

Sandwell Victim Voices

Individual Experiences of Crime

Results of a Survey Conducted by Sandwell Victims Panel 2018

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1. Introduction

The intention of this report is to represent the views and experiences of victims of crime living or working in the West Midlands Metropolitan Borough of Sandwell. It has been produced on behalf of the Victims Panel for the Sandwell Local Police and Crime Board the 'Safer Sandwell Partnership'. The activity has been coordinated by Sandwell Council of Voluntary Organisations (SCVO), a charity which acts as an umbrella organisation for over 1000 local voluntary groups and community organisations.

This report builds on work completed in 2014 when 12 organisations from the voluntary and community bid for funds through SCVO to run consultation activities to establish victims of crimes views and experience. The full report 'Listening to Victims of Crime in Sandwell-A Report 2014' is available through SCVO who coordinated the project and compiled the final report.

This year the research was conducted by SCVO who directly approached individuals and organisations through two new surveys to gain the views and experiences of victims of crime and ask community and voluntary organisations about their responses to victims of crime.

2. Executive Summary

The research comprised an Organisational Survey completed by a range of bodies some of which provided direct or indirect support to Victims of Crime as well as those that said they would not know if their service users were a victim of crime. Over 13,500 people are supported annually by specialist organisations in Sandwell which support victims and other bodies estimated they supported a further 87 individuals. 75% of organisations actively signposted victims to others that could help or support them and the majority thought there are a range of barriers in referring people citing lack of resources, lack of processes and a lack of trust in other organisations.

The main focus of the work was an anonymous and confidential Individual Survey of Crime to gain information about the victims' experience both in data and also in their own words. Of the 327 people who completed the survey 76% had been a victim of crime. The intention was to try and reach those people more likely to be a victim of crime and less likely to report it. The majority of people who completed it were White British Females. When compared to Census Ethnicity Data for Sandwell the total of White British respondents was 13% less than the average for the area. However, there was a much higher than average response from three communities, Mixed White and Asian, Asian or Asian Bangladeshi and Black or Black British African. Other groups were broadly consistent with the profile of the Borough.

Respondents could comment on crimes committed over any time period and choose the one crime that was most significant to them and give more detailed feedback about the process of reporting the crime, their need for

support and their views on it as well as what they found lacking. The top 3 crimes in order were Burglary, Anti-Social Behaviour and Assault. Just over three-quarters reported the crime with almost half stating it was an excellent or good process and around a third stating it was a poor or bad experience. Only a quarter of victims sought support afterwards and of these just over half wanted emotional support and family and friends were the leading sources of that support. Almost half felt they needed advice and guidance and a third needed practical help. The majority of people already knew about the support available, or they were advised by family, friend or neighbour, and whilst one third could access support immediately around one in ten waited more than 6 months. Comments on support ranged from 'I wasn't given support even though I asked for it' and 'it was fragmented' to 'It was brilliant support, I felt I could hold my head high and not be scared'. When asked to say if the crime had affected their life comments dwelt on the negative impact with comments such as 'It made me scared to live at home' and 'Yes- I get so sad and angry sometimes' as well as 'Anxious in large groups of people I don't know'.

Case studies illustrate four experiences in more depth with an example of Domestic Violence compounded by poor communication between the Courts and Police. A second case where Harassment and a Hate crime at work also led to Intimidation, threats to kill and Honour crime. A third person suffering on going Anti-Social Behaviour, Burglary and Harassment feels badly let down by all agencies and a fourth was disappointed by Police response both at the time of their accident and in the subsequent investigation.

Overall it emerges many victims of crime have a positive experience in reporting the crime and gaining subsequent support. However, for some fear stops them reporting crime and for others the process and aftermath of reporting it was a negative experience. Again with support there are many positive experiences but for some waiting a long time for support or not being able to access it at all causes issues. If a person's situation is complex or unusual it can be hard to find the right support if any. Support organisations may wish to consider how they could tailor their service from the outset for individuals who present with a particularly complex set of issues. For organisations there is an opportunity to look at ways of working more closely, identifying what works well and addressing the deficiencies in current systems that have a negative impact on the victim of crime. A key element might be looking at the interpersonal skills of employees who work with victims as many responses cited the excellent support and treatment they got from those helping them and others felt let down by individuals and processes they felt were unsupportive.

3. Headline Findings

- 327 completed an individual survey about crime
- 248 (76%) responded they had been a victim of crime
- 56% incidents happened at home
- 77% of crimes were reported to Police

- 29% thought the process of reporting crime was poor or bad
- 75% of people did not seek support after the crime
- 57% wanted emotional support after the crime
- Family and friends were the leading source of support at 64% and 53% respectively.
- 33% were able to access support immediately and over 10% had to wait more than 6 months.
- 26% said the crime left no lasting effect on them with the remaining respondents suffering a range of issues.

