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'I Feel Persecuted. It's So Distressing and Upsetting, It Is All Too Much'. A Disablist Hate Crime Typology: Intimidation, Exploitation and Brutalization

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In this article, we develop a typology of disablist hate crime that does justice to the lived experience of victims and highlights the differences between disablist hate crime and other forms of hate crime in England. This research consists of analyses of cases and semi-structured interviews with professionals. Based on interaction type, its duration, meaning, frequency, severity, and harm, we developed three categories: (1) intimidation, (2) exploitation and (3) brutalization. We argue that because of the specific symbolic nature of targeting disabled people, these acts should be considered as potential hate crimes.

KEY WORDS: disability, disablist hate crime, violence, intimidation, exploitation, brutalization

INTRODUCTION

In the year to March 2024, 11,719 disablist crimes were recorded by the police in England and Wales (Home Office 2024). However, this is thought to be the tip of the iceberg as most disabled hate crime victims do not report these crimes to the police (Zayeb and Allen 2024), particularly acts of repeated victimization and sub-criminal incidents (Chakraborti *et al.* 2014*b*; Macdonald *et al.* 2023). Additionally, only 338 cases were referred to the Crown Prosecution Service (Pring 2024).

As we will argue here, this current situation seems to be linked to a definitional problem: how do we define and thus acknowledge and understand disablist hate crime? In reaction to this issue, we developed a typology of disablist hate crime which is based on 100 cases in England. This typology does justice to the lived experience of victims and highlights differences between disablist hate crime and other forms of hate crime. In addition, we also focus on perpetrators of disablist hate crimes, which are rarely studied, and ask why and how they target disabled people. We hope that this typology will support citizens and professionals, such as police officers

and safeguarding practitioners in recognizing and defining 'normalized' acts, targeting disabled people, as hate crimes.

We acknowledge that framing the targeting of disabled people in the language of hate is problematic, resulting in a 'conceptual minefield' (Thorneycroft and Asquith 2015). The language of vulnerability has been resisted within the literature on disablism and disablist hate crime. Roulstone *et al.* (2011) suggest it is unhelpful, even dangerous, as it fails to recognize structural disablism, blames the victim and minimizes the actions of the perpetrator in exploiting this perceived vulnerability for their own ends. In addition, once vulnerability is identified, the crime is no longer conceptualized as a hate crime (Macdonald 2015: 358), rather it is assumed people are victimized because they are seen as an easy target. This is echoed in the literature reporting victims' voices (Sin *et al.* 2009; Landman 2014). Positioning the disabled person as inherently vulnerable results in a protection rather than rights/justice response, and a safeguarding rather than criminal justice system response.

However, Chakraborti and Garland (2012: 510) argue that the perceived difference and vulnerability of hate crime victims should be central to the hate crime discourse. Thus, we can move to recognizing that being 'other' is the key feature of hate crimes. In this paper we concur that the difference of potential victims seems to be recognized by perpetrators: some indicating to victims that their 'different' behaviour, or appearance, was a problem to them; others demonstrating explicitly stereotyped views about disabled people which were indicators of their prejudice. In addition, their views were shaped by the notion of vulnerability as weakness, which explains why and how they targeted their victims, which will be discussed in detail in this article.

As so few disablist hate crimes are recognized, reported, or prosecuted, the evidence we have is limited (Walters *et al.* 2016; Macdonald *et al.* 2017; Trickett and Hamilton 2021). What we do know is that many disablist acts are repetitive and seem to escalate in frequency and intensity. Disablist hate crimes often involve theft, and perpetrators are more likely to be known to their victims (Equality and Human Rights Commission 2011; Chakraborti *et al.* 2014b; Walters *et al.* 2016). These and other studies, which we discuss later, seem to indicate that disablist hate crimes have a different character than other hate crimes. To gain a deeper understanding of the specific nature of disablist hate crime we analyse and compare a wide variety of cases in this article, guided by two questions: (1) What *forms* of disablist hate crime emerge from our data set and how do they differ from what we know of other hate crimes? and (2) What *categories* of perpetrators emerge from our data set and why and how do they target their victims?

In our answers to these questions, we will build upon the literature of disablist hate crime and extend this subfield by our research that consists of qualitative document analyses and semi-structured interviews. In total, we have analysed 100 cases based on a wide range of sources such as police files, safeguarding reports and interviews with police officers and safeguarding practitioners. We categorized the cases on the type of interaction that constituted the hate crime, its duration, meaning, frequency, severity and harm. From this analysis, we have constructed a new typology of disablist hate crime acts and perpetrators which captures antisocial behaviour, violence, and exploitation across a range of settings including public spaces, care facilities and people's homes. Taking such a broad scope means we develop a rich typology grounded in data. In so doing we include cases which are not identified as disablist hate crimes by professionals within the criminal justice system.

In this article we will describe three categories of hate crime: (1) intimidation, (2) exploitation and (3) brutalization. With intimidation, we refer to verbal and physical harassment which instils fear and terror in victims. Exploitation refers to acts of coercion (including intimidation) or deceit *with* a definitive aim (mostly for financial or sexual gain). Brutalisation includes intimidation and exploitation and develops into excessively violent (verbal and physical) acts often

resulting in murder. These categories function as a heuristic model and we acknowledge that the boundaries are not always this clear in everyday life.

