Title:

Layers of Resistance: Understanding Decision-Making Processes in Relation to Crime Reporting

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Abstract

Under-reporting has been a longstanding problem for criminal justice agencies, which masks the true scale of crime taking place and prevents victims from accessing justice and support. Using empirical evidence collected from more than 2,000 victims who came from different backgrounds and who had experienced different forms of crimes, this article proposes a new theoretic model to enhance our understanding of under-reporting. This model highlights that victim decision-making is influenced by structural, social, situational and individual barriers which interact symbiotically to create layers of resistance to reporting. The article concludes by considering what steps academics, policy-makers and practitioners can take to dismantle these barriers and to improve reporting rates.

Keywords

Victims, victimisation, under-reporting, and justice.

Introduction

One of the most pervasive challenges facing criminal justice agencies and other relevant organisations around the world is under-reporting. It is widely acknowledged that official figures are a considerable underestimate of the actual number of crimes taking place (Maguire and McVie, 2017). The sheer volume of victims who are prevented from accessing justice and support is illustrative of the collective failure of agencies to develop, implement and resource policy interventions that connect with the lived realities and challenges facing victims of crime. The issue of under-reporting has been discussed extensively within criminological literature, with research revealing the different barriers that victims may face on the basis of their identity or background, or as a result of the form of victimisation that they have experienced (Skogan, 1984; Goudriaan et al., 2005). Similarly, the importance of reporting in the context of enabling effective prioritisation and service delivery is well documented within key sources of policy guidance (see, *inter alia*, HM Government, 2016, 2017; Home Office, 2016). Despite growing recognition of how reluctant victims can be about reporting to the police, there has been little in the way of meaningful action to dismantle the barriers that they face. In fact, state-level discourse continually reinforces the idea that the responsibility to report crime rests solely with the victim, but this comes with assurances that when victims do cross that threshold then reports will be dealt with seriously, sensitively and swiftly. Such rhetoric demonstrates a simplistic understanding of decision-making in relation to reporting, ignoring the multiple, inter-related barriers that people face after experiencing victimisation and which prevent them from reporting to the police.

In some ways, criminological research within the UK and further afield has not assisted in enhancing this understanding because issues of under-reporting have tended to be explored through a narrow analytical lens, meaning that knowledge has been generated on specific forms of crime and specific victim types. Similarly, many of the theoretical frameworks that have been developed to describe the decision-making process have tended to rely on data from large-scale victim surveys – such as the British Crime Survey – which many marginalised and disempowered groups are under-represented within. This article seeks to address these limitations by proposing a new model to explain under-reporting in a more holistic way, drawing upon the perceptions and experiences of a diverse sample of more than 2,000 victims. This model highlights that victim decision-making is influenced by structural, social, situational and individual factors which interact concurrently to create layers of resistance to reporting. The implication being that if criminal justice agencies and other relevant organisations across the globe do not adopt a much more proactive and intelligence-led approach to dismantling these barriers, then resistance to reporting is likely to become more entrenched and the gulf between the recorded figure of crime and the actual amount taking place is likely to expand further.

Background

Under-reporting – or more specifically the decision-making process in relation to reporting – has been the subject of criminological enquiry for decades, and yet the issue continues to present considerable challenges for criminal justice agencies around the world. Reporting criminal activity is important for a number of reasons. At a state level, rates of reporting are thought to symbolise the extent to which a country's citizens trust government institutions, with the suggestion being that the countries with higher rates of reporting have 'good democratic health' (Terente, Gallo and Oltra, 2017: 154). Reporting also has significant practical implications; criminal justice legislation, policies and practices are often informed by what has been reported by victims and witnesses to the police (Baumer and Lauritsen, 2010; Slocum et al., 2010). Non-reporting of criminal incidents can lead to inaccurate intelligence, and thus the policy and budget decisions which are based upon reported and recorded data are likely to have limited effectiveness (Terente, Gallo and Oltra, 2017). Similarly, criminal justice agencies are somewhat hampered in their ability to investigate and prosecute a crime without being notified of the incident, which is why victims are considered to be the 'gatekeepers' of the criminal justice system (Gottfredson and Gottfredson, 1988: 16). Finally, and arguably most importantly, reporting enables victims to become 'visible' to criminal justice agencies and to other relevant

organisations, which should result in victims being able to access practical and/or emotional support (Boateng, 2016; Davies, Francis and Greer, 2017: 19). Those victims who do not report to the police and who are in need of support, are often left to suffer in silence by virtue of not possessing the knowledge or resource to access support services.