4. Outline of the Process

In conjunction with members of the Victims Panel two surveys were designed.

The Organisation Survey was promoted through the SCVO newsletter which is distributed to over 2,000 local community contacts, sent directly to those previously involved in the 2014 survey, raised at meetings and promoted at Sandwell Networkers Meeting amongst other events. (See Appendix Three) The Individuals Survey was the main focus and whilst it was based on the original questionnaire from 2014 it was expanded to explore more areas of the victims' experience. The survey was anonymous though certain key characteristics were recorded as well as the details of the crime or crimes the victim had been subject to. (See Appendix Two)

Both surveys were published on Survey Monkey and hard copies were also made available with over 50% of individual respondents completing the questionnaire on paper.

Members of the Victims Panel were keen to try and reach communities who are more likely to be a victim of crime and less likely to report it so efforts were focused on targeting these groups. This meant older people, younger people, vulnerable adults, people recently arrived in the borough etc. were targeted rather than easy to reach people through established organisations.

The surveys were available online and in addition copies were printed with explanatory letters for respondents and guidance notes for groups who wanted to involve their members. Individuals were also given information on organisations that could assist them if they still felt in need of help and support. A variety of methods were used to promote the survey and a wide range of organisations contacted. For further details about the dissemination of the survey please see Appendix Three.

Individuals were asked if they would like to be considered for a case study and these people voluntarily gave contact details. The individuals approached to be a case study were selected to represent a range of crimes, ages, genders and ethnicities as well as having a complex or interesting story to tell about their experiences.

Case study individuals were contacted and gave their information either by email or in a one to one meeting. They could also have had a telephone conversation. All were advised about how their data would be used and given information in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018.

5. The Organisational Survey

The Organisation Survey produced 12 responses from a range of organisations to understand better how organisations support or signpost people who have been victims of crime.

Asked if their organisation supported the victims of crime 25% said it was the main focus, 50% said they did indirectly as some of their clients were victims of crime and 25% said no or that they would not know if people were a victim of crime. Respondents in the last category did not have to complete any more questions unless they wished to make a comment at the end of the survey.

A total of 13,500 people were supported in a year by organisations whose remit is to work with victims of crime. Of those that supported clients indirectly two said they would not know the number and three others estimated they supported about 45 people cumulatively in the previous year. One other cross regional organisation estimated they supported a further 42 victims of crime in Sandwell.

Nine organisations actively signposted clients to other agencies and services which might be able to help them. The methods used to signpost people (they could choose more than one answer) were a formal referral process (44%), an informal process but would contact the organisation for the individual (56%), they would give a leaflet or website details (67%) or mention to a client other organisations or agencies which might be able to help. (56%)

All those (8 in total) who responded to 'Would you like to be able to refer clients to other support services?' replied yes. When asked a follow up question about the barriers in referring clients, of the 9 who replied (and they could choose more than one answer) 2 thought there were no barriers, 6 thought there was a lack of information 3 cited lack of resources, 1 thought lack of time and another 1 said there was a lack of process and 2 indicated a lack of trust and confidence in other agencies.

In assessing their own agencies ability to support victims of crime and refer them to other organisations 4 believed their services were excellent, 3 said good and 2 thought they could do better.

Only two organisations left comments when asked to add anything else they thought it would be useful to know. One thought their clients might also be victims of other crimes that they did not know about. The other stated they would be happy to look at ways of supporting the work.

6. The Survey of Individuals

6.1 Profile of Respondents

A total of 327 people completed the survey of which 79 (24%) said they had not been a victim of crime and 248 (76%) said they had.

It is worth noting at this point that it appears some people who were a victim of crime did not recognise it. The survey was anonymous. A number of surveys were completed by hand and a bundle were returned from an organisation which had distributed them to people they knew had been a victim of crime. It was voluntary for these people to complete the survey and yet a significant proportion returned the forms saying they had not been a victim of crime.

The current age of respondents revealed a higher than average participation from younger people aged 16-24 (22.3% compared to 13.9% of the population) and also for those aged 36-50 (31.8% to 25.7% respectively). The 65-80 age group and over 80 age group were underrepresented. Some of the age bands had to be combined to make a more meaningful comparison with the population data. Please see Appendix Four.

