

Office of the Police & Crime Commissioner for Merseyside

Victims Research Programme ‘Phase 2’

Victim Perspective:
Findings from Victim Focus Groups

21st October 2014

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SECTION 1: Overview

1.1 'Phase 2' of the Police and Crime Commissioner's (PCC) Victims Research Programme began in July 2014, and this report is one of three research papers that summarise the main findings that emerged from the work as 'Phase 2' was completed in Autumn 2014. The full list of Summary Papers are:

1. **Summary Paper 1 – Findings from Victim Focus Groups & depth interviews.**
2. Summary Paper 2 – Findings from Victim Survey.
3. Summary Paper 3 – Findings from Service Provider Workshops.

1.2 Why is victim-centric research important? In the week of writing this report, two news stories act as a timely reminder of the need to continue to improve cross-sector understanding and knowledge of the victim experience, and continually strive for a more effective, better co-ordinated service response:

- A '*bold new vision for the treatment of victims*'¹ was released by the Government on 14th September 2014, outlining plans to enshrine in law victims' rights and entitlements presently set out in the Victims Code, as well as establishing a new nationwide Victims' Information Service by March 2015. The latter initiative could provide a valuable new resource, for victims and service providers alike, if implemented in a co-ordinated way - in partnership with existing service providers and attuned to local demands and local understanding.
- Most recently, the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) account² of the tragic case of Becky McPhee, and the police response 'failure points' leading up to the murder of this domestic violence victim, serves as a timely reminder of what happens when things go terribly wrong when dealing with vulnerable people – and the need to better train staff, implement effective action plans and critically assess process through a victims 'lens'.

¹ Access here: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/a-bold-new-vision-for-the-treatment-of-victims?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=press-release-a-bold-new-vision-for-the-treatment-of-victims

² Access here: <http://www.ipcc.gov.uk/news/ipcc-finds-domestic-violence-victim-was-failed-merseyside-police-being-murdered>

Background

- 1.3 In April 2014 a Research Programme was designed by the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) to inform the production of a Victim Needs Assessment, which in turn was used to provide an evidence base for commissioning decisions (2015/16).
- 1.4 The Research Programme consisted of two phases (the first of which was 'desk based' research and the second was engagement based), each of which had three elements.
- 1.5 This report presents findings from a series of Focus Groups and depth interviews, conducted in Summer 2014. In developing the Focus Group methodology, particular reference was made to a report produced for the victims' services advocates (VSA) project, commissioned during summer 2012 to inform the imminent arrival of Police and Crime Commissioners. The report was titled 'Listening and learning – Improving Support for Victims in Merseyside' – using three Focus Groups and 13 victim interviews to give a voice to the victims of crime on Merseyside. Our present victim consultation project set out to reach a far greater number and range of victims, and seven Focus Groups were successfully convened, as well as 11 depth interviews and discussion groups – in total enabling 121 victims to input into the reporting via face-to-face engagement. In tandem, a victims survey was conducted, accessible online and via postal response – the survey findings are presented in the 'Findings from Online Victim Survey' report.
- 1.6 Learning from the best parts of the VSA work, the topic guide and structure of the group was kept simple – two exercises conducted over two hours, with a chance for victims to summarise or distil key messages to the PCC at the end. Far fewer questions were used in the topic guide compared to the VSA project, as a trial run revealed that the VSA volume of questions was impractical in the time. 10 core questions were therefore devised, that the moderator used to help focus attention on people's experiences of [1] reporting, and [2] coping/recovery. The topic guide is included in the Appendices to this report. In the remainder of this report findings from Focus Groups conducted in August and September 2014 with victims of crime are presented, under thematic headings which correspond to priority themes for the Merseyside Police and Crime Commissioner – namely hate crime, domestic abuse (DA), sexual offences, and anti-social behaviour (ASB).
- 1.7 It is important at the outset to stress that there are 'pros' and 'cons' to be aware of when integrating Focus Group feedback and in-depth conversations with victims into a needs assessment. Limitations of this method of engagement include:
 - The temptation to make 'generalisations' about the experiences of the wider victim population based on the opinions of a small subset of the population.
 - Researcher or moderator influence is hard to eradicate in these exercises, but consistency can be improved through, for example training of staff in the use of topic guides and core principles prior to focus groups.
 - Group formats in particular have a number of limiting features to be wary of, including: reluctance of victims to speak in groups and the risk of people 'shouting loudest' having their opinions heard; victims being sensitive about voicing their experiences in a group format; event location being a barrier to participation for some, with transport an important consideration when recruiting.