One of the ways in which academics and policy-makers have sought to better understand the issue of under-reporting has been to conduct victimisation surveys (Goodey, 2005). The US was one of the first countries to develop a victimisation survey – the *National Crime and Victimisation Survey* – in 1973, with similar surveys now being administered within many countries across the globe, including Australia, Canada, Finland, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, New Zealand and the United Kingdom (Davies, Francis and Greer, 2017). Victimisation surveys have generated much needed knowledge on patterns of criminal activity and on reporting behaviour which is of particular relevance for the focus of this article. According to Goudriaan et al. (2005), analysis of victimisation surveys has led to the development of four theoretical frameworks to explain reporting decision making: rational, psychological, institutional and community. The rational model of reporting is based on the idea that the decision-making process involves the victim 'weighing-up' the potential benefits and costs of reporting a crime to the police (Skogan, 1994; Kaukinen, 2002). The perceived benefits and costs are often dependant on the nature of the victimisation (Tarling and Morris, 2010). For example, if a victim's watch was stolen then retrieving the item or substantiating an insurance claim might be conceived of as 'benefits', and the time it would take to report the crime would be regarded as a 'cost'. In this instance, the victim is likely to calculate that the benefits outweigh the potential costs and therefore come to a rational decision to report to the police. Although the cost-benefit model is thought to explain individual difference in reporting behaviour, the model does not adequately explain how victims come to evaluate the characteristics of the crime in the way that they do, and it underplays the influence of other situational, community and societal factors (Goudriaan et al., 2004).

The psychological model of reporting also utilises the notion of cost-benefit analysis but instead emphasises the influence that our emotional response to the incident has upon decision-making. For example, a victim who has been physically attacked may feel anger, a sense of injustice or fearfulness of future victimisation which might motivate them to report. However, if the perpetrator is known to the victim than this may evoke concern of retaliatory violence, which will also affect the victim's cost-benefit calculation (Fisher *et al.* 2003). Similar to the rational model of reporting, the psychological model seeks to explain decision-making solely through an individual's perception of and emotional response to crime, ignoring broader situational and societal factors. The third model – institutional – acknowledges that reporting is 'a formal act that receives its meaning and practical implications within the institutional system of which it forms a part' (Terente, Gallo and Oltra, 2017: 156). In other words, our perceptions, experiences and expectations of the state and those agencies which enact state policies and practices, informs our decision to report (Skogan, 1978; Tolsma et al., 2012). Research evidence suggests that confidence in the police is a particularly prominent determinant of reporting (Anderson, 1999; Baumer, 2002; Soares, 2004). The final model of reporting recognises the influence of familiar and community networks in shaping the decision-making process. The community model suggests that a victim's decision to report will have been informed – whether consciously or subconsciously – by family members, friends, and community contacts and organisations (including a school, church or community group) (Greenberg and Ruback, 1992). Both the institutional and community model underappreciate the roles that individual difference and situational dynamics play in influencing decision-making.

The four theoretical frameworks outlined above seek to explain reporting from different perspectives, demonstrating how cost-benefit analysis, emotional responses, perceptions of state institutions and familiar and community networks impact upon the decision-making process. However, these frameworks are rooted in the analysis of victimisation surveys which have tended to focus on specific forms of crime. For example, Skogan's (1994) study based on the British Crime Survey examined incidents of property crime and personal crime, whereas MacDonald's (2001) research using the same

victimisation survey focuses exclusively on domestic burglary. Not only has the nature of criminal activity changed considerably in the last two decades since many of these frameworks were developed, but also the diversity and structure of our societies have been transformed. As Davies, Francis and Greer (2017: 17) suggest 'criminal victimisation is felt most often and most acutely by the most marginalised and powerless sections of society', and it is questionable as to whether their perceptions and experiences are represented within the victimisation surveys which inform these theoretical frameworks of reporting. It is only possible to advance our understanding of decision-making in the context of reporting by collecting more meaningful data from victims who have experienced different forms of crime, who come from different backgrounds, and who have different lived realities.

The sample

This article draws upon a series of studies undertaken by the author over the course of the last five years. These studies were commissioned by different funding bodies, were conducted in different locations and had varying timeframes but they were unified by common objectives which were to better understand the nature of hate crime victimisation, to explore the emotional and physical impacts of hate crime and to identify the barriers which prevent victims from reporting their experiences or accessing support services. In the context of these studies, hate crimes were defined as acts of violence, harassment and hostility directed towards someone on the basis of their identity, 'difference' or perceived 'vulnerability' (Chakraborti, Garland and Hardy, 2014). The studies were as follows: a two-year piece of research funded by the Economic and Social Research Council which ran from 2012-2014 (n=1,421) (Chakraborti et al., 2014); a four-month study in 2015 funded by the Equality and Human Rights Commission (n=44) (Chakraborti and Hardy, 2015); a four-month study in 2016 funded by the Office for the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) in Hertfordshire (n=466) (Hardy and Chakraborti, 2016); and a six-month piece of research in 2017 on behalf of the Office for the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) in the West Midlands (n=142) (Hardy and Chakraborti, 2017). Due to similarities in the aims and methodological approaches of these studies relevant analysis from each piece of research is presented collectively within this article in order to identify common barriers to reporting.

One of the strengths of this dataset of 2,073 victims is the diversity of the sample in terms of age, gender identity, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation and disability. For example, 55.2% (n=1145) of participants were female and 43.3% (n=897) were male. The diversity of the sample is especially apparent within the context of ethnicity, with significant numbers of participants identifying themselves as being Asian British (n=204), Asian 'Other' (n=42), Black African (n=113), Black British (n=73), Black Caribbean (n=19), Chinese (n=42), Indian (n=150), Pakistani (n=59), White British (n=1038), White European (n=66), White 'Other' (n=65), and of Mixed Ethnic Heritage (n=54). Furthermore, 19.5% (n=405) of participants identified as having some form of disability – which is in line with the national figure of disabled adults within the UK (Department of Work and Pensions, 2017) – including mild to severe learning difficulties, long-term health conditions such as muscular sclerosis and HIV, physical disabilities such as visual impairments and issues with mobility, and mental health conditions such as anxiety, depression and schizophrenia.