The ethnicity questions were based on the current categories the Police use so this makes a direct comparison with census data for Sandwell difficult. It is not surprising the White British response is lower than Sandwell as a whole 53% compared to population of 66% as the intention was to gain data from harder to reach groups. It was unexpected to reach a higher proportion of Mixed White and Black African, Mixed White and Asian and Asian or Asian British Bangladeshi respondents. (0.62%, 1.86% and 7.74% respectively) compared to Sandwell population (0.2%, 0.7% and 7.74% respectively). Other groups were broadly consistent with the profile of the Borough.

The overwhelming majority of respondents were women, over 67%, and 31% were male. One transsexual responded and nearly 2% preferred not to say.

The vast majority, 85%, said they were heterosexual, nearly 2% bisexual, almost 3% Gay or Lesbian with over 10% preferring not to say.

Almost 13% considered themselves to have a disability, 83% not and over 4% preferred not to say.

Concerning religious beliefs 36% were Christian and 32% said none with the next highest category being Muslim at nearly 15%. One person said Jewish and one said Buddhist. 8% preferred not to say.

People were asked for the first four elements of their postcode. Analysis did not reveal anything of interest or significance about location.

6.2 Details of Crimes

People were asked to record up to 5 of the most significant crimes to them and when it/they happened. Then they were to answer subsequent questions based on one crime of their choosing. It is clear from the data that some people answered about more than one crime and that is why some of the data totals more than 100%.

A lot of questions were asked about how long ago the crime was and what type of crime it was as well as the location of the incident. People could categorise a crime as more than one type for example robbery and assault.

The types of crime were as follows:

- 29% Burglary
- 22% Anti-Social Behaviour
- 17% Assault/Violent Crime
- 17% Criminal Damage
- 17% Theft
- 13% Harassment
- 12% Domestic Abuse
- 12% Vehicle Crime
- 6% Bullying/Coercive Control
- 6% Hate Crime
- 6% Sexual Abuse
- 6% Robbery
- 3% Driving Offence
- 1% Online abuse/bullying/harassment
- 0.5% Honour Crime

When the crimes occurred gave an interesting result in that 19% happened over 10 years ago, perhaps demonstrating the impact crime has on people.

- 35% Within the last year
- 22% Between 1-2 years ago
- 24% Between 2-5 years ago
- 17% Between 5-10 years ago
- 19% Over 10 years ago.

The majority of crimes happened at home and the details are as follows:

- 57% At home
- 22% On the street
- 9% In a public place e.g. pub, nightclub, shops etc.
- 9% In a public place e.g. pub, nightclub, shops etc.
- 6% In a vehicle e.g. taxi or own car.

- 5% On public transport
- 3% In home of another family member
- 2% In a friend's house
- 9% Other

6.3 Reporting Crime

The vast majority of respondents 76% reported the crime to the Police, 19% did not and the remaining 5% said someone reported the crime for them.

The reasons for reporting the crime were: (respondents could choose more than one answer).

- 69% It was the right thing to do
- 64% Wanted the person caught.
- 44% Did not want it to happen to anyone else.
- 25% For the crime number for insurance claim etc

Reasons for not reporting the crime were varied: (more than one answer could be selected)

- 37% Thought it would be too much hassle
- 33% Did not think the Police would help
- 24% Did not think the crime was serious enough
- 22% Did not have faith in the justice system
- 18% Were frightened of what might happen
- 9% Did not want it made public
- 7% Did not trust the Police
- 5% Were worried they would be blamed or judged
- 4% Did not want their friends/family or local community to find out

The majority of people told family and or friends about the crime (79% and 67% respectively) with over 5% telling no one.

When asked if they sought any support as a result of the crime 75% said no and 25% said yes.

The reasons for seeking support ranged from needing emotional support, 57%, required advice and guidance on what to do, 44% whilst 30%, needed practical help and 7% said as English was not their first language they needed information and guidance on what to do.

People sought support from a wide range of sources and could tick all that applied. The results were:

- 64% Family
- 53% Friends

- 26% Health Professional
- 23% Council, Housing or Social Services
- 16% Trusted individual such as teacher/support worker/faith leader
- 15% A Charity/voluntary/community organisation
- 9% Information on the internet
- 5% Telephone helpline
- 5% Independent Legal Advice/Advocacy
- 3% Local support/Faith Group
- 1% Social networking/online discussion forums

Most people seeking support wanted personal contact or advice from someone and this was also clearly seen in the 16-18 group and 19-24 who cited trusted individuals, friends and family as part of their support network.

People found out about the support they got from a range of sources, and could tick more than one answer.

- 41% Already knew about it
- 39% Family and friends helped me/advised me
- 20% Were directed by another organisation
- 10% Looked on internet/social media
- 8% From a leaflet

The majority of people got the support they wanted promptly but a significant cohort had to wait four weeks or longer.