However, on the plus side, the Focus Groups and depth conversations:

- Capture personal experiences in a victims own words.
- Extend the researchers understanding of a victim's perspectives and the meanings that they attach to an experience and behaviour.
- Enable participants to raise issues with the researcher/moderator that are important to them, which are often not evident from a trawl of literature.
- Provide a valuable source of rich, in-depth intelligence – to supplement quantitative analysis.

Outputs

- 1.8 The outputs associated with the Focus Group engagement strand of 'Phase 2' are:
- This Summary Report
 - One-to-two side OPCC Briefing Reports ('Moderator Reports'), produced for each Focus Group and written by the OPCC Team members who attended the sessions and acted as moderators. These reports are not for circulation outside of the OPCC.
 - Recordings of each session on the OPCC Dictaphone. These recordings have now been deleted as per the consent forms signed by participants.
 - Detailed thematic findings which are not for publication. However, the detailed thematic findings have been shared with the appropriate service providers.
 - A full, detailed report for Merseyside Police which outlines all of the findings from the victim Focus Groups.
 - Attendees who contributed to the victim Focus Groups will be invited to attend a feedback session whereby full thematic results will be shared.
- 1.9 This Report attempts to mesh together the key points highlighted in the OPCC Briefing Reports supplied for each Focus Group, and using the recordings, distil the findings accordingly.

Summary of Findings and Recommendations

- 1.10 Analysis of the Focus Group and depth interview findings reveal several possible priority areas for the PCC and support agencies to focus attention. Areas of commonality across the four thematic areas appear to be:
- **More training** - More awareness training for the police on the impact of actions and understanding the perspectives of all of the different people that make up the communities of Merseyside was voiced as a priority across many of the Focus Groups. Whilst it is acknowledged that the police services are under an immense amount of pressure, funding more training for staff so they have greater understanding of the needs and vulnerabilities of communities is important to victims.
 - **Provide a speedy, effective response for vulnerable victims** – Communication by the police was raised on several occasions, with some frustrations voiced relating to instances where the police can't offer referral options to external services. Delays in attendance are a frustration and lack of communication heightens that frustration. Taking action quickly is vital, with delays offering perpetrators vital time – and that

time can be used in some circumstances to pressurise a victim to detract their complaint, or remove evidence. All agencies receiving reports need to ensure that reporting leads to a swift needs assessment followed by rapid action – whether that is signposting to an offer of support from a person or service that a victim can relate to, or direct intervention with a perpetrator. Creative solutions need to be considered (for example, having a domestic abuse ‘triage’ service that brings a rapid response from experts with the right mix of skills to work in tandem with the police response teams).

- **More education, across all communities, about ‘difference’ and vulnerability,** from nursery level up. More work is needed to broaden the impact of these programmes, and raise awareness of these activities.
- **More effective work with the perpetrator** – Domestic abuse focus groups highlighted the need for more perpetrator programmes, and victims in three of the hate crime groups mentioned the need to change behaviour of offenders (perpetrators) and re-educate them on accepting people with difference, cultures and backgrounds. Whilst there are some perpetrator programmes in place across Merseyside, it was felt that the programmes have to be long term and available pan-Merseyside.
- **Market and advertise helplines more (such as Stop Hate UK).** Feedback on Stop Hate UK was overwhelmingly positive. However, a lot more effort is needed to broadcast their services, in a range of ways that have impact (e.g more posters on walls; more online marketing to reach younger people). Domestic abuse victims also flagged the importance of an effective helpline, similar to Stop Hate UK.
- **More advice and support to prevent re-victimisation.** Target hardening, crime prevention advice and practical support in helping people prevent re-victimisation (including self-defence classes) were flagged by victims across all Focus Groups. In terms of how the PCC could take this forward, one option could be to proactively provide crime prevention advice to those areas and individuals who are most vulnerable to crime (for example using victim profiling and cross-referencing with geodemographic analysis (such as MOSAIC or ACORN packages).

1.11 A range of creative ideas were put forward by victims for consideration by the PCC including:

- Piloting a **domestic abuse ‘triage’ team**, made up of domestic abuse survivors and support service staff, who could turn up with the police to explain the process more effectively and show more empathy.
- Communicating to the victim a **‘single point of contact’** (SPOC) for all of the local services.

1.12 Further research with victims of crime is required to fill gaps in knowledge relating to particularly vulnerable cohorts of the Merseyside population and gather experiences from

groups rarely heard from. All of this is dependent on resources being available and deadlines for reporting, however it is recommended that further work is undertaken with:

- **Young people** who have been victims.
- Victims of **life-changing violence**.
- Victims of **business crime**.
- Those often excluded or marginalised.
- **Male victims of domestic abuse**.
- **Children and families of domestic abuse survivors**.

