

Better  
Housing  
Briefing

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**Racist  
harassment  
and housing  
services**

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A Race Equality Foundation  
Briefing Paper

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## Resources 1

### Web-based resources

#### RaceActionNet

[www.raceactionnet.co.uk](http://www.raceactionnet.co.uk)

An information tool for practitioners tackling racial harassment and anti-social behaviour, and promoting community cohesion. More than half of local authorities, housing associations and criminal justice agencies in Britain are members. RaceActionNet offers accessible research findings, guidance, discussion forums and practitioner-focused materials. This is not an open access service and membership fees apply.

#### Racist Incidents and Harassment Toolkit

[www.crimereduction.gov.uk/toolkits/](http://www.crimereduction.gov.uk/toolkits/)

The key objective of this toolkit is to enable Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships to respond to the requirements of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, demonstrate effective solutions to local problems, and assist in the development of good practice. The toolkit consolidates information and advice about practical measures that can be adopted locally to identify, tackle and prevent such incidents. It also contains checklists for identifying problems, developing responses and monitoring local progress. Through the toolkit practitioners can share experience and ideas.

## Key messages

- 1 Some official figures seem to indicate that the experience of racist incidents and victimisation is decreasing. However, reported levels of incidents are still seen as only the 'tip of the iceberg' and there have been documented increases in incidents after major international terrorist attacks
- 2 Most racist incidents occur in and around the home, and most racist incidents consist of abuse, intimidation and threats. Such incidents are not often reported immediately but at a crisis point when racist incidents can no longer be tolerated
- 3 To support victims effectively social landlords have to ensure that they understand the victim's perspective
- 4 Social landlords have at their disposal a range of codes of practice, good practice guidelines and resources to help them respond to racist incidents, encourage reporting and support and work with victims.

## Introduction

Research on racist incidents has now covered a span of over thirty years. Studies in the 1980s showed that racist incidents were extensive, and that people of South Asian origin were often the main target. In 1981, the Home Office report, *Racial Attacks*, was the first official recognition that there was a problem that needed to be addressed. This resulted in a flurry of activity throughout the 1980s, localised research reports substantiating a problem, and government-level policy and practice reports offering solutions.

Since 1990, there have been at least eighty-five murders with a racist element (see [www.irr.org.uk](http://www.irr.org.uk)), including the gang murder in 1993 of Stephen Lawrence in London, and in 2005 of Anthony Walker in Huyton, Merseyside. Murders are the extreme manifestation of racism in the UK. By far the most common form of racist incident is verbal abuse and intimidation. However, racist murders send a clear message of non-acceptance of difference and force local communities, agencies, politicians and law makers to work together to prevent such actions and reduce other forms of racist expressions.

Increasingly, local anti-racist and support agencies have to respond to international events that impact on local communities. Community-based anti-racist monitoring groups have reported an increase in racist incidents and Islamophobia since the terrorist attacks in New York in 2001 and London in 2005 ([Institute of Race Relations, 2007](#)).

The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry ([Macpherson, 1999](#)) highlighted the existence of institutional racism, a fact argued by anti-racist groups for many years. Further, the Inquiry highlighted that housing departments were all too often seen to be

slow and bureaucratic in their responses to racist behaviour. Debates and policy developments on integration and community cohesion continue to ensure that racist and racial expressions and actions are in the public arena to which all public bodies, including housing, have to respond.

## The extent of racist incidents

1

Racist incidents include the use of racist language, criminal damage and physical assault (Jansson, 2006). In 2005/06 the British Crime Survey (BCS) estimated that there were 179 000 racially motivated crimes in England and Wales (Walker, 2006). The number of racially motivated crimes was estimated at around 206 000 by both the 2003/04 and the 2002/03 Surveys (Dodd *et al.*, 2004; Nicholas *et al.*, 2005).

The 2005/06 BCS found that the risk of becoming a victim of a racially motivated crime was statistically low across all ethnic groups. However, the risk was lower among white ethnic groups compared with all other ethnic groups, but did not vary between the minority ethnic groups. Indeed, people from minority ethnic groups are ten times more likely to be a victim of a racist incident than people from white ethnic groups.

The BCS also found that a larger proportion of respondents from minority ethnic groups perceived incidents as having been racially motivated compared with white respondents. Eleven per cent of the total BCS crimes where the victim was from a minority ethnic group were thought to be racially motivated. The comparable figure was one per cent for BCS crimes where the victim was from a white ethnic group.

