

Secondary reassurance contact (SRA) for victims of hate crimes

Exploring how a secondary response by neighbourhood police officers improved experiences and reduced attrition for victims of hate crime.

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Key details

Does it work?	Promising
Focus	Prevention
Topic	Community engagement Criminal justice
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Region	London
Partners	Police
Stage of practice	The practice is implemented.
Start date	October 2022

Key details

Scale of initiative	Local
Target group	Communities General public Victims

Aim

Secondary reassurance contact (SRC) focuses on recognising what has happened to the individual, acknowledging the impact, and demonstrating organisational commitment to assist.

The aim of the initiative is to assess whether SRC from neighbourhood policing officers impacts victims of reported hate crimes. It assessed this in several different areas.

- Impacts on victim attrition in the investigative process. Victim attrition is considered to have occurred when a case concludes with outcome codes 14 or 16. This is when a case is closed on the basis that the victim does not support police action.
- Impacts on charging rates. A case was considered to be charged when outcome code 1 was recorded.
- Impacts on positive outcomes. A case was considered to have had a positive outcome if concludes with outcome codes 1,2,3,4,5,6,8,9,10 or 22. These are an array of outcomes that can be considered to be positive. This includes those where the outcome would have been positive but a considered decision that pursuing the case was not in the public interest (despite evidential threshold) was reached.

A pilot was conducted from October 2022. This pilot determined whether SRC served this aim and if it is consistent with the force aims to:

- provide an effective service to victims
- provide a proactive approach to reducing crime
- show communities that we care and respect them
- be evidence-based focused
- innovate and make efficient use of resources

Intended outcome

The intended outcomes for the use of SRC for victims of hate crime are to:

- reduce the number of reports closed as a direct result of victims withdrawing support (outcome 14 or 16)
- increase the positive outcome rate
- increase the charge rate

Description

Hate crime investigations often have considerable victim attrition, low detection and low positive outcome rates. The effectiveness of these investigations is pivotal in securing victim satisfaction. It also improves community confidence in policing, especially in communities with the lowest confidence in policing.

Previous research revealed that:

- minority communities are disproportionately impacted by hate crimes
- improving the policing response is key to securing trust (Chakraborti, 2009)
- victims of hate crime report a greater loss of confidence, feelings of vulnerability, and psychological side-effects, compared to crime victims more generally (Allen & Zayed, 2022)
- hate crime has a detrimental impact on the wider community (Hall, 2005) and constitutes a signal crime (Innes, 2014) that impacts broader perceptions of crime and safety (Shirlow et al, 2013)
- the importance of an effective response cannot be overstated given deteriorating public confidence in policing (Brunt, 2023) and consequent gross underreporting of hate crime (Pezzella et al, 2019)

Between 2021-2022, victims withdrew support for 31% of hate crime investigations in the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS). The failure to secure victim support is a key predictor of charge and leaves communities at risk of repeat victimisation. Proactive measures for reducing hate crime are limited. Therefore, ways to ensure hate crime reports are dealt with effectively and positive outcomes are publicised can be explored.

Funding and resources

The pilot was designed to be cost-effective and work within existing business practices without any additional funding and with minimal demands on officer time. There was no additional funding or resources available to deliver the SRC. Given the community impact of hate crime, pre-existing neighbourhood teams were utilised.

For the pilot, a neighbourhood policing team officer or police community support officer (PCSO) contacted victims following the report of a hate crime. This took place either in person or by telephone depending on the circumstances and wishes of the victim. This was separate from any contact that officers investigating the reported offence had made. The aim was to reassure victims and demonstrate that the MPS takes this crime type and its impact on victims seriously. This contact does not habitually take place within the MPS in these circumstances. Ordinarily, the only contact a victim receives is from the officer investigating the reported offence.

All hate crimes reported were identified by applying the hate crime flag on the crime management system. As cases were reviewed by the BCU hate crime outcome and performance officer (HCOP), they were added to spreadsheet and were randomly assigned to either receiving SRC or to business as usual.

If a case was assigned to receive SRC the HCOP referred it for a visit to the relevant neighbourhood ward team, in line with the victim's home address. Referral was achieved by a crime management flag '49' (code added to bring a crime to the attention of neighbourhood police teams with relevant geographical responsibility) and a follow-up by email to the relevant officers. Officers completed the contact and noted the completion of this on the crime management system.

Officers delivering the SRC were given loose guidance focused on reassuring the victim that their crime was taken seriously by the organisation. Guidance as to form or content of contact was intentionally not prescriptive. Contact was victim-led, allowing officers to use their discretion to bring local knowledge and relationships to bear.

Briefings

Officers and supervisors were briefed on email, and this was followed with interactive online sessions. Officers attended one session, and additional sessions were held when SRCs were being embedded as business as usual.