Before we discuss our results, we will discuss legal and academic conceptual issues related to disablist hate crime and explain the methods that we have used.

Legal definitions of hate crime

In England and Wales, there are five types of hate crimes recognized by the law which are based on race, religion, disability, sexual orientation and transgender identity. A criminal offence may be prosecuted as a hate crime if the offender has either:

> demonstrated hostility or been motivated by hostility based on race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, or transgender identity.

There must be evidence that the crime:

> was motivated, wholly, or partially, by hostility, or the suspect demonstrated such hostility immediately before, during or after the crime was committed (Crown Prosecution Service 2024a).

The term hostility is not defined other than that of a 'dictionary definition' which includes references to spite, contempt, and prejudice (Crown Prosecution Service 2024a). This means in practice that hate crimes are most often categorized as such when there is a verbal or non-verbal expression of hostility.

A hate incident can be recorded where there is no criminal offence, and the incident meets the threshold of:

> A single distinct event or occurrence which disturbs an individual's, group's, or community's quality of life or causes them concern (College of Policing 2022).

Hate crime laws were introduced following increasing numbers of racially motivated attacks (between 1940 and 1980), a period of rising immigration into the United Kingdom of Black and Asian people, and the emerging far right (Hall 2013: 32). Hate crime law built upon existing discrimination law (Barnes and Oliver, 1995: 111) including the Race Relations Acts (1965; 1976), and the Sex Discrimination Act (1975). There are separate stirring-up hatred offences based on race, religion or sexual orientation (Public Order Act 1986), and aggravated hostility based on race or religion (Crime and Disorder Act 1998). The racially motivated murder of Stephen Lawrence by a group of white men in 1993, was a watershed moment for hate crime (Hall 2013: 4). The subsequent report into the police handling of the case concluded that not only that the investigation was deeply flawed, but that the police force was institutionally racist (Macpherson 1999). These findings gave impetus to a series of initiatives to tackle hate crimes, including extended powers (Hall 2013).

Disablist hate crime was similarly built on a foundation of anti-discrimination legislation (Taylor 2022b). It has long been recognized that disabled people experience increased levels of violence and abuse (including in care settings see Sobsey 1994). However, it took a series of campaigns to problematize the issue as a disablist hate crime, an essential impetus for policy and legislative change (Taylor 2022b). These campaigns identified the difficult transitions faced by many people with learning disabilities from institutional to community living (Values into Action 1999), and the widespread 'bullying' of people with learning disabilities (Mencap 2000). Additionally, a fifth of people with mental health needs reported feeling unsafe in their own homes (MIND 2007). Provision was finally made for enhanced

sentencing for crimes deemed to be motivated by hostility on the grounds of disability under the Criminal Justice Act (2003)[1].

It is important to remember that there was no equal provision within the legal system across the five protected characteristics, as disablist hate crime was not a stand-alone offence in line with other forms of hate crime[2]. Arguably this may send messages to the public, victims and offenders that some forms of hate crime are more important; that there is a hierarchy of hate crimes, with disability and transgender hate crimes at the bottom (Mason-Bish 2012; Walters *et al.* 2016).

Regarding our findings, the most problematic aspect of the legal definition of hate crime is the expression of hostility or prejudice. As we will explain in this article many cases lacked such direct expressions, hindering the defining of an act as a hate crime. In addition, agents of social control tend to use vulnerability (as opposed to hostility) as a motivation in a one-dimensional and ableist way to disregard the application of hate crime (see also Mason-Bish 2012; Roulstone and Sadique 2012). We argue here that a defining quality of disablist hate crime is that disabled persons are targeted because perpetrators define them as vulnerable in the sense of weak, different and even subhuman, which in itself is an indication of hostility or prejudice. Because of this specific degrading character of disablist hate crime, a verbal expression of hostility should not per se be needed in defining acts of verbal and physical violence directed at disabled people as hate crimes. Even more so, as we shall argue later, because of the specific symbolic nature of targeting disabled people, these acts should be considered as a potential hate crime.

Academic understanding of hate crime

As we have mentioned, few disablist hate crimes are recognized, reported, or prosecuted (Walters *et al.* 2016; Macdonald *et al.* 2023). Whilst the evidence we have is limited, it seems that many disablist acts are excessively violent (Equality and Human Rights Commission 2011; Quarmby 2011). They also seem to escalate in frequency and intensity, and may involve theft (Doherty 2020), and coercion (Donovan *et al.* 2019). Perpetrators are likely to be known to their victims (Equality and Human Rights Commission 2011; Chakraborti *et al.* 2014b; Walters *et al.* 2016), indeed many are in some form of relationship (Grundy 2011; Thomas 2011; Burch 2021). Disabled women have been shown to be more at risk of being victims of sexual assault and rape than non-disabled women (Equality and Human Rights Commission 2011; Balderston 2013; Williams and Tredidga 2013; McCarthy *et al.* 2017).

Our article builds upon earlier typologies of disablist hate crime, which tend to follow a legal categorization. For example, the typology of the Leicester Hate Crime project (Chakraborti *et al.* 2014a) identified six types of acts described by hate crime victims: verbal abuse, harassment, property crime, violent crime, sexual bullying and cyber-violence. The data included a questionnaire and interviews with disabled people ($n = 271$), 90 per cent of whom reported experiencing harassment and verbal abuse, half experienced violent crime, and a fifth sexual violence (Chakraborti *et al.* 2014b). Almost two-thirds reported disablist incidents occurred in public (64 per cent), whilst 16 per cent happened in the victim's home (Chakraborti *et al.* 2014b; see also Sin *et al.* 2009; Equality and Human Rights Commission 2011).