The police record information on racist incidents using the definition: 'Any incident which is perceived to be racist by the victim or any other person' (Macpherson, 1999, Ch. 47, Section 12). Police statistical returns show a different picture from that of the BCS. Racist incidents recorded by the police rose sharply from 23 072 to 47 829 between 1998/99 and 1999/2000 (Criminal Justice System Race Unit, 2006). This may have been due to raised public and agency awareness up to and beyond the publication of the Macpherson Report in February 1999.

In 2004/05, racist incidents recorded by the police stood at 57 902, an increase of over 10 000 since the publication of the Macpherson Report. The recorded incidents for 2004/05 represented a 12 per cent increase from the previous year. Overall, this sharp rise could be a result of encouragement by all agencies and community groups for better reporting by victims and better recording by the police, rather than an actual rise in the number of incidents (Criminal Justice System Race Unit, 2006).

## Resources 2

### Institute of Race Relations

[www.irr.org.uk](http://www.irr.org.uk)

With a dedicated section on racist violence and harassment, this website offers a range of practical information. For example, it offers a round-up of news reporting on racist incidents, research articles and commentary from a community perspective. One of the resources, *HomeBeats*, is a multimedia journey through time, from Africa, the Caribbean and Asia, to the making of modern Britain. The first CD-ROM on racism and the black presence in Britain, it fuses music, graphics, video, text and animation into a stunning voyage of personal and historical discovery for every user. It covers the history of the struggle for racial justice, tracing the connections between slavery, the colonial experience and modern day racism.

## Resources 3

### Training Toolkit

'I Ain't Racist But ...'

Toolkit for Youth Workers to Deal with Racist Incidents

Contact: Leicester Racial Equality Council  
[www.lrec.org.uk](http://www.lrec.org.uk)

The main objective of this accessible toolkit is to provide youth workers with a resource to deal effectively and confidently with victims and perpetrators of racial incidents. The toolkit was developed from research with young people and youth workers. It outlines essential principles to be aware of, which can be applied when responding to a range of racist incidents in youth work and other settings.

### Support groups

#### Support Against Racist Incidents (SARI)

[www.sariweb.co.uk](http://www.sariweb.co.uk)

Based in Bristol, SARI is a voluntary black-led agency run by people who have suffered racial harassment. The service aims to support and empower victims of racial harassment and to ensure that racial incidents receive a co-ordinated response from statutory and voluntary agencies. SARI has trained caseworkers to assist victims by offering a range of services that respond to the nature, extent and impact of racist incidents.

## 2 The level and evidence of under-reporting and under-recording

The BCS indicated that 56 per cent of racist incidents against black people and 53 per cent of incidents against Asian people occurred in and around the home ([Home Office, 2006](#)). Evidence and levels of reporting and under-reporting in local areas often influence the way in which the issue of racist incidents is prioritised. The need to collect data and assess under-reporting can detract from the fact that racist harassment and violence is a fact of life for some people from minority ethnic communities ([Chahal and Julienne, 1999](#); [Victim Support, 2006](#)).

Studies suggest that there is under-reporting of racist incidents, as there is of crime generally. The [Audit Commission \(2004\)](#) found that 33 per cent of general crime victims and 61 per cent of witnesses did not report any incident to the police.

The [Fourth National Survey of Ethnic Minorities \(Modood \*et al.\*, 1997\)](#) found that under-reporting varies by type of incident experienced. The survey found 75 per cent under-reporting on racial attacks, 39 per cent under-reporting on property damage and 92 per cent under-reporting on racial abuse. Given that abuse is the single largest category of experience (see, for example, [Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Racial Equality Council, 2005](#)), these figures indicate massive under-reporting of the most prevalent form of racist incident.

A survey in Hounslow ([Hounslow Racial Equality Council, 2004](#)) found that 40 per cent of minority ethnic people had experienced (as a victim or witness) a racist incident, but that 35 per cent of them did not report this to any agency. Fieldwork undertaken by [Docking and Tuffin \(2005\)](#) indicated a 50 per cent under-reporting level. The BCS has indicated that reporting varies by ethnic group, with Indians most likely to report. In Docking and Tuffin's review, one police officer found that 97 per cent of racist incidents were not reported by Chinese people in a rural area.

Although public reporting of racist incidents has increased, [Docking and Tuffin \(2005\)](#) found that levels of under-reporting were still thought by police and other agencies to be high, although more serious incidents were likely to be reported. Where under-recording occurred, the review found that this was because the incident was thought by the police to be minor; or because police officers did not understand the definition, thought there would be additional work required, or may have held negative views of certain minority ethnic groups.

In 1999, the BCS estimated that 150 000 incidents were reported to the police (of a total of 280 000), but the officially recorded number was 47 814 ([Clancy \*et al.\*, 2001](#)). It appears that under-reporting and under-recording of racist incidents still occurs and, therefore, practices of agencies need to continue to be monitored and improved.