- 33% Immediately
- 19% Within a week
- 17% Between 1 and 2 weeks
- 14% Between 2 and 4 weeks
- 4% Between 3 and 6 months
- 10% Over 6 months

6.4 Making Connections: Gender Perspectives on Crime

Analysing the data revealed some interesting information as the individuals' journey emerged. The following are a selection to review are grouped by gender and then crime.

Male Experience: Two men reported they suffered from Domestic Abuse, both were White British and reported the crimes. The male 16-18 year old said it happened 5-10 years ago on the street. The older male, aged 25-35 said it happened at home but police refused to open a case and give a crime number so he could not access support.

Four men reported Assault/Violent Crime and all reported it via 999 with 3 saying the reporting experience was positive but one saying it was not. This

latter respondent was reporting hate crime (homophobic) at the same time. Offences occurred at home, at a friend's, on the street and on a canal tow path.

Nine men said they had been harassed, 5 at home and 4 on the street and for the vast majority (7) it had occurred in the past year. 7 of the 9 did report the incident, all by calling 999 and 3 of those who reported the crime rated the experience as poor/bad.

Six men reported Hate Crimes of which 4 men were also the ones that reported Harassment.

One man stated he had been sexually abused at work 1-2 years ago but only sought support about 18 months later. He was aged 51-64 and decided to retire early because of the incident.

Female Experience: Twenty-seven women reported they suffered from Domestic Abuse with almost half occurring in the past year. Almost all occurred at home (23) with 3 occurring at a friend's home and 7 in public. 20 reported the incidents to the Police and 4 others had the crime reported for them. Of these 7 stated it was poor or bad experience. Less than half of the women (13) sought support after the incident with 10 saying they needed emotional support. Interestingly only two sought support from Black Country Women's Aid with others seeking support from family and friends as well as other agencies such as health professionals etc. Of the 14 women who did not seek support 5 say they are still scared and 5 have mental health issues as a result.

Twenty-four women said they had been harassed and for 15 it happened at home, 4 in someone else's home and 11 in public. (As some were harassed more than once the total is more than 24). 19 Incidents were reported with 14 finding the process okay or better and 5 saying it was poor or bad.

Six women reported Hate crimes of which 3 were also ones that reported harassment. One Woman (White British) states she has been involved in 3 incidents on the past 5 years at home and in public. Another (British Pakistani) has had 2 instances in the last 2 years and both were in public. Only 4 people reported the incident and of these 2 said it was okay or better whilst for the others it was a poor or bad process.

Thirteen women said they had been sexually abused of which the majority (9) were White British/White Irish/White any other background. 4 happened in the past year and 5 were over 10 years ago. 7 happened at home and 6 in public. 11 reported it to the Police, all told a family member or friend and 3 sought help from Black Country Women's Aid.

Two women had been subject to online abuse, both reported it to the Police and both stated it was a poor/bad experience.

One woman stated she had been involved in Bullying, Domestic Abuse, Honour Crime, Sexual Abuse and Victim of human trafficking. She did not report it to the Police as she said she does not trust them and did not want

anyone in her community to find out. She had mental health issues with nightmares and flashbacks.

6.6 The Victims Voice: Support After Crime

Respondents were asked to state what was good about the support they received and what could have been better and gave narrative answers.

A number of people said they were not offered support and some commented that they didn't get support even though they asked for it.

'Nothing came back'

'I wasn't given support even though I asked for it.'

'I didn't actually get any despite asking for it at the time of the incident'

'None given by Police or Council'

For others the support was insufficient or inadequate.

'Support worker could do a lot better'

'It could have been better if police took immediate action'

'Police referred to Women's Aid-it took a while.'

'Just told to keep updating them if anything else happens, despite requesting to be moved'.

'I received help and advice at work but very little from the Police-I tried to call 101 first but they weren't interested so after advice from management I went to the Police station and had a quick call from Police to get details and then 10 minutes later a text saying case closed.'

'Police officer contacted the person who was attacking my child and informed her of the consequences but it all took a long time'

'It was fragmented'

'We were referred to victim support by police, they listened to the problem as we are victims of antisocial behaviour and hate...they wrote a letter to the Sandwell Council but the council officer.....didn't bother too much-to the council officer it's just another letter'

Others had a better experience and it seems family and friends were an important source of support for some.