The participants within these studies also lived in very different geographical environments, including rural spaces, multicultural settings, and economically advantaged and disadvantaged areas. For example, two of the studies were conducted within the city of Leicester and the surrounding county of Leicestershire. Leicester is one of the most diverse cities within the UK, with just 45% of the city's almost 330,000 residents identifying as White British within the 2011 Census and yet this differs starkly to the demography of the population within the surrounding county, of which 89% categorised themselves as White British (Office for National Statistics, 2012). This diversity in terms of ethnicity and religion was also apparent within the West Midlands – the most recent research site – which is a county 'of contrasts' (Medland, 2011: 1), consisting of seven metropolitan boroughs many of which have a strong industrial heritage. In terms of social and economic diversity, the West Midlands

includes areas of high deprivation with 43% of children in Birmingham specifically growing up in poverty, as well as affluent areas (End Child Poverty, 2018).

In order to connect with this diverse sample, many of whom had never reported their experiences of hate crime to the police or to any other organisation, the research team implemented two different engagement approaches within the three research sites of Leicester and Leicestershire, Hertfordshire and the West Midlands. The first of which – the 'top-down' approach – involved contacting mainstream service providers such as community safety teams within local authorities and victim support organisations, as well as 'community leaders' within the locales in order to negotiate access to potential participants. This approach had limited success, especially within those studies with tight timeframes, because emails and phone calls were unanswered, meetings were difficult to arrange and gatekeepers were often sceptical about the relevance of the research to their service users.

In order to overcome these difficulties, the research team adopted a second, more unconventional approach which meant collecting information on the population, the facilities and the services being delivered within each area to identify access points. The next step of this 'grass-roots' approach involved the research team familiarising themselves with these access points by turning up and regularly returning to international supermarkets, cafes and restaurants, charity shops, community and neighbourhood centres, health centres, places of worship, pubs and clubs, taxi ranks, homeless shelters and drug and alcohol services. Within each of the studies, the research team invested a considerable period of time interacting with potential participants in a much more flexible and informal way in order to develop knowledge of, and rapport and trust with those groups and communities who are typically disconnected from criminological research, activism and policy-making. This involved taking part in Bhangra classes, various arts and crafts events, questions and answer sessions in ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) lessons, poetry readings, exercises classes, charity walks and a range of other social activities. Collectively the four studies included significant numbers of participants from communities and groups that are often considered 'hard to reach'. For instance, the research team heard from members of recently arrived migrant groups such as the Roma, Polish, Somalian, Congolese and Iranian communities (*n=197*); asylum seekers and refugees (*n=* 93); those who identify with Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, Sikhism, Paganism, Spiritualism (*n=* 514); members of the trans community (*n=* 85); lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual and asexual people (*n=* 336); and those who were under 18 years old (*n=* 124) and over 65 years old (*n=* 85).

In each of the four studies participants were asked to share their perceptions and experiences through a survey and/or an interview. The surveys, which could be completed online or in hard-copy, comprised of open and closed questions relating to experiences of victimisation, of reporting and of accessing support services. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were also conducted with participants individually or where necessary in group settings, in order to elucidate further qualitative data. The qualitative data from both the surveys and interviews underwent discourse analysis in order to identify recurring themes and relationships. In total, 1,726 participants completed a questionnaire and 483 took part in an interview, resulting in a combined sample of 2,073 victims (139 participants completed a questionnaire and an interview). In terms of experiences of crime, these participants shared stories of being called abusive and derogatory names (*n*=1556); being harassed, threated and intimated in person or online (*n*=1189 and *n*=446 respectively), having their house, car or property vandalised (*n*=678), being humiliated or financial and sexually exploited, being raped, and being punched, kicked, spat at and hit with a weapon (*n*=568)[1].

Importantly, although this large sample of victims came from different backgrounds, had been targeted for different aspects of their identity, and had experienced different forms of crime, their decision to report had been shaped by the same factors. This article will go on to illustrate that the
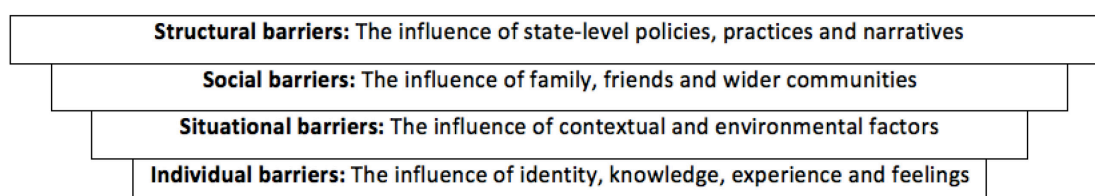
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[1] These figures are taken from the survey of which 1,726 participants completed.

sample's reasons for not reporting were complex and multi-layered, suggesting that barriers to reporting are systemic within our society.