### Impact on and support of victims

[Chahal and Julienne \(1999\)](#) found that reporting of racist incidents often occurs at a crisis point. Indeed, their research found that 25 per cent of the sample who suffered racist incidents in and around their home did not report any incident for at least eighteen months.

They also found that the impact of racist incidents had a profound effect beyond the actual events or incidents, affecting all those being targeted. Often these impacts on victims and victims' families were not recognised by supporting and reporting agencies. Some of the impacts identified by the research included the following: family relations between spouses were affected; health and well-being was compromised; and there was an increased sense of isolation because friends and relatives were less likely to visit. Children were probably the most affected because they were not allowed to play outside or play unsupervised; they were being escorted to and from school; and routine, everyday activities were disturbed and became events that were planned.

[Lemos \(2000\)](#) found that support for victims was more likely to be available in areas where there was a specialist agency working on racial harassment. 'Support' included the provision of advice, counselling in some areas, personal alarms and mobile telephones, and home security improvements. In a similar vein, [Chahal \(2003\)](#) found that support was often better provided and more responsive where a dedicated racial harassment caseworker or project existed. Indeed, it was evident that where an independent support project was in operation, evaluation by victims/clients of the service they received was very high. [Docking and Tuffin \(2005\)](#) found that where victims had been referred to Victim Support and/or a local Racial Equality Council (REC), they valued the help they received. However, this referral process worked better in urban than in rural areas.

### Understanding the victim's perspective

3

The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry ([Macpherson, 1999](#)) highlighted that housing departments were often slow and bureaucratic in their response to racist behaviour. [Chahal and Julienne \(1999\)](#) found that once a complaint was made to a statutory agency, the victim's perception was lost within the complaints process. This was confirmed by [Lemos \(2000\)](#) who found that many social landlords felt that the priority was to deal with perpetrators rather than move the victims. Although working with perpetrators is crucial, investigating and support agencies, in order to develop more effective responses and service-based actions, need a clearer understanding of what motivates victims to report incidents.

[Chahal and Julienne \(1999\)](#) and [Chahal \(2003\)](#) highlighted that victims may be in crisis when they report incidents. They also noted that when victims enter the complaints structure of an agency, they want a collective service response to be accessible, non-judgemental, focused and dedicated; to be able to refer them to

## Resources 4

### The Monitoring Group

[www.monitoring-group.co.uk](http://www.monitoring-group.co.uk)

The Monitoring Group helps victims of racial violence and harassment across the UK. An active campaigning agency, the Monitoring Group has been developed to offer services across the country through the Rural Racism Project based in the South West of England, offices covering the Midlands and Yorkshire, and Min Quan, the Monitoring Group in Chinatown. The Monitoring Group undertakes casework, offers a freephone helpline (0800 374618) and has established a trauma and therapy project. The website offers a range of useful information and links.

### Useful data sources

#### British Crime Survey (BCS)

[www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds)

The BCS is a large, nationally representative, victimisation survey of approximately 45 000 adults living in private households. Since the mid-1990s, the BCS has asked questions of all respondents on the extent of racially motivated incidents. The 2004/05 BCS sample included an additional booster sample of 3703 respondents from minority ethnic groups.



## Resources 5

### Statistics on Race and the Criminal Justice System

[www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds)

Under Section 5 of the Criminal Justice Act 1991, the Secretary of State is required to publish collected data on race and the criminal justice system, including police-recorded figures of racist incidents, stop and search, and deaths in custody.

### Taking action

#### Dominion Housing Group

[www.dominionhg.co.uk](http://www.dominionhg.co.uk)

The eviction of a woman with a long history of racial harassment and anti-social behaviour against her neighbours was secured by the East Reading Neighbourhood Policing team and Cherwell Housing Trust, part of the Dominion Housing Group. A warrant for eviction was secured against the tenant. She was convicted of racially aggravated harassment in 2004, and complaints about her behaviour date back almost ten years. A police officer who worked on the case for four years said that it was an extremely complex and lengthy legal case to get the tenant evicted. Her actions have had a lasting effect on people living near her and some have left the area because of the abuse they had suffered. The role of residents in gathering evidence and appearing in court played a vital part in the success of the case.

sources of help and to promote their rights; to act, or know an agency that is able to act as an advocate; to be able to validate their experiences; and to offer emotional support and aftercare. These attributes form an effective service response and contribute to understanding the victim's perspective.