'Family support'

'Friends support'

'Supported by my GP and partner'

'Police officer visited and advised on how to improve security'

'My niece was seen by the school services and supported for a long time'

'Police dealt with this immediately'

'It was brilliant support I felt like I could hold my head high and not be scared'

'Health visitor wrote a letter to the council to help me move'

'In EMCONET people spoke with me in Russian and I was comfortable to understand them'

The next question asked 'Was there any support you wanted but could not find or access? Please tell us'

Nearly a third of respondents just replied No. Other feedback included:

'I could not access any support because the Police refused to open case and give a crime number'

'Wanted support for 2 years but nobody understood'

'Didn't know how and who to talk to at the time of the assault'

'Yes Police to do something about it'

'Wanted the help from social services but they closed the case'

'LGBT service was terribly unsupportive'

'Yes for harassment to be taken seriously'

'Looking back it took me a long time mentally to get over it. I didn't realise how I'd changed. (Withdrawn, angry) Quick emotional support or counselling would have been beneficial'

'There is a lack of clear guidance and support at work'

'From the police, there was CCTV a short distance from the collision scene but the Police did not seek to find it. It was only when made them aware did they say it was up to me to do so and not for them to go looking'

'Council offered no support'

'Victim Support did not get in touch'

6.6 The Victims Voice: Impact of Crime on Lives

People were asked 'Anything else you would like to say about the crime and its effect on you and your life?' and almost 80 people responded which is more than commented on either of the earlier questions about support.

'It made me scared to live at home'

'My children-nightmares. Myself, still in the evening double check doors, windows, etc.....'

'I was insulted by my manager, because he was British and told everyone that he hates Eastern European migrants. Also I was the most ageing person in my section'

'Yes.....sometimes I get so sad and angry sometimes'

'Had CCTV installed'

'IT RUINED IT'

'Scared to leave home alone'

'I still have flashbacks of the crime and effect'

'Appalling that the fraudsters targeted people out of work who are already struggling financially'

'Totally left me feeling insecure in my home, I always have both doors locked'

'Anxious in large groups of people I don't know'

'No because I recovered and came back to college to show them they can't stop me'

'Better LGBT services and better understanding of hate crime within the south Indian community'

'Saving money on street lighting gives higher crime and no one was caught and we had a lot of break ins that week'

'It does seem a lot of crime goes unresolved.....there is not enough police in sight which would just encourage me to feel safer I stopped using public transport a long time ago due to the fear of being mugged or attacked'

'Crime has affected my life so much that sometimes I wish I was not born in this world. I cannot get over what happened in the past, being controlled by

other people. Most of the time I am sad. I felt I was born for slavery, for trafficking. I was raped by my first husband and this affected me so badly'

'Continually feel threatened by this family'

'I no longer feel safe to leave my house and still am desperate to get supporting letter from Police so I can move quicker. I feel it's necessary to film every time I open the door as Police didn't do anything than chat with the neighbour again'

'It made me move away from a home me and my late husband shared and had spent thousands on and was near where I worked just to get away from her'

'I am angry because I was given the possible name of a suspect but I was never told if this was followed up'

'No proper action was taken was taken by the housing association and my family has also had harassment from this tenant'

6.7 The Victims Voice: Case Studies

The final question gave people the opportunity to provide contact details if they wanted to be considered as a case study and give further information about the crime, the impact and their views on how the process worked for them. People had the opportunity to respond via a more in depth questionnaire, or they could talk about it over the phone or in a one to one meeting. The following accounts are mostly their own words as they answered the questions and expressed their views.

Case Study One

When did the crime happen? February 2017

Crime: Harassment, Hate crime, Stalking, Honour crime, Intimidation and threats to kill.

Events: *"I was appointed as a manager for a public sector organisation. It emerged a member of staff, A, was not following policies and good working practices and I started to address the issues according to procedures and updated my manager by email. It became clear that there had been issues with A for a number of years which had never been properly addressed. A instigated a complaints meeting involving all the staff on that shift and I was told by my manager I would no longer be managing A and her colleagues and my work changed. Sometimes our work would overlap and we were cordial at break times though A often made snide remarks and asked me about my sexuality but I said nothing.*

In February 2017 I asked A to do a task and it was clear A smelt of cannabis and when challenged 'went off on one' and 'used the F word.' It was witnessed by other staff and A went off sick for 2 weeks. I made a statement at the request of my manager.

Two members of staff subsequently said 'A has told us they will screw you up' It emerged A had already started a stalking campaign prior to the incident by identifying my partner and family via Facebook, had driven along my road (which is some distance from work) and had showed family photos from Facebook to co-workers and had been in contact with my spouse. I come from an Asian background as does A so they were well aware of the impact of scandal on the family.

I tried to contact my manager without success but I could not leave work as there was no one to hand over to.