Hate crimes targeting disabled people also take place in the specific setting of a care facility. It is well documented that institutional settings are scenes not only of care but also where patients come to physical, emotional and psychological harm (Sobsey 1994; Moore 2018). Evidence can be seen in the report into Atlas Homes, a care provider for adults with learning disabilities

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1   Currently this provision lies under s66 of the Sentencing Act, 2020.
2   Such as aggravated offences on the basis of race and religion, stirring up offences on the grounds of race, religion or sexual orientation under the Public Order Act, 1986.

(Flynn 2019): staff tested patients' compliance by demanding they undertake menial tasks, and there was widespread systemic neglect and assault. The Serious Case Review (SCR[3]) into the incidents at Winterbourne View, a private hospital for adults with learning disabilities and autism, identified a culture of abuse exacerbated by organizational structures (Flynn and Citarella 2012: 136). Taylor (2022a) indicates that these acts should be considered as hate crimes.

As disablist hate crimes are different to other forms of hate crimes, so too are their perpetrators. They are more likely to be a single perpetrator acting alone rather than in a group (Walters et al. 2016: 35), and there have been cases involving female perpetrators (Equality and Human Rights Commission 2011). A remarkable feature of disablist hate crime is that many perpetrators know their victims (Sin et al. 2009; Chakraborti et al. 2014b; Williams and Tredidga 2013; Chapman 2020). The term mate crime was developed to describe this type of hate crime where (mostly) people with learning disabilities or mental health needs are exploited by fake friends (Landman 2014), but also by family members, spouses and carers (Thomas 2012). Some police forces (e.g. Greater Manchester Police 2017) insist that police officers pay serious attention to when victims use the concept 'mate crime', because '… such a report is likely to be a disability hate crime or incident' (ibid: 27). However, Gianassi (2013) highlights this is a problematic aspect of understanding hate crime for police officers as they see it is related to the private domain and thus do not define it as a hate crime.

Still the literature on 'mate crime' shows there is a specific subcategory of disablist hate crimes which consists of long-term hate relationships of coercion and control (Donovan et al. 2019; Macdonald et al. 2023), within which perpetrators use techniques of grooming, gaslighting and cuckooing. The term grooming refers to non-violent methods of gaining access to a victim for sexual exploitation (Lanning 2018). Gaslighting covers techniques used by perpetrators in controlling relationships to undermine the victim's sense of reality, thus making them easier to dominate (Gass and Nicols 1988). For instance, disabled women describe grooming and gaslighting in their experiences of intimate partner violence and coercive control, of being isolated from family and friends, and being mocked and abused (Balderston 2013; McCarthy et al. 2017). These cases of domestic violence share features of relational power being used to control and abuse victims (McCarthy et al. 2017). Cuckooing more usually refers to county lines drug operations where perpetrators infiltrate an individual's home, in the same way a cuckoo would take over the nest of another bird (Spicer et al. 2019). As we shall see, these features were evident in many of our cases.

As we have indicated, we do not yet have a useful typology which may help criminal justice actors to recognize, respond to and prosecute disablist acts. To address this, we have used several methods that we will discuss in the next paragraph.

METHODS

Our methods consisted of document analyses and semi-structured interviews. We have analysed a wide range of sources, such as case logs, witness statements, perpetrator interviews, safeguarding practitioners accounts, Safeguarding Adults Reviews, Independent Office for Police Conduct[4] inquiries, Local Authority Multi-Agency Learning Reviews[5], and newspaper and media reports. In addition, we also conducted semi-structured interviews: four with police

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3   SARs formerly Serious Case Reviews (SCRs) are learning investigations mandated within the Care Act, 2014, (England and Wales) conducted when an adult has died or suffered serious harm through suspected abuse, poor care or neglect.
4   The Independent Office for Police Conduct (formerly Independent Police Complaints Commission) is the independent police watchdog (England and Wales) and conducts inquiries into serious complaints and misconduct.
5   Local Authority Multi-Agency Learning Reviews carried out when criteria for SAR/SCRs are not met.

officers and seven with safeguarding practitioners. The police officers were chosen because of their involvement and experience in investigating disablist hate crimes. Safeguarding practitioners were sampled because of their specific knowledge in relation to investigating safeguarding concerns involving disabled people. These methods helped us to gain the thick description needed to describe, analyse and compare all the cases. We categorized them on the type of interaction that constituted the hate crime, its duration, meaning, frequency, severity and harm. Using grounded theory methods enabled us to explore the field of disablist hate crime in a critical, conceptual and creative way.

In line with grounded theory (Charmaz 2014), we used theoretical sampling: while developing categories we looked for cases that could help us with the further development of categories. Thus, after the analysis of each data set, we compared our findings with the relevant literature and previously gathered data, before sampling new examples of disablist hate crime. Thus, we situated our developing sensitizing concepts in the iterative exploration of our cases. We stopped with theoretical sampling when a situation of saturation was reached: the gathered data did not change our conceptual understanding of disablist hate crime anymore.