1.13 In the longer term (2015/16 and beyond), a consultation programme with victims of crime conducted on an annual basis would help add an important longitudinal element to these community engagement 'foundations' and help to supplement the service user ('customer') engagement exercises that are being conducted by support agencies, including Merseyside Police. Consideration should be given to setting up and then maintaining a Victims Panel, from which Focus Groups could be recruited and statistically robust survey findings drawn.

1.14 To conclude, whilst acknowledging the immense financial pressures that many support agencies are under, it is nevertheless imperative that agencies work together to critically assess (and where possible quantify) the impact that the experiences of a victim has on a victim's life, their families and the local community - to make sure that no victim feels excluded by the system and commissioning of future services is relevant to victim needs. It is as important as ever for all agencies and sectors of the community to work together to reduce both the incidence of crime and to reduce the spectre of the possibility of crime or abuse, which create the sense of fear and vulnerability which can be seen to be having such a profound impact on people's lives.

1.15 The findings and actions from the three Victim Research 'Phase 2' Summary Reports, together with the three 'Phase 1' reports, were distilled into an overarching Victim Needs Assessment in October 2014 which informed the PCCs commissioning decisions for 2015/16. The design of service specifications was based upon the findings from the programme of research.

Disclaimer

The views expressed in this report are those of the author and are not necessarily shared by the commissioners.

This document has been prepared for the titled project and should not be relied upon or used for any other project without an independent check being carried out as to its suitability. Michael Lloyd accepts no responsibility or liability for the consequence of this document being used for a purpose other than the purposes for which it was commissioned.

The hyperlinks / website references in this report were correct at the time of publishing.

Contacts for further information

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Appendices

APPENDIX A1: Geographic spread of Focus Groups and depth interviews

Hate Crime Groups – attended by 40 participants

Wirral	Monday, 18th August, 2014
Liverpool North	Tuesday, 19th August, 2014
Liverpool South	Tuesday, 19th August, 2014
Sefton	Wednesday, 20th August, 2014
St Helens	Friday, 22nd August, 2014
Knowsley	Thursday, 21st August, 2014
Additional ('mop up')	Tuesday, 9th September, 2014

Domestic Violence Groups – attended by 46 participants

Wirral	Wednesday, 3rd September, 2014
Liverpool North	Thursday, 28th August, 2014
Liverpool South	Wednesday, 27th August, 2014
Sefton	Tuesday, 2nd September, 2014
St Helens	Friday, 5th September, 2014
Knowsley	Thursday, 4th September, 2014
Additional ('mop up')	Thursday, 11th September, 2014

ASB Groups – attended by 26 participants

Wirral	Monday, 15th September, 2014
Knowsley	Tuesday, 16th September, 2014
St Helens	Tuesday, 16th September, 2014
Sefton	Wednesday, 17th September, 2014
South Liverpool	Wednesday, 17th September, 2014
North Liverpool	Thursday, 18th September, 2014

Sexual Offences Focus Group - attended by 9 participants (and 2 support workers)

Liverpool (pan-Merseyside Group)	September, 2014
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A2: The Topic Guide

Access here: [Victim Focus Group Topic Guide](#)


Screenshots, showing the questions & dialogue prompts, follow for the 7 pages of the Topic Guide:

Focus Groups – Victims (Aug/Sep14)

MLR>>
Metropolitan Police
London

POLICE COMMISSIONER
Working for the Metropolitan

Adult Focus Groups – TOPIC GUIDE



A. PRE-FG'S - Materials need to take to FGs:

- This semi-structured **topic guide** - providing a balance between consistent questioning and flexibility, that allows the FG moderator/facilitator to adapt the style and approach according to group need.
- Event materials – including:
 - Consent forms
 - Dictaphone & batteries – if participants gave consent to recording, with anonymity stressed at outset.
 - Flipchart and pens.
 - Post-it notes.
 - Incentives and change for reimbursing travel.

B. ON THE DAY.... Four steps to follow

1. Introduction <i>10 mins</i>	2. Ice-breaker <i>5 mins</i>
3. 2 x EXERCISES <i>2 x 45 mins (plus break)</i>	4. Conclusion <i>5 mins</i>

1

1. Introduction 10mins

1a] Introduce yourself

1b] Explain confidentiality

1c] Explain practicalities

1d] Ensure consent

1a] Introduce yourself

Explain you're going to spend the first 10 minutes at the start talking at them –

- "explaining a bit more about us, what we do and what we hope you're going to do, and finally tell you what you need to know about how this will all work – including where the loos are, if you haven't found them yet!".