I was in an extra-marital same sex relationship but was not out and when I phoned my partner, Z, it emerged A had already contacted their spouse. As the situation was serious Z suggested I ring the Police. I was working a weekend and could not get anyone to take over my duties. I contacted the Police and carried on working. When my manager got in touch their main concern was why I had called the Police.

A couple of days later the Police came to work and said it was a hate crime and they would speak to A and warn them so nothing else would happen. I got a crime number and was told to phone Police if anything else happened. There was no mention of Victim Support.

The following week I spoke to my father and told him about my sexuality and also about historic sexual abuse from when I was a child perpetrated by extended family members for over 7 years. He was not aware of either.

A further week later, I was summoned home by my spouse, to a meeting of their extended family and the parties that had arranged our marriage. I was interrogated, threatened and intimidated by them overnight for about 9 hours. My employer added in the Hate Crime to the Misconduct charge against A but they were never suspended.

*I was not allowed support in the Disciplinary Hearing for A and was interrogated by A's union official. My employer said the hate crime was not a work issue and A was issued with a final written warning for the work incident. I went off sick with stress for 3 months and was referred to occupational health. They recommended I did not work with A and on my first day back the manager changed the rota and forgot to cover it so I did see A. I asked a member of staff to stay with me during the handover and as I left the building A said 'hope you have a F*** nice birthday'. I told my manager but nothing was done about it.*

A was eventually moved to another work location only after another employee raised a grievance against A for drug abuse and harassment.

The irony is that A is also homosexual and from an Asian background so knew the consequences of their actions.

For me the consequences were I was homeless for a period and without money when I ran out of sick pay. I have had death threats and also been told my home will be petrol bombed. There are certain areas I cannot go and places of Worship I have to avoid. The threats subsided a bit when the Police became involved but as they used a pay as you go mobile it was not traceable so the investigation is not progressing. The extended family will have contracted it out to someone to intimidate me."

Support: *"I have had very little as no one was able to help. Initially the first occupational health person was not very helpful. I contacted Summit House, Terence Higgins Trust and an Asian LGBT service in Leicester and none could help as they said it was a work related issue. The second occupational health person was better and was the one who said I should not work with A.*

Through my GP I got to see a Clinical Psychologist. He is nice but he said as an African he had never worked with a homosexual. I was diagnosed with Chronic Depression and Complex PTSD and he had never worked with PTSD either. The sessions aren't enough and I hope to get more.

I had to contact Victim Support but the Police had not referred it to them as A's offences were not on the crime database. Victim Support only have volunteers and recently I have been left 7 weeks between appointments and I now have a new counsellor. In the meantime, they never answered the phone and you could not leave a message and I eventually had to go to YMCA and leave a message for them to pass on to Victim Support."

Suggested Improvements: *"There needs to be improvements in communication between the Police and victims. I just got a phone call about the hate crime and really you need to see someone face to face.*

*Support for complex cases is not available and nowhere seemed able to help with the cultural aspects of this crime.
Victim support are ok but many are young people and they just don't have the life skills for cases like mine."*

Case Study Two

When did the crime happen? December 2017

Crimes: Assault/Violent Crime, Bullying Coercive control, Harassment

Events: *"I had a row with my partner X of 3½ years the night before and went to work the following day which was a Friday. When I returned X had smashed the house up and was drunk in bed. X would not leave and I left the house until the Police arrived. When they did X's phone went off and I found out they had been seeing someone else. The phone went off again and it turned out X was using cocaine but I had no idea. X was very violent and lashing out at Police so was arrested and in custody over the weekend. I kept phoning the court on Monday to find out what happened but nobody contacted me. Eventually at 4.45pm when I called I was told X was released on bail. I quickly packed a bag and left and later found out X returned home only 10 minutes later.*

X's bail conditions meant he could not return to the house, be on the street where we lived or contact me. I didn't know this and nor did the Police. There was a huge breakdown in communication. The Monday he was released X was found in the road outside our house drunk and in a filthy state. Someone had called an ambulance and X was so violent they had to call the Police to help them. By chance I was passing in a relative's car on the way to the shops and witnessed it. X was taken to hospital and later released. X was frequently seen by neighbours hanging around outside the house and lived in the shed for 3 days where later a large knife was found. I stayed away for a few days and got a call at 1am to say X had smashed their way in to the house. Police arrested him. X had self-harmed and there was blood everywhere. X was taken to hospital and was seen by the mental health team who released them. X later went to court and even though all the bail conditions had been broken they were released again. X was referred to the courts 3 times for breaching bail conditions and released each time.