The research project can be broken down into three stages. (1) Stage one consists of the analysis of hate incidents ($n = 16$) and hate crimes ($n = 3$) reported to the police in a metropolitan area in northern England for a period of 6 months (January–July 2016). The sample size was smaller than anticipated and the data did not fully capture the range of incidents described by disabled people in earlier research (Sin *et al.* 2009; Equality and Human Rights Commission 2011; Chakraborti *et al.* 2014b; Burch 2018; Macdonald *et al.* 2023). To remedy this the sample was developed in two ways. Firstly, hate crime incidents for the previous 12 months were collected, which added eight incidents to the data set. Secondly, with the support of a police data analyst, 17 further cases were sampled in which a victim was defined as vulnerable and/or disabled and with a known perpetrator ($n = 34$).

(2) Stage two of data collection recognized gaps in the police data of cases of violence and harassment within care facilities, and where perpetrators were carers, which had been identified in the existing literature (Equality and Human Rights Commission 2011; Flynn 2012; Walters *et al.* 2016). To explore this subfield of disablist hate crime we realized we needed a different source. We carried out semi-structured interviews with a purposive sample of safeguarding practitioners in Northern England responsible for investigating safeguarding referrals for disabled adults. The practitioners were recruited from the Local Authority Safeguarding Adults Teams via email. All practitioners responding were interviewed ($n = 7$). These practitioners described recent cases involving a range of acts and perpetrators ($n = 41$).

(3) Stage three targets a set of hate crimes that were only covered by two cases in the previous sampling and involved further data collection to develop the category that we later defined as brutalization. Historical cases were selected for analysis based on evidence of the brutalization of a disabled victim by an identified perpetrator(s), where there was documentary evidence in the public domain. These included Safeguarding Adult Reviews (SARs), Independent Office for Police Conduct Inquiries, and/or media reports. Further cases from beyond the North of England were analysed until categories were fully developed, such as the Winterbourne View case[6] (care facility in Southern England) ($n = 15$).

The final sample ($n = 100$) is shown in Table 1 below.

Inspired by the constant comparative method (Charmaz 2014), we used memos throughout this iterative process of data collection and analysis to develop open, and then focussed, coding cycles. To illustrate this process, initially the memos were grouped thematically, and an early

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6 Although there were several people harmed at Winterbourne View, by several perpetrators, this is treated as one case in the data.

conceptual structure of disablist hate crime was constructed. As the analysis and data collection continued concepts were developed, which were used to reanalyse the existing data resulting in the final categorization that we present here.

Our analysis adds to the previous studies on the experiences of targeted disabled people, by analysing the different components that shape these crimes. Where others focus on specific acts referring to criminal offences, we pay attention to creating a conceptual framework guided by our analysis grounded in the type of interaction, its duration, meaning, frequency, severity and harm. Our final contribution is that we specifically focus on the acts of perpetrators as a defining element of the interactions that shape hate crime to gain a deeper understanding of its nature and its different forms.

FINDINGS

The analysis of the 100 cases in our data set indicates 49 cases were intimidation, 38 cases were exploitation and 13 cases were brutalization. Though this has no representative value, studies show that intimidation is a common experience among disabled people, exploitation is less frequent but not uncommon, and brutalization is rare (Chakraborti *et al.* 2014*b*; Emerson and Roulstone 2014; William and Tredidga 2014). In the following description of each category, we will discuss cases which exemplify its characteristics.

Intimidation

Though intimidation tends to be the most fleeting form of disablist hate crime, it remains an act of power with which the perpetrator subjugates the targeted person transforming them into an object of the perpetrator's will. Intimidation tends to be a verbal act instilling fear, harm or distress in the targeted person. At times it can also have a physical element as in pushing a person or causing damage to property. In these acts, the targeted person is treated like a non-person (Goffman 1963). The 49 cases of intimidation included acts defined by the police as disablist hate crimes (three cases), and disablist hate incidents (24 cases). Within this category, we distinguish two forms of intimidation based on the duration and frequency of the incidents: (1) discrete incidents (14 cases), which are incidental, isolated acts and (2) structural intimidation (35 cases), which consists of repeated incidents.

Discrete incidents tend to involve verbal or written abuse, including threats. The first two cases we present are representative of these isolated incidents involving verbal insults. In the first one, the victim was an autistic man with learning disabilities. He was targeted by three 13-year-old youths on bikes whilst he walked near to his home. The youths shouted abusive terms including the word spacker at the man and rode off, with the victim giving chase. In the second case, the victim was a disabled man with mobility issues. The female perpetrator, a neighbour, shouted the word spaz at the victim as he walked outside the building. Although the victim indicated to the police which flat she lived in, when questioned the alleged perpetrator denied any involvement. Both cases were filed as hate incidents without any further police action.

Table 1. Data sources

Data source	Number of cases (n)
Police Records (Northern England)	44*
Safeguarding practitioner interviews	41
Investigations and cases in public domain	15

*Disablist hate crimes, $n = 3$; disablist hate incidents, $n = 24$; other crimes, $n = 17$.

We have found 35 cases of structural intimidation. These were repeated incidents of verbal abuse, property damage, threats of physical violence and harassment. Perpetrators were generally known to the targeted person, as acquaintances, neighbours or local young people. These incidents are usually close to the targeted person's home or in the neighbourhood and can continue over a long period of time. That known people do this over a long period is shaped by the fact that they see their victims as vulnerable, meaning not able to retaliate. As we will show in the following examples *vulnerability* is intrinsically related to *hostility and prejudice*, an understanding which is missed in the dominant ableist perspective on these concepts as contradicting motivations. In line with ableist thinking vulnerability as a motivation excludes hostility and consequently the charge of disablist hate crime (Mason-Bish 2012; Roulstone and Sadique 2012).