Supporting victims of racist incidents and having the ability to respond from a victim's perspective is important because such incidents can have a greater traumatic impact on victims than other crimes because of: the high risk of repeat victimisation; the impact of persistent 'low-level' harassment and hostility in public places, in or near the home, in the workplace or at school; the damaging effect of persistent racist abuse on other relationships; the restriction of everyday activities; feelings of powerlessness, victimisation and low confidence; and a belief that statutory agencies will be unable or unwilling to help ([Virdee, 1995](#); [Chahal and Julienne, 1999](#); [Lemos and Crane, 2004](#); [Victim Support, 2006](#)). This can lead to the issue being made invisible or not given priority.

## 4

### Improving service responses

Social landlords need to assess the effectiveness of their work in supporting victims of, and challenging, racist incidents within the context of a range of initiatives available. These include community cohesion guidelines ([Blackaby, 2004](#); [Robinson et al., 2004](#)); *Tackling Racial Harassment: Code of Practice for Social Landlords* (DETR, 2001); *Implementing the Code of Practice for Social Landlords on Tackling Racial Harassment: Guidance and Examples* ([Lemos and Crane, 2004](#)); *Code of Practice on Reporting and Recording Racist Incidents* (Home Office, 2000); and the recently published *Statutory Code of Practice on Racial Equality in Housing* (CRE, 2006). Together, these sources offer substantial guidance and good practice that can enable self-reflective practice, increase confidence in victims to report, and challenge racist incidents.

Below is a checklist of some of the issues of which social landlords should be aware in relation to supporting victims of racist incidents:

- Does your organisation have a policy and procedure on how to respond to racist incidents?
- Does it conform to current good practice?
- How does the organisation make staff, tenants and residents aware of the policy?
- Does your organisation follow Home Office guidance on the treatment of victims and witnesses?
- Is there a locally agreed protocol that highlights clear lines of communication between the victim, reporting agency and multi-agency partnerships?
- Does your organisation have an effective monitoring process?
- Does your organisation train staff to respond in a sensitive and aware manner, to give them interviewing skills and to understand victims' perspectives?
- Is your organisation able to provide appropriate interpretation and translation services?

- Does your organisation know what specialist services exist to which victims can be referred?
- Is there a need for a dedicated racial harassment support/caseworker?
- Does your organisation offer support and temporary or permanent transfers to witnesses and victims of racist harassment?
- Does your organisation provide a choice-based lettings scheme for victims of racial harassment?
- Does your organisation assess victim satisfaction and provide aftercare after the incident has been dealt with?
- Who takes overall charge for racist incidents, and when and how will they be monitored and evaluated?

(Based on [Race and Housing Research Briefing, 2003](#); [CRE, 2006](#))

### Potential measurable outcomes

The *Statutory Code of Practice on Racial Equality in Housing* suggests at least six possible measurable outcomes to which social landlords need to respond:

- *The housing organisation has a comprehensive anti-racist harassment policy and procedures for dealing with racist incidents*
- *The Policy covers support for victims, action against perpetrators, and commitment to working with other agencies*
- *Staff have been trained and are clear about what is expected of them when dealing with a complaint of racial harassment*
- *Monitoring reports show that racial harassment has been responded to quickly and effectively, at every stage*
- *Feedback from all concerned shows general satisfaction with the way cases have been handled by the housing organisation*
- *In areas where racial harassment is a particular problem there is evidence that the organisation has taken steps to deal with it.*

([CRE, 2006](#), p. 68)

## Conclusion

Tackling racist incidents requires a holistic approach achieved through developing strategies and action plans that contain and promote zero tolerance of racist action; improved reporting; monitoring; taking tough action; victim and witness support; and engaging perpetrators in, for example, restorative justice and behaviour change.

Racist incidents and victimisation have an impact on the everyday lives of victims. Social landlords and other relevant agencies have a duty to ensure that, when reported, appropriate action is taken which includes supporting the victim, challenging the perpetrator and creating safe spaces in local communities. Under-reporting and non-reporting of racist incidents, like crime in general, is a fact and should not be seen as meaning that racist incidents do not occur. Local campaigns, partnership working, communities having evidence of action, and gathering local intelligence are likely to contribute to increased confidence in service providers and an increase in reporting.

## Resources 6

### Housing Ombudsman Service

[www.ihos.org.uk](http://www.ihos.org.uk)

A complaint made to the Housing Ombudsman by a black couple against their housing association focused on the housing provider not properly investigating an alleged complaint of racial harassment. The Ombudsman found that the association had categorised the complaint from the outset as a neighbour dispute, despite the fact that at the time it had been operating a 'victim-centred' policy on harassment. The Ombudsman found the housing association responsible for severe maladministration in its failure to respond to the report of racial harassment according to its procedures and its failure to give fair consideration to the couple's complaint. The Ombudsman ordered that the couple be paid compensation, and that training for staff be provided on how to follow policies and procedures.

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