The last time X was released a friend paid for a hotel room so they were not on the street. I was unable to return home, as it was a crime scene due to all the blood and blood prints over the door. I was indirectly in contact with X through a friend and though the relationship was over I wanted X to have hope and get help. I phoned X on a withheld number and said it might be possible to meet on Christmas Day if they got help and acted better.

On 15 December the friend who paid for the hotel said he could not get hold of X. I said to phone the hotel and check the room. X had committed suicide by taking 97 tablets and 2 bottles of brandy. X wrote a seven-page suicide note and had even chosen the music for the funeral. One of the police officers attending at the hotel had also been at the house when X self-harmed and had taken X to hospital. He said X had not been aggressive but kept saying they were going to kill them self. The officer said he could not believe it when X was released from hospital given the state they were in.

I had to buy a new bed for the hotel, pay for the funeral and settle his drug debts, because my family were at risk. I am now £10,000 in debt and working so many extra hours to pay it off.

At the time I informed every one of his death such as Police, Court, GP etc. However, I have a letter from the bailiffs' telling me they are coming to the house as I think there is a debt from the fines when X was first arrested. I have phoned everyone about it numerous times to try and resolve it but I can't get it sorted.

The GP practice has sent letters out about X's health checks and rights under GDPR."

Support: *"The police were amazing, especially at first with the Domestic Abuse and one WPC went above and beyond and eventually a few days after X's release found out the bail conditions. The Police always phoned when they said they would. I feel the Police were let down as if they had known the bail conditions earlier they could have charged X when they were breached. If X had been in prison they might not have committed suicide. The coroners' office has been very good.*

Black Country Women's Aid took 2 weeks to get in touch with me. The only support was to be told to get in touch with a solicitor for Non-Molestation order which would cost me about £2,000 as I work but I could do it online for free. I was not offered counselling as they said they had too many cases. I was never appointed a case worker and there was no follow up. Victim Support took 1½ weeks to get in touch. They said they would call back but never did.

X did not get the support they deserved as after assessment by the mental health team and declaring an intention to commit suicide after self-harming they were still released."

Suggested Improvements: *"There needs to be much better communication. The Courts did not tell me X was released and they did not tell the Police about the bail conditions. If Police knew X may have been arrested and in prison for breaching them and at least alive. Also the courts were told about X's death but the bailiffs still want their money. BCWA and Victims Support need to improve their service as they did not help and gave some poor advice."*

Case Study Three

When did the crime happen? January 2015

Crime: Hit and run road traffic accident

Events: *“I was cycling on a quiet Sunday morning and was hit by a car that did not stop. I got the colour of the car but not the make or model. A passing driver called 999 and Police and ambulance arrived. Police support was very poor. At the scene the Police officer was more concerned with moving the first paramedics vehicle even though I was sitting in it (a 4x4) awaiting a full ambulance assessment. Even the medic said she thought he was out of order. The medic also had to argue the case for my bike to be taken home by the Police as we have no car as a family. She said to one officer ‘well you can’t just leave it at the side of the road can you’ and his response was ‘I suppose we’ll have to try and get a van’.*

It was over a week before the police contacted me for a statement and at that time I asked if they had checked the factories along the road for CCTV. The officer told me it was my responsibility to tell them (the Police) there was any possible CCTV available. At the time of the collision I was left unconscious in the road and my injuries mean I have been left with physical scarring and permanent nerve damage. It was a further two weeks before I heard from the police again and was told there was little possibility of tracing the driver. At the time I lost all confidence in the Police, but thankfully due to the hard work of a couple of officers road crime against cyclists is now being taken much more seriously.”

Support: *“Police were disinterested both at the scene and as follow up.”*

Suggested Improvements: *“Police need to make full use of all avenues as in my case CCTV footage was lost because they were too idle to look for or think of the possibility.”*

Case Study Four

When did the crime happen? Since 2014 and is still happening.

Crimes: Anti-Social Behaviour, Burglary, Harassment, Hate Crime.

Events: *“This has been ongoing since we moved in to the property in 2014. It started with throwing eggs on windows, then mud balls, after that they managed to get into my car without breaking any locks or glass and stole my Tom Tom and a few other things. We live in a corner property and back on to open space. Beer bottles and drinks cans get thrown in to the garden. Fence panels were removed and we thought well they are old and replaced them. but again they took wood out of the panels. Twice a big dog was left in our garden on purpose. Playing football in the road and hitting windows and denting cars is normal and our car has been dented. This started with 3 teenagers knocking doors and asking to cut grass in the garden but we said no and the same night they were throwing eggs at the house. We found this out from the security guard working in the company opposite. Then they took my car’s rear number plates and also the self-propelled lawn mower I had bought for my extra-large garden was stolen from the shed. Our satellite dish cable was cut and they tried again to steal the cars number plate. They couldn’t get it as the Police had given me a special screw for it but they damaged it and broke the back light. We put up CCTV cameras and they have tried to break them with the football. There is always a big group of teenage boys and girls standing or sitting on a side wall or on the playground opposite until late night making a noise by laughing and talking loudly and with loud bikes. I can see from my CCTV there is a group sitting outside on our wall on the side street.*

There has been a lot of stress and the attacks were really bad when we lost a baby and it made things even worse. We can’t watch TV until late as if they hear it they start messing with the satellite cable again. We can’t let our son play in the garden because of the problems, especially since the dog incidents.