Explaining resistance to reporting

The model comprises of four levels: structural, social, situational and individual. Within each level there are a number of factors which shape decision-making. The levels, as with the factors included within, should not be viewed in isolation but rather as having an interactive relationship whereby the factors in one level inform the next, building up layers of resistance to reporting.

Figure 1: The layers of resistance model of under-reporting

Structural barriers: The influence of state-level policies, practices and narratives

Social barriers: The influence of family, friends and wider communities

Situational barriers: The influence of contextual and environmental factors

Individual barriers: The influence of identity, knowledge, experience and feelings

Additionally, the levels should not be viewed as being equitable in terms of the strength of influence over decision-making. As the commentary that follows will illustrate, individual- and situational-level factors take greater precedence when a victim is weighing up whether to report to the police or to another relevant organisation. However, the ways in which victims interpret these individual and situational characteristics has been and is shaped by broader structural and social factors. The following sections provide an overview of each level of the model, conveying the inter-connectedness of these factors and the complexity of decision-making in relation to reporting.

Structural barriers to reporting

In the context of reporting, decision-making cannot be detached from the social, economic and political landscape in which we find ourselves within. The UK – along with many other countries around the world – has encountered significant financial difficulty, resulting in successive governments implementing far-reaching austerity measures. Cuts to services and staff within public-sector agencies have been widely reported by the media, with headlines such as *'Cuts force Metropolitan Police to ignore crime'* and *'Met police fail to investigate thousands of crimes'* documenting the impact that dwindling resources is having upon the quality of service delivery (Ansell, 2017; Davies, 2017). The data collected through the studies outlined above indicates that this macro-level discourse has filtered down to everyday environments, influencing everyday decisions such as whether to report an incident to the police, as demonstrated by the following quotations:

> *The police would be the last people that I'd report to. Mostly because I think they're too busy.*

> *I don't fully trust the police, not because I don't believe in what they do or think they're good people but they have budget cuts and deadlines.*

> *Obviously, the police are so stretched with cases and work, they can't always get back to you straightaway. A lot of people do feel left to their own devices and I think that they don't really know where to go and who to turn to.*

> *I felt that it* [victimisation] *would not register as important to a busy police force.*[2]

As part of these studies many participants felt that the police in particular were under considerable financial constraints which was likely to affect the chances of securing a successful outcome. As previous studies have found, this perception can influence the level of confidence that a victim has in

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[2] The perceptions and experiences of the sample are spoken about collectively to demonstrate the commonality of these themes.

the police and the criminal justice system as whole (Baumer, 2002; Soares, 2004; Lievore, 2005). Another common perception held by participants was that the high-demand placed upon police time might lead officers to make judgements about the people who come forward or about the crimes that were being reported. The concern expressed about *"wasting"* police time demonstrates how macro-level factors can shape a victims' perception at a situational-level, with certain forms of crime considered to be less of a priority against a backdrop of limited resources (this point will be explored in greater detail in 'Situational barriers to reporting').

Another structural barrier which was found to impact upon decision-making was the perceived involvement of the UK Government (and by extension, public sector agencies) in facilitating a climate of hostility towards the 'Other'. The suggestion being that state-level narratives, policies and practices exacerbate fear about and victimisation towards certain groups within society.

> *The way that the media talk about these issues legitimises the abuse we get on the street from Joe Bloggs … Now people are not content with the verbal abuse, cold shoulders and dirty looks. Now they think that because the MPs are discussing it and everybody's talking about it, we can now pull off the veil, we can push people, we can 'have a pop'.*

> *It's definitely got worse … Another time I walked out of here, two people walked past me, one turned around and said "You sponging skank, you can see really", saying that I was doing it for benefit reasons.*

> *Brexit changed a lot in a bad way. As a Polish national I feel scared about the future of myself and my daughters as it's become so clear that we are no longer welcome in the UK. After Brexit people feel allowed to show their aggression.*

This view was particularly prominent within those communities who are especially marginalised within society, including asylum seekers and refugees, disabled people, Muslim people, new and emerging communities, and people who are socially and economically disadvantaged.

This perception affects decision-making in relation to reporting in a number of ways. First, victims who belong to those communities that are being blamed by the Government for society's ills perceive the police and local authority to be the agencies who are responsible for enacting government policy. In this respect, these agencies are part of broader structure of 'official' institutions whose policies and practices reinforce the disempowerment and vulnerability of these communities. Secondly, these individuals feel that they are unlikely to be seen as the 'victim' by these agencies, someone who is innocent and underserving of that experience. Concern of being perceived as culpable or in some way responsible for the incident has been identified by previous research as a disincentive to reporting (Tarling and Morris, 2010; Campbell, 2014; Phipps et al., 2017). There are many groups and communities within society who occupy this conflicting position of being persecuted by state narratives and policies on the one hand, whilst also experiencing high-levels on crime on the other. It is not surprising to hear that an asylum seeker who is waiting for the outcome of their leave to remain application will not report being harassed by their neighbour; that a sex worker will not report that they have been raped; that an English Roma Gypsy will not report experiencing domestic violence; that a male with physical disabilities will not report being financially exploited by his carer; or that a homeless male will not report having his sleeping bag set on fire. State-level proclamations that all criminal incidents reported to the police will be taken seriously is unlikely to counter the fear, mistrust and resentment felt within marginalised and disenfranchised communities towards the police and other relevant organisations.

