**

Running through these outlined responses and ways of coping are the deployment of detachment and solidarity, which to be effective traits, depend on a positive occupational culture. As the police culture literature shows there are advantages and disadvantages to these traits (Reiner, 2010). Some

participants spoke of relying on their colleagues on site to challenge perpetrators' behaviours. For example, Mohammed spoke about physical detachment by removing himself from hostile situations when possible and practicable. He would step back in an attempt to de-escalate the incident and allow other colleagues to step in. This detachment, or isolation, tactic links to the solidarity response, whereby police officers protect and support each other. Our participants generally found the shift culture mostly protective and more diverse than ten years ago. Dwayne argued that sometimes white officers could go 'embarrassingly overboard being offended on colleagues' behalf'. Others concurred:

I came out after about six months on shift. People weren't bothered, didn't care. They said 'so what? You're a cop, you're one of us, you're on the shift'. If anything my shift now stand up for me if I get abuse. They won't let people say things to me, they back me up, we protect each other. If you see someone getting abuse you go in there and give them a hand. (Laura)

While shift solidarity was valued and seen as important, the working culture could also be harsh and one Asian officer reported 'I can't rely on my colleagues, I've learnt that early on in my career. My confidence in the organisation has gone' (Meera).

Support from supervisors and the formal reporting processes was inconsistent. This is important as officers at sergeant and inspector level can be influential in shaping junior colleagues' careers. Our participants shared experiences of supervisors who had provided support and encouragement but equal numbers who had, in their views, lacked sympathy. As a result, the reporting process itself could leave them feeling vulnerable. They noted secondary victimisation as important given that reporting their experiences to their supervisor could lead to difficult questioning about their role in the incident, and, for males, the consequences to one's implied masculinity in being a victim. This finding resonates with research suggesting reporting hate crimes can result in secondary victimisation (Chakraborti and Garland 2015):

If you reported all the abuse, you would be taken on one side and told to 'man up'. (Matt)

Moreover, the participants had mixed and ambivalent views concerning the formal reporting and support mechanisms provided by the police organisation. They variously praised, dismissed or were suspicious of the reporting and support mechanisms:

I used to get a letter from supervisor every time I was a victim. I don't get them anymore, not sure why. (Deepak)

I feel angry, frustrated that I can't do anything. Once I was abused by a prisoner and the decision was made not to prosecute him for it by a senior officer. It was not treated seriously. (Stephen)

In analysing participants' responses to their hate crime experiences, it is clear that they operate on a continuum that moves from (1) accept/tolerate and ignore, through (2) understand and communicate (e.g., using empathy and humour) to (3) challenge and address, record and arrest. These responses can be made sense of conceptually by drawing on Hirshman's (1970) 'exit, voice and loyalty' (EVL) model which has been used to map and compare employees' responses to adverse working conditions, including in the criminal justice context (Mawby and Worrall, 2013). The category of *exit* involves physically or psychologically leaving the organisation. This includes not only the obvious responses of taking a career break, thinking about leaving or actually leaving for good, but also withdrawing enthusiasm, accepting abuse and failing to challenge it.

The category of *voice* involves standing up to abusers and speaking up to colleagues, management and others, in some cases through involvement with a staff association or working group. This includes the responses of working from within and being honest about the issues, recording and seeking to address them. Thirdly, *loyalty* is a characteristic of employees who feel an attachment to the organisation which acts as a psychological barrier to exit. In dirty work terms, these officers refocus attention on the more rewarding or altruistic aspects of their job. It includes those who believe they have to stay in the police service if things are to change. As Mohammed argued, 'you've got to be in it [the police service] to make a difference'.

### **Concluding Comments**

While there has been an increased interest in the experiences of ideal victims of hate crime, relatively little is known about police officers who experience hate crime because of the intersectionality between their stigmatised professional identity and personal identities. This paper has presented some of the findings from, as far as can be established, the first ever study examining the experiences of police officers as hate crime victims. Police officers are not obvious victims but viewing their experiences through the prism of dirty work reveals patterns of hostility and of coping that provide insights into the lived realities of what happens when hate crime meets dirty work in everyday policing. This study surfaces that hate crime is a problem for police officers, albeit a largely invisible one. Participants differentiated

between their hate crime experiences as policing professionals and as individuals behind the uniform, through their multiple experiences while undertaking operational police work. The experiences of the participants in this exploratory study, if substantiated by larger-scale studies, have potential implications for police training, organisational policies, processes, communications, support mechanisms, first line supervision and leadership. Further debate and research in these areas is necessary to establish a comprehensive database on the nature and extent of the issue and how best to address it. Not only would this be vital to informing the debate in terms of the inclusion or otherwise of police officers' hate crime experiences under the hate crime framework, it would also contribute modest steps towards building and maintaining a diverse police service that mirrors 21st Century communities in terms of gender, age, religion, ethnicity, disability and sexuality.

## NOTES

1. On 31 March 2016 the total strength of the 43 police forces in England & Wales was 124,066 officers. Of these, 29% were female and 6% were from ethnic minority backgrounds. 106,411 (86%) officers have 'front-line' roles (Home Office, 2016b).

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