Most of the structural intimidation cases were face to face (31 cases), with many lasting for months or years. In the following example, perpetrators targeted a 21-year-old female with epilepsy and learning and speech difficulties. The woman had recently moved into the neighbourhood. This case was initially reported by her carer to the police as an isolated incident of criminal damage to property. Still, there had been previous (unreported) incidents including the dumping of a large sofa, rubbish bins and human faeces in her garden, writing on walls, smashing and stealing garden ornaments and kicking down the garden fence. The most recent incident involved a firework rocket being set off in the garden, causing the victim to become very scared. The fire brigade attended to offer safety support, sealing up the letter box in case further fireworks were used. The perpetrators were a group of young people, who attacked when the victim was home alone (without carers present). None of the neighbouring properties were damaged, leaving the victim feeling she was deliberately targeted. Sadly, in our data, there are many such examples of structural intimidation by neighbours and local people. Though studies indicate that gender plays an important role in disablist hate crime (see Healy 2022; Mason-Bish 2024), we will not focus on this, as it falls outside the scope of this article.

Some of these hate crimes are carried out by individual perpetrators as in the following case. The 52-year-old male victim had physical health issues. The perpetrator was a 52-year-old female living in the flat above who deliberately targeted the victim by banging on walls, digging up plants, staring through his flat window, smearing rice pudding, yoghurt and glue, on windows and leaving bricks on his window ledges. The victim interpreted these acts as threats. The victim's chest condition meant he coughed loudly. When this happened, the perpetrator switched on her vacuum cleaner, leaving it running for hours at a time. The perpetrator verbally insulted the victim and told neighbours that he was a paedophile, a common term of abuse used against disabled persons (Equality and Human Rights Commission 2011; Quarmby 2012). The perpetrator continued with this harassment daily, for up to 6 hours at a time, over several months. This repeated and sustained targeting had a severe impact on the victim's mental and physical health. In his victim impact statement, he said:

> I am at the end of my tether. I have no quality of life. This was my last move. I will die here, worst decision I ever made. I feel persecuted. It's so distressing and upsetting, it is all too much. (Police Records)

The police took the reports seriously, arresting the perpetrator and charging her with harassment, although not with disablist hate crime. Though the decision-making process of the police is relevant to understand the social construction of hate crimes by professionals, it falls outside the scope of our article. In a forthcoming publication, we will focus on the meaning-making process of disablist hate crime, including the perspectives of professionals, such as police officers.

Not all structural intimidation is perpetrated by neighbours or acquaintances. Some perpetrators are in an intimate relationship with the victim, as carers, partners or family members. These hate crimes take place in the private domain, usually in the person's home or a care facility. Some of these cases involve neglect or dehumanizing treatment, as in the following case. The victim had very limited physical ability. He was doubly incontinent, needing full nursing care with regular position changes to prevent skin breakdown and pressure sores. The victim also had obsessive-compulsive disorder, with thoughts and compulsions focussed on cleanliness. The perpetrator was a 40-year-old female paid carer., who deliberately antagonized the victim by putting clean sheets on the (unclean) floor and leaving food marks from dirty plates on clean bed sheets. She also repeatedly misnamed the victim who interpreted these acts as deliberate attempts to antagonize him. He challenged the carer about her behaviour and asked her to leave, but the carer did not report this to the care agency or return over the weekend. The consequences for the victim were that he was left alone for 72 hours, without food, water or nursing care, suffering mental anguish. This type of relationship, between carer and victim, involves features of coercive control. In this case, the perpetrator exploits the power she holds as the carer by depriving the victim of his basic needs.

In four of our intimidation cases, the perpetrator and victim were married or cohabiting as partners. In these cases, it seemed problematic for the couples to establish what was acceptable behaviour within the relationship. In one such case, the relationship was described by the wider family as being volatile and verbally abusive. However, as the female victim became frailer and more dependent, the perpetrator's dominating behaviour escalated into physical violence, with pushes, rough handling, and unexplained bruising. This escalation into violence is common in disablist hate crimes (Equality and Human Rights Commission 2011; Gravell 2012; McCarthy et al. 2017; Chapman 2020).

There were four cases of structural written intimidation. A typical example involves a physically disabled 32-year-old man who used a wheelchair. The perpetrator, a 22-year-old man, posted abusive social media posts mocking the victim, claiming he was a benefit cheat, another common form of abuse directed at disabled persons (Quarmby 2012; Chakraborti et al. 2014a; Burch 2018). Only after several months did the victim report the incidents to the police. Whilst these types of intimidation are not face-to-face, they have a huge impact on the victim. In this case, the victim said it made him feel suicidal.