- Officers were not briefed prescriptively regarding how they should approach the contact or what they should discuss. The aim was to test the effect of the contact itself. This allowed officers to adapt to the specifics of the case and victim. The only suggested actions were the completion of risk assessment and support referrals, if this had not already been done.
- It was suggested that in-person contact was preferable, but the wishes of the victim should be followed so some contact was likely to take place by phone. This was considered preferable to insisting on in-person contact as in some cases it may be contrary to victim's wishes or could place victims in unintended difficult situations/danger.
- Whilst separate from any ongoing investigation, it was considered prudent to give some direction on what neighbourhood officers should do if a victim wished to provide a statement. This was included in the briefing.

Briefings and launch were timed to coincide with National Hate Crime Awareness Week in October 2022, in order to build momentum.

During the pilot, 239 neighbourhood policing officers and PCSOs were involved, covering 79 wards in the South West BCU of London. The South West BCU comprises of London Boroughs of: Richmond, Merton, Wandsworth and Kingston. There is a resident population of approximately 907,000, with police officer/staff numbers at approximately 1,900.

Evaluation

An evaluation was conducted by the Metropolitan Police force and was completed in June 2023, looking at the impact of SRCs and how they were implemented.

A randomised control trial (RCT) method was used, and data was collected from October 2022 to January 2023. All hate crimes (not hate incidents) reported in the South West BCU (SW BCU) area were identified from the application of the hate crime flag on the crime reporting system. There were 250 reports that were randomly assigned to treatment (secondary reassurance contact) or control (no secondary reassurance contact/ordinary service), using a random number generator. In this way 125 case were assigned to each condition.

Subsequently, both groups were analysed using basic statistical tests to determine whether the SRC was associated with reduced victim attrition or increased positive/charge outcomes.

Victim attrition

- A secondary reassurance contact is associated with reduced victim attrition.
- The risk of victim attrition in this pilot was 22% lower in the treatment group relative to the control group.
- It is estimated that improved compliance with delivery of victim contact would reduce the risk of victim attrition further, to 26% relative to business as usual.
- In the 12 months (April 2021 to March 2022) the MPS recorded 22,421 hate crimes. 6,839 resulted in victim withdrawal. If all of these had received a reassurance visit this would predict 1,500-1,800 fewer victims dropping out per year. This equates to retaining victim support in an additional 8% of total reported hate crimes.

Charge rate and positive outcomes

- There is no meaningful association found between secondary reassurance contact, and charge rate or positive criminal justice outcomes.
- It is surmised that given the relative rarity of these outcomes, a larger sample size is required to detect any effect.

Overall impact

Overall, the SRC intervention showed reduced victim withdrawal from the investigative process of hate crime in the SW BCU area.

As a result of these findings, the SW BCU (approximately 1,900 staff, population 907,000) within the MPS have resolved that all victims who report hate crime will receive a SRC from a local neighbourhood officer.

In addition, the MPS lead responsible officer for hate crime is now reviewing the opportunities that this study has presented to improve victim care across London.

The trial was delivered as part of officer's normal duties, no additional resource was used. The majority contacts were made by telephone and therefore took little time to complete. It is therefore considered that SRCs are a viable tactic with considerable gain to be made at minimal cost.

Learning

- This study suffered from issues with compliance, primarily in officers delivering the secondary reassurance contact as assigned. This was potentially due to competing demands and deviance from normal procedure. Any intention to roll-out more broadly should pay particular attention to officer briefing and monitoring of compliance.
- Senior agreement and buy-in is necessary to signal organisational importance and to facilitate effective implementation. Initial discussions were undertaken through the local Hate Crime Working Group and agreed with the neighbourhood strand Senior Leadership Team. It is also beneficial for consistency to have this approach embedded within performance and governance processes, as opposed to being a stand alone entity.
- Understanding of the officers delivering the SRC and their supervisors was key to effective implementation.
- To ensure effective roll-out of SRC, it would be beneficial to start small. For example, rolling out ward by ward, as opposed to across a large population area at one time. This would allow for improved monitoring of compliance and implementation. Having a strong compliance team in place would also be beneficial in ensuring officers are implementing the SRC correctly.
- Cost and benefit to officer time: this trial was completed using existing processes, without additional budget and with a minimum ask of officer time, providing a cost effective and efficient use of police resources to maintain victim engagement in hate crime investigations.

The following time demands included:

- HCOP reviewed overnight hate crimes as part of their daily duties. The additional ask of this trial was for them to add a specific crime management system flag that brought the report to the attention of the neighbourhood teams. This could be embedded by way of policy, requiring the reporting officer to add the relevant flag at the time of reporting.
- Neighbourhood teams ran searches for relevant flagged reports prior to this trial as part of their daily business. Most secondary reassurance contact was made via telephone or in person by PCSOs as part of normal patrols.
- HCOP monitored compliance however, this could be incorporated into existing neighbourhood performance management structures with limited amendment.

Best available evidence

- Currently the [Crime Reduction Toolkit](#) does not include any best-available evidence about hate crime related interventions.
- This practice example has adopted a similar second response approach to the evidence summarised for [second responder programmes to prevent domestic abuse](#).

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Tags

Community engagement Criminal justice Neighbourhood policing