Social barriers to reporting

The studies outlined above highlighted that decision-making in relation to crime was also heavily influenced by a victim's family, friends and wider community, and that the ramifications of structural barriers can also be observed at this level. For instance, institutionalised practices of oppression and discrimination have been commonplace throughout history, creating a legacy of mistrust between

certain communities and the police in particular. In a UK context, historical events including the criminalisation of gay men and the flawed investigation of Stephen Lawrence's racially-motivated murder, continue to have repercussions upon reporting behaviour today as evidenced by the following quotations.

> *I think a lot of it is the fact that they* [transgender people] *are frightened that the police will not take them seriously and perhaps even laugh behind their backs.*

> *Will I go to the police and say somebody was being verbally abusive, being racist towards me? It's a waste of time. If they cannot deal with Stephen Lawrence in 20 years what chance do I have with verbal abuse?*

> *They* [lesbian, gay and bisexual people] *are fearful that the police will be unsupporting [sic], uncaring, unsympathetic or homophobic themselves.*

The legacy of prejudicial policing towards minority ethnic and faith communities, LGB&T people, as well as a range of other disempowered groups, affects not only the confidence that victims have in whether the police will treat them compassionately irrespective of their identity or lifestyle, but also in whether their experience of crime will be dealt with appropriately (Campbell, 2014). As this section and the last have highlighted, perceptions about whether a crime will be dealt with appropriately are informed by both structural and social barriers but importantly, these factors are not static; societal events, new policies, state discourse and community practices continually re-shape and reinforce these perceptions.

Attitudes towards reporting were also found to be heavily influenced by an individual's interactions with their 'community'. It is widely acknowledged that experiences, particularly if they are negative in nature, can travel quickly and deeply within certain communities (Macfarlane and Dorkenoo, 2015). This is especially evident within faith communities and during the course of conducting the studies the author regularly heard about a negative experience that someone known to the victim had with the police or with another relevant organisation. Comments such as *"the police never called her back"*, *"they did nothing to help them"*, *"they lost their CCTV footage"* and *"they told her there was no evidence"* tended to be a precursor to a participant posing the question, *"so what's the point in me reporting?"*. A similar finding emerged from Brown and Walters' (2016) research with lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGB&T) communities. They discovered that when an LGB&T person hears or reads about the victimisation of another LGB&T person it not only leads to an increase in the fear of future victimisation and to changes in behaviour, but it also contributes to a decrease in confidence in the Government, the police and the Crown Prosecution Service (*ibid*, 2016).

Another social barrier which was found to shape decisions about reporting is what could be termed 'shared familiar or community practices'. These are the behaviours that are promoted within and come to inform the norm within a given family, friendship group or community. As part of the studies outlined above, it became evident that reporting behaviour was heavily influenced by what was perceived to be the normalised response to crime.

> *We all know somebody who wears the veil … All of my friends' mums wear scarves and they're used to seeing them getting abused and them ignoring it, they think that's the same way they have to deal with it. They view it as something normal, if you get abused, you get abused. Why would you report it to the police?*

> *When I told my friends about what happened to me, they found it hilarious that I reported it to the police. Because they think it's something weird to do, they're just so used to it they no longer view it as a crime at all.*

Again, the influence of shared practices emerged as being particularly prominent within certain groups, including minority faith communities, new and emerging ethnic communities, gypsies and travellers, and the trans community. Sin's (2015) research has also revealed that disabled people's

decisions about reporting is heavily informed by their interactions with their social support networks, including family members, carers, support workers and friends. He suggests that from an early age, disabled people are conditioned to accept or ignore negative behaviour and criminal incidents but that this 'protectionist' approach leads to significant levels of victimisation going unreported (*ibid,* 2015). Again, these social barriers should not be analysed in isolation, the shared practices have been informed and reinforced by macro-level narratives, policies and practices, and collectively they facilitate a resistance to reporting.

Finally, the prosocial relationships a victim has with their family and friends was also found to impact upon the likelihood of reporting crime to the police. Of the survey participants who had not reported to the police, 30.2% (*n*= 340) stated that they had not done so because they 'had dealt with it themselves or with the help of others'. The author's research suggests that many victims have a preference for informal reporting mechanisms and support provision which involves disclosing experience(s) to people whom victims are familiar with and trust.

> *I have a lot of close friends in the area who have been incredibly supportive and they're there for us. And so we have people that we can go to immediately, we're not on our own.*

The existence of a supportive network of family members and friends has also been identified as a key factor in a victim's decision in previous studies (Greenberg and Ruback, 1992; Starzynski et al., 2005; Boateng, 2015). Again it is important to emphasise that a victim's closeness to their family members or friends is unlikely to be the only factor to influence their decision to report. Rather, it should be viewed as forming another part of the decision-making mosaic.