Before we focus on the category of exploitation, we will pay attention to the perpetrators of intimidation. Our perpetrator analysis suggests that the perpetrators of discrete incidents of intimidation are more likely to fit the 'typical' early hate crime offender profile described by hate crime scholars: single males acting alone or in groups in public (McDevitt et al. 2003; Walters et al. 2016). However, perpetrators of structural intimidation are more likely to be women acting alone. Where the ages of perpetrators are known (n = 28), over half are aged 40+ years, with younger perpetrators (under 18 years) more likely to be involved in discrete incidents. Finally, most perpetrators of intimidation were in some form of relationship with victims, but in discrete cases, perpetrators were more likely to be strangers (eight cases), or neighbours/local youths (seven cases). To conclude, incidental intimidation tends to involve younger male strangers as perpetrators. Structural intimidation was most likely to be carried out by perpetrators known to their victims, older and quite often women. In the following section, we explore cases of exploitation.

Exploitation

Just over a third of the cases (38) involved perpetrators exploiting disabled people. Exploitation involves a variety of goals such as obtaining money, valuable objects, housing, labour and sex. Almost all these events were in private spaces. Both subcategories of discrete and structural exploitation will now be explored with examples of typical cases.

There were 15 discrete cases of exploitation, 4 were financial exploitation, and 11 were sexual exploitation. Two of the cases of financial exploitation were by strangers, one happened at the targeted person's home and one on the street outside the victim's care facility. In the latter case, the perpetrator was a stranger who targeted disabled residents outside their sheltered accommodation. The perpetrator approached victims before grabbing their handbags or purses. Some were pushed to the floor and sustained injuries. None of the targeted people were physically able to give chase or fight back.

Two of the other discrete cases were distraction burglaries, one perpetrated by a stranger and one by a 'friend'. Both these incidents involved perpetrators manipulating victims to act on their wishes. In one of these cases, the female perpetrator targeted a frail elderly woman, knocking on her door asking for change and a glass of water. When the victim was distracted, the perpetrator entered the house. Upon returning with water, the victim saw the perpetrator stealing money from her handbag. The perpetrator left the property, but a local witness took her car registration and informed the police. Attending the offender's home, police recovered a large amount of cash from this and similar incidents. During the interview, the perpetrator admitted seeing the victim collecting cash from the nearby Post Office and following her home. The offender had previous convictions for burglary and theft from disabled victims. In both previously discussed cases, the victims were targeted because they were disabled.

A subcategory of incidental exploitation is sexual exploitation. Almost all cases of sexual exploitation were discrete cases involving either verbal coercion or physical violence (11 of 12). All the perpetrators knew their victims, five were friends, four were carers or nurses and two lived in the same care facility. Most (10 of 11 cases) happened in the targeted person's home or care facility, the remaining assault case was on the street near the person's home. In the following example, a 27-year-old woman with a learning disability was raped in her own home by a school friend she invited for tea. The perpetrator tried to persuade her not to report the incident because he had children: he was worried he would receive a custodial sentence. The victim disclosed the rape to a care worker, who reported it to the police, but the victim said that she felt sorry for the perpetrator and did not wish to assist in the police investigation.

Two discrete cases of sexual assault were carried out on elderly frail women by men living in the same care facility. The assaults took place in the victims' personal bedrooms, and in communal bathrooms, both areas of open access to all residents. In another example, the perpetrator was a podiatrist, with legitimate professional access to disabled victims. When the offender was charged, he was found to have falsified his qualifications. Similar allegations had been made against him for assault on other disabled women.

The remaining 23 cases of exploitation are conceptualized as structural exploitation: taking place over weeks, months, and even years. Most of these cases (22) are of financial exploitation, with one case of sexual exploitation. We focus first on the financial exploitation cases. The perpetrators in these cases were all known to their victims, most were family members (11), five were paid carers. In the following case, the victim was an elderly disabled woman. The perpetrator was the victim's son, a young man addicted to alcohol and drugs. The victim had helped her son with money and food, but he made more frequent demands, becoming increasingly violent towards his mother when she tried to refuse him. In reaction to this, he entered her home without permission, looking through cupboards for money. When he was unable to find any money, he punched her in the face, knocking her to the floor. He then stole her vacuum cleaner which he subsequently sold.

There are four cases that both the police and safeguarding practitioners referred to as 'mate crimes'. In these crimes, perpetrators cultivate fake friendships with people with learning disabilities or mental health needs to exploit them (Landman 2014). Perpetrators may exploit existing relationships as relatives, parents and carers (Thomas 2012). The cases we have gathered

share some of the described features of mate crimes, as we shall see in two of the cases we discuss below.

In the following example, the victim was an elderly woman with dementia living in sheltered housing. The perpetrator was an informal carer posing as a helpful friend to several people living in this facility. In this case, the perpetrator groomed the victim offering to 'help' by running errands including paying her bills at the bank. By gradually gaining the victim's trust the perpetrator was able to get access to her bank accounts to steal money.

The second case we describe is the only case of structural sexual exploitation in our data set. The victim was a 22-year-old man with learning disabilities, who was targeted from the age of 14 years by the perpetrator, a male in his late 60s. The perpetrator was a neighbour who used coercive techniques of grooming and gaslighting to control his victim. Grooming is generally used to refer to child sexual exploitation but can also apply to young people and adults. In this case, the offender developed the persona of a friendly uncle, gaining the trust of the family and taking the victim on trips in his car. On these trips, he sexually assaulted the young man. This continued for several years, causing severe emotional distress. The victim developed mental health issues and used alcohol to deal with the trauma, making attempts to die by suicide. Although the victim repeatedly tried to report the incidents, he was not able to convince the police of his situation. Gaslighting is used in controlling relationships by the perpetrator to undermine the victim and make them easier to dominate. In this case, the perpetrator convinced both the family and the police that the victim was wrong in his assertions and had misinterpreted his behaviour, denying the victim's reality.