Introduce yourself & the note-taker with you - explaining that you work for the Police and Crime Commissioner, MP Jane Kennedy, and a bit about your area of expertise/roles.

Then explain the purpose of the focus groups:

- *"This is one of over 20 Focus Groups being held across Merseyside, that are seeking the views of victims of a variety of crimes – including hate crime, domestic violence, and sexual offences.*
- *This is connected to a big change in how victim services are commissioned – from April 2015, Jane Kennedy and her Deputy Commissioner, Cllr Ann O'Byrne, will take responsibility for commissioning support services for victims of crime in Merseyside. They want your views, to identify which services are working well and where you think more support might be needed. Basically they want to know where they should focus resources in relation to services and support for victims*
- *What you tell us in this group will be used to make a briefing paper for Jane and Ann, highlighting what victims need most".*

1b] Confidentiality

Explain that:

- *All the information provided will be treated confidentially – it will be kept secure and only be seen by members of the PCC research team.*
- *It will not be shared with other staff, the service provider/gateway organisation (if relevant) or anyone else.*

- *They will not be identified in the report – we may cite their experience or views and quote them in the report but we would not use their name, and would change any details which might identify them.*
- *Participants should respect the confidentiality and anonymity of each other and not disclose what is discussed in the focus group to others*
- *Emphasise the limits of confidentiality i.e. if someone shares something which suggests a vulnerable adult or a child is at risk, or they are at risk, the researcher has an obligation to share this information.*

1c] Practical issues

Explain that:

- *The focus group will last up to 2 hours.*
- *There will be a 5-10 minute break half-way through.*
- *Travel expenses will be reimbursed at the end.*
- *They do not have to answer questions if they do not want to and they can leave at any time and for whatever reason.*
- *They can access information about support services available (where applicable). If needed there is also someone on hand if they should wish to go out and talk to someone.*
- *Check that everyone is happy for you to record the interview – again stressing the recordings won't be shared (its just to help your note taking) and will be deleted in 4 weeks time.*
- *Housekeeping – fire procedure, toilets etc.*
- *Ask them to give each other a chance to speak, respect each other's views and try not to talk over each other.*

1d] Consent

- *Check if they have understood what's been explained so far [the above]*
- *Hand out consent forms and ask to sign. Collect them all after 2 mins.*
- *Emphasise that consent can be withdrawn at any point and they would need to inform the researcher if they wanted to do so.*

2. Ice- breaker 5mins

2a] Rapid round table – what should be the ground rules for today?

- jot down on flip-chart

3. EXERCISES (x2)

45 mins (max) each exercise [with 5-10 min break between]

Exercise 1: Your views about reporting crime

Exercise 2: What can help victims cope and deal better with the impact of crime?

EXERCISE 1: Your views about reporting crime

"We're going to start with a brief show-of-hands, to understand more about your experience of reporting [HATE/DV/ASB...] crime. So"

A:

1. *First of all, hands up if anyone's reported every [HATE/DV/ASB...] crime or incident they've ever experienced – and that can be to the Police or to organisations other than the Police?*

<Prompt – that might be a helpline, Victim Support, your social landlord, a charity, etc>

"OK – so at the start we know that as a Group we [have had some reluctance / OR / haven't had major issues] in the past about reporting crimes.... So next we're going to explore in a bit more detail what helps people make the decision to tell someone about a crime".

SUGGESTION TO MODERATOR: On board or flip chart start with two main headers: 'WHAT'S IMPORTANT' and 'WHY'.

"To dig a bit deeper into why people report crime, we're going to look at what you think is important about the people you report to".

So lets start with the Police:

"We want to find out what you think is most important that the Police do when dealing with victims reporting [HATE/DV/ASB...] crime and why".

B:

2. So first, what is most important about how the Police deal with victims reporting [HATE/DV/ASB...] crime, and why?

MODERATOR INSTRUCTION: Note in the 'WHAT'S IMPORTANT' column, and 'WHY' where possible

PROBE:

- Responding to report of crime quickly
- Taking incident seriously
- Taking (quick) action to investigate
- Explaining process / next steps
- Keeping victim updated and informed about what they were doing
- Being understanding and responsive to concerns of victim
- Treating victim with consideration and respect
- Being discrete where necessary
- Linking victim to other support services

So lets now move away from reporting to the Police – and onto other ways in which a crime/incident gets reported and recorded.