Situational barriers to reporting

The findings from the author's research suggest that some of the most prominent factors shaping decision-making in the context of reporting related to situational barriers. This layer of the model includes a wide-range of contextual and environmental factors such as the form and frequency of victimisation experienced, the location in which an incident takes place, and the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator to name but some examples. Within the author's research, the form of victimisation heavily influenced a victim's perception of how seriously an incident would be treated by the police and by other relevant organisations. Concern that incidents of victimisation would not be taken 'seriously' emerged as the most commonly cited reason as to why victims had not reported their experience. Out of those participants who completed a survey and had not reported to the police or to another relevant organisation (*n*= 1,127), 32.4% (*n*= 365) stated that the reason they did not report was because they did not think the harm caused would be recognised or understood. As the following quotations demonstrate, victims who experience the more 'everyday' forms of verbal abuse and harassment are much less likely to report their victimisation.

> *Can you imagine going into the police, saying "I want to report, he just called me a Black bastard or a Black nigger or a Black cunt and I want to report it"? They'd be laughing.*

> *I don't know, somehow I feel like I could be wasting police time for what someone's just yelled at me.*

> *If I was to be assaulted, absolutely I'd report. If I was to have damage to my property, absolutely. Somebody calling me a poof … I'm too old, I've heard it far too many times.*

> *I felt that it was a minor incident that no-one would take any notice of.*

Focusing on the two most recent studies conducted by the author, which took place in Hertfordshire and the West Midlands, survey participants (*n*= 576) were asked about how likely they were to report different forms of crimes. 84.4% (*n*= 486) stated that they were 'unlikely' or 'highly unlikely' to report being verbally abused to the police; 57.8% (*n*= 333) stated that they would be 'unlikely' or 'highly unlikely' to report being harassed online; and 48.4% (*n*= 279) stated that they would be 'unlikely' or

'highly unlikely' to report being harassed either in person. The survey findings also revealed, however, that people would be much more inclined to report their victimisation if it were to involve deliberate damage to property or physical attack (80.4% (*n*= 463) and 83.5% (*n*= 481) respectively). It appears that the 'tipping point' for reporting relates to situational-level factors such as the presence of violence, repeat victimisation involving the same perpetrator, and the reality of needing a crime number for insurance claims (Skogan, 1994; Van Dijk et al., 2005).

A person's perception of the value of reporting a specific form of crime to the police is also shaped by the frequency in which they are experiencing victimisation. For example, within the large sample of victims who were engaged with as part of the author's research there was a sizeable number for whom crime was *"part and parcel"* of their daily life.

> *It starts at school, and we call it bullying. And then it kind of goes right through your life. So for people with learning difficulties, it's normal.*
>
> *Everywhere I go I expect to be verbally abused because it's happened that often. If I don't get abused it's a bonus.*
>
> *I actually logged every hate crime and I'd got about 500 in one year. And that went on for two and a half years.*
>
> *I more or less expect something to happen every day.*
>
> *In terms of verbal abuse, loads and loads. Like F'ing old dyke … you got very used to it.*

For these individuals, feeling 'different', being harassed and having to avoid risk-laden environments was woven into the fabric of their everyday life. From this perspective, everyday forms of crime such as verbal abuse and threatening behaviour are viewed as being 'ordinary' and 'routine'. When a victim conceptualises experiences in this way it means that such incidents are often not thought of as deserving a criminal intervention.

A further factor that could be categorised as a situational barrier to reporting is the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator. Crimes involving a perpetrator who is known to the victim in some capacity, whether this be as a neighbour, a colleague, a partner or a support worker, are often not reported because the victim fears that it will exacerbate the situation or lead to retaliatory violence (Felson et al., 1999, 2002; Taylor and Gassner, 2010). The author found that 10.6% (*n*= 119) of those survey participants who had not reported to the police explained that this was because they believed it would make the situation worse. This situational-level barrier has been highlighted as being a strong determinant of under-reporting within previous research on different forms of crime, including anti-social behavior (Walters and Hoyle 2012; Duggan and Heap 2014); disability-related harassment (Thomas, 2011; Sin, 2013); domestic violence (Felson et al., 1999, 2002; Reyns and Englebrecht, 2014); elder abuse and child abuse (Virueda and Payne, 2010); female genital mutilation (Macfarlane and Dorkenoo, 2015); and violent crime (Skogan, 1994; Taylor-Dunn, Bowen and Gilchrist, 2017).

Another prominent situational barrier that was identified as part of the author's research relates directly to the environment of reporting. Many participants described reporting structures as being *"confusing"*, *"complicated"*, *"time-consuming"*, *"daunting"*, *"stressful"*, and *"emotionally draining"*.