When we look closely at the perpetrators involved in exploitation, we can see that they are predominantly males, in contrast to cases of intimidation. Where the ages of perpetrators are known, most are over 18 years, with half being over 40 years old. In cases of sexual exploitation, perpetrators are more likely to be older men, with three quarters being aged 40 years or over. Only three cases of exploitation were discrete events carried out by strangers. Most perpetrators know the victim as a friend, neighbour, family member or carer. Many perpetrators are in positions of trust or have manoeuvred into a fake friendship with the victim, often using grooming techniques. To conclude, the perpetrators of exploitative disablist hate crimes tend to be older males who are known to their victims. In the next section of this article, we will discuss cases of brutalization.

Brutalisation

Brutalisation refers to excessive physical violence, such as imprisonment, slavery, assault and murder. Brutalisation forms the extreme end of subjugating and dehumanizing disabled people and is often related to the final phase of exploitation. In our data set, there are thirteen cases of brutalization. Many of the cases combined emotional, sexual, financial, verbal and physical acts of violence. Three victims were sexually assaulted/raped, and six victims were murdered. The incidents mostly took place within the victim's or perpetrator's home, although some also spilled into other spaces including other people's homes, social clubs, shopping centres, health centres and hospitals. Although none of the crimes were recognized as hate crimes, there were cases that both the police and safeguarding practitioners described as 'mate crime'.

Most cases of brutalization involve a long process. One case that we analysed, the murder of Rikki Judkins, followed a different pattern and can be defined as a discrete form of brutalization. As far as our data goes, this type of disablist hate crime is an outlier because it took place in a relative short time frame and in public. Rikki, a 50-year-old man with learning difficulties and mental health needs, became stranded in Lancaster when he missed his last bus home to Coventry. Rikki was violently assaulted by two young men in an underpass. He was punched, kicked, stamped on and beaten with a large stone weighing 11 kg. Rikki sustained 18 separate

injuries to his head and face, including severe head injuries and died 3 hours after the assault from his injuries. His rucksack had been ransacked, and his mobile phone was missing. The perpetrators boasted to friends about the killing but did not admit that they targeted Rikki because he was disabled. Though the excessive brutal violence of the attack carrying the symbolic connotation of disrespect, degradation and subjugation is an indication of a hate crime, in line with the other cases we gathered, his murder was not prosecuted as disablist hate crime.

Most cases of brutalization involve a long process, one that resembles the process of cuckooing we touched on earlier (Spicer *et al.* 2019). We analysed nine such cases, four by a single person and five by a group. Though the property may have been used as a private space for taking drugs, this was not the main motivation for perpetrators. Rather it was to exploit the victim, to get access to their property, sexual services and labour. These motivations seem to fit with the interpretation of cuckooing as a 'nascent crime model' (Spicer *et al.* 2019).

In one such case, the victim was a disabled man with mental health issues. The victim was targeted by a stranger who was just released from prison. They were introduced at a mutual friends house, where the perpetrator began grooming the victim, telling him he had nowhere to stay. The victim felt sorry for the perpetrator and offered him a place to sleep for a few nights. The perpetrator moved into the targeted person's flat the same night, and after a few nights, the victim asked the perpetrator when he was leaving, to which the perpetrator became aggressive replying: 'what's your fucking rush'. The victim was both frightened and intimidated, having been told stories by the perpetrator of his exploits in prison and the violent acts he had committed. In his victim statement, he said that he felt like a child being ordered about to make drinks and food on demand. The victim had to sleep on the settee as the perpetrator took over his bedroom. He also shared that the perpetrator told him he was a piece of shit. The perpetrator refused repeated requests to leave. When the victim tried to stand up to the perpetrator, he became angry, screaming he would fucking kill him. When rescued by police, the victim told the officer he felt:

> … *very scared, that he had lost control of his life, and had been intimidated by the offender.* (Police Records)

In five cuckooing cases, the victims were targeted by a group of perpetrators. These were more sustained episodes of coercion and physical assault over months or years. Two of the victims were murdered. One victim was Joseph O'Hanlon, a man with physical and mental health issues. Joseph was an ex-charity worker living in Rochdale. In 2015, Joseph received £7000 from his pension and was soon befriended by a group who began using his flat to take drugs and drink alcohol. The group stole Joseph's money, food and his belongings, for several years, using his key fob to come and go as they pleased. Joseph tried to remove these 'friends' from his property but seemed powerless to do so despite warnings from his landlord.

The case tragically ended in April 2016, when Anthony Bennet, aged 42 years, joined the group. Over several days, Bennet attacked Joseph, using his fists, feet, a hammer, a mop and a block of wood. Joseph sustained 90 separate injuries and died from his injuries. Bennet slept in Joseph's bed for 4 days, whilst Joseph's body remained on the living room floor. When Bennett was arrested, he was wearing Joseph's clothes. Bennett was sentenced to life imprisonment for murder. He had carried out a similar (though not fatal) attack on a disabled man a few months before.