C:

3. Did you personally report previous crimes against you to any organisations OTHER than the Police, and if so who?

PROBE – Why did you contact them?

C:

4. For those who reported a crime (to either the Police or any another organisation), how well do you feel they reacted to your initial needs and how well did they pass you on to the help you needed?

PROBE – dependant on previous answers, try to get respondent to differentiate between Police and other agencies if possible.

If there is a strong reaction, find out if this was a recent experience being talked about – and what would they want done differently in that particular case.

5 – 10 minute break [dependant if over-running]

EXERCISE 2: What can help victims cope and deal better with the impact of crime

Quick recap – “we’ve so far looked at that immediate issue of who you feel able to report the crime to. Next we’re going to look a bit more at:

- what victims needed most help with in terms of dealing with the impact of crime
- and what’s important, longer term, in helping people to cope with (and in some cases recover from) the effects of the crime.

SUGGESTION TO MODERATOR: On board or flip chart start again with two main headers: ‘WHAT’ and ‘WHY’.

D:

5. What, if anything, did you most need help with in terms of coping with the impact of the experience of crime on your life? And can you explain why that was?

MODERATOR INSTRUCTION: Add under the ‘WHAT’ and ‘WHY’ on board.

PROBE -

- Counselling / emotional support
- Family/friends support
- Crime prevention advice / Extra security
- Medical advice
- More information ETC

D:

6. Referring to each of the points above - Was there a particular point in time after the crime that help was needed? When was that?

MODERATOR INSTRUCTION: Add a **WHEN** heading if enough responses

D:

7. Referring to each of the points above - what forms of help do you think is most important for victims of [HATE/DV/ASB...] crime overall, to help them start to cope with the impact? So we’re focussing on the first few weeks after the event.

Moving onto longer term ‘healing process’ and support needs:

D:

8. Have any of you got to the point where you’d say you’re on the way to recovering from the impact of the crime against you? If so, what helped you most in that longer term recovery process?

And just moving onto the last couple of questions – and summarising what you'd change and improve...

E:

9. Was there anything else you needed, to help you to cope and recover better, that was NOT available to you?

E:

10. If you could tell the PCC (Jane Kennedy) ONE thing about what she should be doing for victims of [HATE/DV/ASB...] crime, what would it be?

4. CONCLUSION 5mins

- *Thank participants for their time and contribution*
- *Ask if there are any final questions or comments*
- *Reiterate that follow-up support is available*
- *Ask if people are interested in seeing the report / being kept informed of progress – take contact details of those who are. Communicate that a report will be available on the PCC website from October 2014*

APPENDIX A3: The OPCC consent form template



Information sheet and consent form

If you have any further questions about the research please feel free to contact Norma Kielty-Crummey norma.kielty-crummey@merseysidepcc.info or on telephone number 0151 777 5162.

Please sign this form to show you that you have read, or I have read to you, the contents of this information sheet and consent form and that you agree to take part in the focus group. Alternatively you can return this form electronically with an email stating you consent to take part.

_____ (signed)

_____ (printed)

_____ (date)



Information sheet and consent form

This focus group is for people who have been victims of crime and who wish to be involved in a discussion about the quality and type of support service that the victims/survivors of crime on Merseyside receive. Rt Hon Jane Kennedy, the Police and Crime Commissioner for Merseyside and her Deputy, Councillor Ann O'Byrne, Merseyside's Victim's Champion will be required by the Government to take on the commissioning/funding of some support services for the victims of crime from April 2015. We are beginning a consultation during which we want to hear the opinions of people who have been affected by crime from across the region. This is so that when we take over the selecting, funding and monitoring of some victims' services later this year, we hope to be better informed about the nature of the service that is needed. This consultation will enable us to deliver the services that we know are needed and wanted.

Your experiences will help us develop services to support people like yourself when dealing with these sensitive issues. There are no right or wrong answers – all we want is your views and experiences.

Before we start we would like to emphasise that:

- Your participation is entirely voluntary
- Your participation is anonymous
- you can refuse to answer any question
- You can leave the focus group at any time.
- You have access to the counsellor at the focus group

With your permission we would like to record the focus group. The information collected will be anonymous and confidential.

The only exception to this would be if anything you tell us suggests you, or others around you, are at risk of harm either from yourself or from other people. Recordings and any notes taken during the focus group will be destroyed once the final report is complete. Excerpts from the focus group may be made part of the final report, but under no circumstances will names be included in the report.

If you have any further questions about the research please feel free to contact Norma Kielty-Crummey norma.kielty-crummey@merseysidepcc.info or on telephone number 0151 777 5162.