> *The process* [of reporting] *can be traumatic as well. You think is it worth going to the police, filling out all these forms, giving up all this time just to re-live it, go over it and over again, if nothing's actually going to come of it?*

For victims with work and childcare commitments or caring responsibilities, taking time off to report hate crimes was simply not a viable option, particularly when these experiences are a regular occurrence. Concerns were also raised by members of new and emerging communities and those for whom English was not a first language, that cultural and linguistic barriers prevented them from reporting. These practical issues have been highlighted elsewhere in studies on disability-related

harassment (Quarmby, 2008; Thorneycroft and Asquith, 2015); identity theft victimisation (Cross, Richards, and Smith, 2016; Reyns and Randa, 2015); and sexual violence (Taylor and Gassner, 2010). Equally, the level of courage, patience and resilience needed in order to share harrowing experiences with an unfamiliar, and potentially sceptical third party was something that participants believed was commonly overlooked by practitioners, and thus created further resistance to reporting.

Individual barriers to reporting

The final level of the proposed model focuses on individual barriers and this contains a broad-range of influences such as knowledge, experience and feelings which result in victims being reluctant or unwilling to report crime to the police. One of the key factors within this layer relates to levels of awareness of existing policies and practices as this can dictate whether a person conceives an incident to be a criminal offence, whether they understand their rights as a victim, or whether they have knowledge of all available reporting mechanisms aside from the police. Of those survey participants who had not reported to the police, 9.5% ($n=$ 107) stated that they had not done so because they did not know who they could report. In recognition of the issues surrounding reporting considerable investment and effort has been devoted to creating third-party reporting mechanisms, which are designed to offer an alternative reporting route to the police (such as Action Fraud, Crimestoppers UK and True Vision). Many public-sector agencies have taken steps to either become a third-party reporting centre or to identify appropriate locations within community settings that could act as a reporting centre. As part of the author's studies, all 1,726 survey participants were asked if they had ever reported their experience and if so, to who. The numbers of participants who had utilised a third-party reporting mechanism – such as a local authority, housing association, educational institution, health centre or hospital, LGB&T-, disability-, race- or faith-focused community support organisation or online options – was relatively low at 14.5% ($n=$ 250). This finding was reinforced through interviews which illustrated that the majority of victims had never heard of third-party reporting.

> *We know* [where to report] *because we're lucky enough and privileged enough to be in the know.*

> *I wouldn't know who to phone. If it was verbal abuse or even a punch in the face, I wouldn't want to phone 999 to report that.*

> *When I've spoken to gay people and they've mentioned things have happened to them I'm like "Did you report it?" And in nearly all of the cases they haven't, they're either "What's the point?" or they don't realise it is something they can report. Like lots of victims of hate crime they think you've just got to put up with that. No-one is going to take it seriously.*

The last quotation in particular highlights how interconnected social-, situational- and individual-level barries are and how complicated decision making is. It illustrates the regularity in which LGB&T people are being victimised, the normalisation of these experiences by victims and the wider community, the lack of awareness of 'everyday' forms of verbal abuse and harassment constituting criminal incidents, and the low levels of confidence in the criminal justice system. From the author's research it appears that the more pervasive, 'messy' and intimate forms of crime are often those that are not recognised by the victim as being 'criminal', including domestic violence, financial and sexual exploitation, and hate incidents.

Another individual-level barrier which affects the decision-making process relates directly to the victim's identity and the concerns that they may have about being outed, being re-victimised or drawing attention to themselves. Again, a victim's perception about how their identity might affect the response from the police will have been influenced by the structural and social barriers that were discussed previously.

> *We are scared of the police…Once the police know we are asylum seekers then the way they are talking to us is changed. You can't call the police, if you call the police maybe*

they arrest you instead.

It's really interesting for people in the trans community; the terror of being outed, particularly if somebody isn't out is enormous. And it's a constraint on lives – that fear of being outed, that fear of being caught or seen or whatever. It's extraordinary.

I have been racially abused before and I was really scared to report the crime in case the police wouldn't believe me.

The likelihood of reporting – particularly for those people who belong to marginalised and disempowered communities – will hinge not only on levels of confidence and knowledge but also on personal values and feelings. The author heard from many victims who explained that the reason why they had reported was because they *"didn't want this to happen to anybody else"* and they felt that it was *"the right thing to do"*. This finding is in line with the psychological model of reporting, which highlights that a victim's emotional response to an offence can significantly impact upon the likelihood of reporting (Fisher et al., 2003). Fear of future victimisation, anger, desire for justice or for the protection of others are key emotions that have the potential to shape a victim's choice to report (Boateng and Lee 2014). Related to this is the notion of individual 'resilience'. As highlighted previously, 30.2% (*n*= 340) stated that they had not reported to the police because they 'had dealt with it themselves or with the help of others'. Within the interviews, participants spoke of having the *"strength"* to cope, becoming "*hardened*", and developing a *"thick skin" and "survival techniques"* to survive. This resilience is often a consequence of having experienced verbal abuse and harassment repeatedly and of accepting that being targeted is to be expected when society views you as being 'different' and is therefore inter-connected with broader structural, social and individual-level barriers.

Finally, a victim's previous experience – particularly with the police – can significantly influence the decision-making process. As part of the author's research many victims referred to the frustration or despair that they felt at not being listened to, not being treated empathetically or not being kept up to date with case developments.

Their services were appalling. The police promised, I don't know how many times, to follow up and come round to my flat. I don't even have a crime reference number ... they just completely ignored me.