The last example of brutalization we will discuss is a case of modern slavery lasting 9 years. The victim was a 9-year-old girl brought to England from Pakistan by two of the five perpetrators, her elderly male uncle aged 74 years and his younger wife. The victim was deaf. She did not speak or understand English. The child was locked in the cellar of the family home with only

a camp bed and thin blanket for warmth. The young victim was repeatedly raped by her uncle and beaten by several members of the family. She was forced to cook, clean and work for the family business. She was kept hungry, having to steal food from the meals she cooked for the family. Trading standards officers investigating the illegal trading from the family home rescued the child. She was supported to tell her story through sign language and interpreters, leading to charges against the perpetrators of rape, human trafficking for human exploitation, assault and fraud.

In cases of brutalization, a different picture of perpetrators emerges to those involved in intimidation and exploitation. The perpetrators are either single males, all male groups or mixed groups. There were no single females involved in these acts. Most cases of brutalization were perpetrated by adults. One case involved a group aged 30 to 65 years; one involved a younger group of perpetrators aged 18 to 25 years. All perpetrators in cases of brutalization knew their victims, as 'friends', family members, or partners. To conclude perpetrators within cases of brutalization tended to be male, known, and over 18 years.

CONCLUSION

In this article, we set out to develop a typology covering the daily reality of disablist hate crime. Document analyses, and interviews with police and safeguarding practitioners, while using theoretical sampling, have led to 100 cases that were used to describe and analyse a wide spectrum of disablist hate crimes. Our typology builds upon the literature on disablist hate crime and furthers this subfield by developing three main categories of (1) intimidation, (2) exploitation and (3) brutalization, and six subcategories based on the type of interaction(s) that shaped the hate crime, its duration, meaning, frequency, severity and harm.

Intimidation has two subcategories, discrete and repeated intimidation. Discrete intimidations are incidental and isolated acts and tend to involve verbal or written abuse including threats, which take place in public places. Structural intimidation involves repeated incidents of verbal abuse, property damage, threats of physical violence and harassment. These incidents are usually close to the targeted person's home and in its near vicinity, lasting for months or even years. Incidental intimidation tends to involve perpetrators that are young male strangers. However, repeated intimidation was most likely to be carried out by older perpetrators that were known to their victims, and quite often women.

Exploitation concerns different aims, such as financial gain (money and valuable items), accommodation, labour and sex. Almost all these cases took places in the house of the targeted persons. Discrete cases of exploitation consist of (1) financial exploitation by strangers, such as bag snatching and distraction burglaries and (2) sexual exploitation either by verbal coercion (e.g. grooming) or physical violence. All the perpetrators of sexual exploitation knew their victims as 'friends', carers/nurses, or as people living in the same care facility. Targeted exploitation covers long periods of weeks, months and in one case years. All cases except one are examples of financial exploitation. The perpetrators in all cases were not strangers to the victim, most were family members and paid carers. The perpetrators of this category of disablist hate crime tend to be older males who are known to their victims, especially when the motive is sexual exploitation.

Brutalisation refers to physical violence, such as detention, modern slavery and murder. Brutalisation involves a long process and is quite often the final phase of exploiting, subjugating and dehumanizing disabled people. The cases consisted of emotional, sexual, financial, verbal and physical acts of violence, including sexual assault/rape and murder. The incidents happened mostly in private places, as in the victim's or perpetrator's home, but they also took place during daily visits to other homes and (semi-)public places such as shopping centres and health centres.

The perpetrators in cases of brutalization are mostly male adults and were known friends, family members or partners.

A significant finding of our research is that almost all cases of exploitation, brutalization and structural intimidation, are perpetrated by someone known in some way to the targeted person. These are 'friends', neighbours, carers, acquaintances, family members, officials, and housemates. These acts may call into question the premise upon which many hate crime scholars have previously relied, as increasing evidence suggests disablist hate crime perpetrators are not strangers targeting random individuals but friends and family members targeting people known to them. This may raise challenges for criminal justice actors and safeguarding practitioners to become more aware of these coercive relationships, or what Macdonald *et al* (2023: 138–41) referred to as 'relationships of hate'. Our research suggests many incidents of disablist hate have the potential to develop into structural intimidation and exploitation. Recognising these incidents as hate fuelled and taking positive action to stop perpetrators is vital for disabled people to live full lives in their communities.

In many cases that we have discussed the professionals involved did not raise the question whether a case was indeed a hate crime. Their definition of hate crime does not include the many examples of disablist hate crimes that take place in society. We argue that disabled people should be treated as anybody else, with civility. Yet, even when there is no clear expression of hostility or prejudice, people were targeted because they were defined by the perpetrators as vulnerable, weak and subhuman. Targeting disabled people in this way is in itself an indication of hostility and prejudice. Therefore, these acts should be recognized by agents of social control as potential hate crimes. In sum, these actions do not need any verbal or non-verbal indication of hostility or prejudice, the acts themselves signify that hostility or prejudice are essential elements of these acts.

We hope that this research adds to the debate raised by hate crime scholars (Chakraborti and Garland 2012; Roulstone and Sadiqe 2012; Chakraborti *et al.* 2014a; Mason-Bish 2018) as to how we position and define disablist hate crime, or indeed whether situating disablist hate crime within the hate crime discourse is the right framework. The hate crime field is in a constant state of flux, developing with time and knowledge. As our knowledge expands so too must our way of conceptualizing and constructing hate crime. Our article will hopefully add to the discourse on how to research, prevent and fight hate crime, and in particular disablist hate crime.

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