Hidden Hate: Uncovering Experiences of Gendered Hostility
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What is gendered hostility?
Every year tens of thousands of people in England and Wales suffer prejudice and hostility because of their identity or perceived ‘difference’. Such victimisation is more commonly referred to as ‘hate crime’, and over the past decade this concept has come to be associated with five identity strands: namely, disability, ethnicity, faith, sexual orientation and transgender status (College of Policing, 2014).
Although the development of hate crime policy has generated a number of positive outcomes for some victims of targeted hostility, there remain many groups whose experiences of victimisation have been largely overlooked. One area that has yet to be given the legislative, public and academic attention it deserves is gendered hostility, which includes acts of violence and intimidation directed towards people because of their gender, gender identity or gender performance.

What forms of gendered hostility do people experience?
Over a two-year period from 2012 to 2014 we conducted ESRC-funded research into acts of prejudice and targeted hostility. Of the 1,421 victims of hate crime that we heard from, 204 felt that they had been targeted on the basis of their gender, gender identity or gender performance.

Of those targeted because of their gender:
• 77% had been intimidated or threatened;
• 41% had been physically attacked;
• 36% had been sexually assaulted; and
• 38% had been harassed online.

Victims’ experiences of gendered hostility were extremely diverse, and included being sent hate mail, offensive text messages or abusive posts on social networking sites; being verbally abused and harassed at work, in the street, in pubs, clubs and restaurants, supermarkets, on public transport and at home; having property stolen or vandalised; and being befriended and then exploited or humiliated.

What is the impact of gendered hostility?
Targeted hostility is known to have a significant emotional and physical impact on the victim, their family and in some contexts the wider community. Of the victims of gendered hostility that we heard from many reported feeling anxious, vulnerable and fearful as a result of their victimisation.

It makes you feel upset and angry. You know there was a time when I couldn’t leave the house without crying.

White British female, 40s

It made me feel very vulnerable, powerless, targeted. It made me worry about my safety in the future. It made me feel self-conscious and uncomfortable going out and about.

White British female, 30s

The impact of hate crime resulted in many victims employing a range of different coping strategies and defence mechanisms. This included people changing the way that they look or dress, carrying safety devices, installing CCTV, and bypassing certain areas or environments altogether.

What support do victims of gendered hostility need?
One of the key aims of the project was to assess victims’ expectations and experiences of agency responses to their victimisation. We found that just two in ten victims of gendered hostility had reported their experiences to the police, and even fewer had used a third-party reporting mechanism. We heard from many victims who had little confidence in the capacity of authorities to act empathetically, efficiently or effectively. Rather, it was the small, voluntary and community-based groups that were seen as providing invaluable support for victims of gendered hostility.

When asked how the police, as well as other relevant organisations, could improve existing services and support provisions for victims of gendered hostility, participants suggested a number of recommendations, including:

1. developing awareness campaigns that connect with people more effectively;
2. simplifying reporting procedures to make them more victim-friendly; and
3. ensuring that practitioners treat victims with empathy, humanity and kindness.

“"You never really know with people how far they will go and how fast things can escalate. What could be somebody asking a question, or name calling, can easily turn to violence in less than a minute.”

To find out more information about the research being conducted at the Leicester Centre for Hate Studies, contact us on LCHS@le.ac.uk or 0116 252 3784.