From experience I feel that the police do not take hate crime seriously. Due to bad experiences I would hesitate before I contacted the police for help.

I'm quite surprised that I've even heard the police do anything. They never helped me no matter how many times I go in and complain.

As to be expected, having a negative experience or receiving an inadequate response affected a victim's confidence in the police and reduced the likelihood that they would report another incident in the future (Kelly and Lovett, 2009; Taylor and Gassner, 2010; Boateng, 2015).

Conclusions

So far this article has highlighted a wide-range of structural, social, situational and individual barriers which symbiotically affect decision-making in the context of reporting. As the commentary has highlighted, there are factors which are more relevant and hold greater significance for certain communities and for certain forms of crime. Importantly, by presenting the model in this way the author aimed to demonstrate that there are layers of resistance to reporting which explains the significant levels of under-reporting and reveals the sheer scale of the challenge facing policy-makers and practitioners if they wish to dismantle these barriers.

It is necessary to consider the implications of this model for the academic community, policy and practice. In terms of the field of criminology, this model provides a new theoretical framework which

advances understanding of the multi-level barriers facing victims who come from different backgrounds. This new knowledge should be used to reflect upon and improve our approaches to engaging with victims of crime. Within criminological research there has been somewhat of stubborn reliance on using the conventional 'top-down' approach to accessing potential participants. However, this article has demonstrated how entrenched under-reporting is within our society, with few victims seeking to report their experiences to the police or to another relevant organisation. Therefore, approaching these gatekeepers in order to negotiate access is unlikely to lead to engagement with a broad and diverse sample of victims, which reinforces the marginalisation of 'hidden' communities. It is only through the use of more imaginative, less formulaic, grassroots approaches to engagement that criminologists will develop more complete accounts of victimisation and a more comprehensive understanding of the specific needs and problems facing different communities.

Similarly, this model and the understanding garnered from it should be used by policy-makers and practitioners to address resistance to reporting by developing more meaningful, victim-centred responses. The model illustrates that awareness of legislation, police procedure and reporting pathways are limited, that existing reporting mechanisms are too complicated and time-consuming, that levels of confidence and trust in criminal justice agencies are low, and that many victims receive an unsatisfactory response from frontline practitioners. The key issue is that all too often policy and practice is shaped by narrow engagement with a limited number of community leaders and representatives, resulting in a rudimentary understanding of the challenges faced by victims and the development of services that are ineffective. Frontline practitioners need to be afforded the time and resource to take part in community engagement which facilitates a meaningful and continued dialogue with different communities and with different sectors of these communities. This will enable criminal justice agencies and other relevant organisations to evaluate their own reporting processes through effective consultation, and to take steps to simplify them and to tailor different reporting pathways to meet the needs of specific groups.

This model also has concrete implications for the way in which frontline practitioners treat victims and handle criminal investigations. If criminal justice agencies wish to increase reporting rates then they must improve the quality of the contact that they have with victims, thus reducing negative experiences. This article has illustrated that many practitioners are failing to deal with people in a manner that is victim-centred, sensitive and empathetic, with victims often receiving an uncompassionate and dismissive response. When participants were asked within the author's research to describe the key attributes of an effective response, many referred to being listened to and to being treated with empathy and kindness as a crucial first step. Further improvements in communication need to be made before and during the investigation. There are two main issues which tend to undermine victims' perceptions of how seriously the police, and other relevant agencies, are taking incidents of crime. First, many victims are often unaware of the procedures and practices that must be followed when conducting an investigation and of how bureaucratic, time-consuming and difficult investigations can be. Secondly, victims are rarely kept up to date with case developments. As highlighted within an earlier discussion, these factors can contribute to victims feeling that their case is not being dealt with efficiently or effectively and this negative experience can reduce not only the likelihood of a victim reporting to the police again but also the likelihood of other community members coming forward. To a large extent these problems could be overcome through better communication. Criminal justice agencies and other relevant organisations might want to consider how they can better explain the processes involved in investigating crimes and how they can utilise different methods of communication to ensure that victims are kept informed.

Evidently, under-reporting is a significant problem for societies around the world, and to date national and regional interventions within the UK specifically have done little to tackle this issue. The author collected the perceptions and experiences from an extremely diverse sample – in terms of demographics and experiences – of more than 2,000 victims and found that this disparate group of people were unified in the barriers that they encountered when reporting crime. The objective of

presenting these barriers through the model is to demonstrate that a victim's decision to report is multifaceted and fluid, and this more holistic framework highlights the scale of the challenge that academics, policy-makers and practitioners face in dismantling these barriers. In some ways, what is needed above all else is a significant step-change in the way in which policy-makers and practitioners understand, talk about and approach reporting. In the context of shrinking resources, mounting scrutiny of public sector performance and escalating social divisions, it is increasingly important that criminal justice agencies and other relevant organisations adopt a much more pro-active, nuanced and grass-roots approach to connect with those who are most vulnerable to victimisation. The author's research has also documented the devastating impacts that crime – and hate crime specifically – has upon the lives of victims, their families and wider communities and these harms will only start to heal when victims possess the knowledge and confidence to come forward and report.

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