I have reported it to the Police, Sandwell Council, the Anti-Social Behaviour department and Victim Support but we felt we were in the wrong as Police said they know who it is but they need evidence. Sandwell council did not bother much as they think we just want to change. We asked for help from our local councillor who tried to help and contacted the housing officer. But this officer didn’t listen much. The Anti-Social behaviour department did door knocking on the street and they told us no one had a problem but this is where these people live. We spoke to some Asians living on the street but they did not want to get involved as they fear they will get in to trouble if they complain. After we complained to the Anti-Social Behaviour department things were calm for a few weeks. It looks like they have links inside the council giving them information that there have been complaints.”

Support: *“No one listens much, if someone does it is just ticks in a box. Most of the time we are told ‘we can’t do much about this’. There should be a team looking into these things rather than one person as one person doing the job just says they have too much to do. But in the end someone is suffering and they are not bothered. We are living a very stressful life and have to be more alert. Police told us not to mess with them as they are not very nice people.”*

Suggested Improvements: *“There should be CCTV cameras on side streets and main roads and a proper department looking in to these matters as the antisocial department took months before they went knocking on doors. They said they were waiting for the Police officer to go with them. It was just a tick in their book as you can’t do much in half an hour. If you want to see reality come and see us as it is too easy to sit in an office, sit on your hands and say sorry we can’t do anything. There is always a way if you want to help someone. When we had to call 999 the officer said these many things look like a hate crime but the Council and Anti-Social team didn’t listen much.”*

7. Summary of Findings

Specialist Organisations that support victims of crime provide a valuable service for the majority of service users. However some people who are eligible do not seek support, even if they need it and for others they have to wait too long for the support or in some cases they do not find it helpful. There is scope for some improvements to both formal and informal referral processes in some of the larger bodies and statutory organisations. Some smaller organisations might benefit from knowing more about the current support available so they can appropriately direct any victims of crime they come across.

Reading all the evidence from individuals it is without doubt that for a significant number of victims crime can have a devastating effect on them for a number of years. Many have their lives significantly altered as a result. Others live in fear or change their behaviour in other major ways. Some of this has an unquantifiable economic effect on Sandwell such as not using public transport, being fearful shopping, leaving work because of crime or seeking to move home. Agencies may wish to look at the support they give and evaluate if one size fits all or if they should offer a more flexible approach for some individuals with more demanding issues. For example, if a person's circumstances are very complex then organisations could consider at the initial assessment or meeting whether the usual level of support will be sufficient in this case. Equally if the problem is ongoing such as Anti-social behaviour then not closing a case until it is satisfactorily resolved or reviewing the situation a short time later may help in managing a victims' expectations. Organisations may also want to look at, analyse and share some of the case studies so as to see what worked and what didn't for the victims in those instances. Also reviewing some of the shorter comments about support reveals both good and bad experiences and areas where organisations can assure themselves there is no need for change and address the areas which could be improved. All employers, and especially larger ones may want to review their internal policies and processes to ensure they properly support employees who raise potentially criminal issues with them whether or not they happen directly in the workplace.

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SCVO would like to thank and acknowledge the contributions of all those who participated in the questionnaires and also those who have generously shared their personal stories as a case study.

In addition, thanks are also due to the numerous people and organisations who kindly supported the promotion of the survey and helped with the collation of the questionnaires.

Staff at Sandwell Trends have been very helpful in providing data to compare with population of Sandwell.

Finally thank you to the Sandwell Police and Crime Board 'Safer Sandwell Partnership' for providing funding for this Victims Voices report.

Appendices

Appendix One: Sandwell Victim Voices - Individual Experiences of Crime Questionnaire.

Appendix Two: Sandwell Victim Voices Organisational View on Supporting Victims of Crime.

Appendix Three: Summary of Methods Used to Promote the Individual Survey.

Appendix Four: Age Group Comparison

Appendix Five: Ethnicity Profile of Survey Respondents Compared to Sandwell Census Data.

Appendix Three

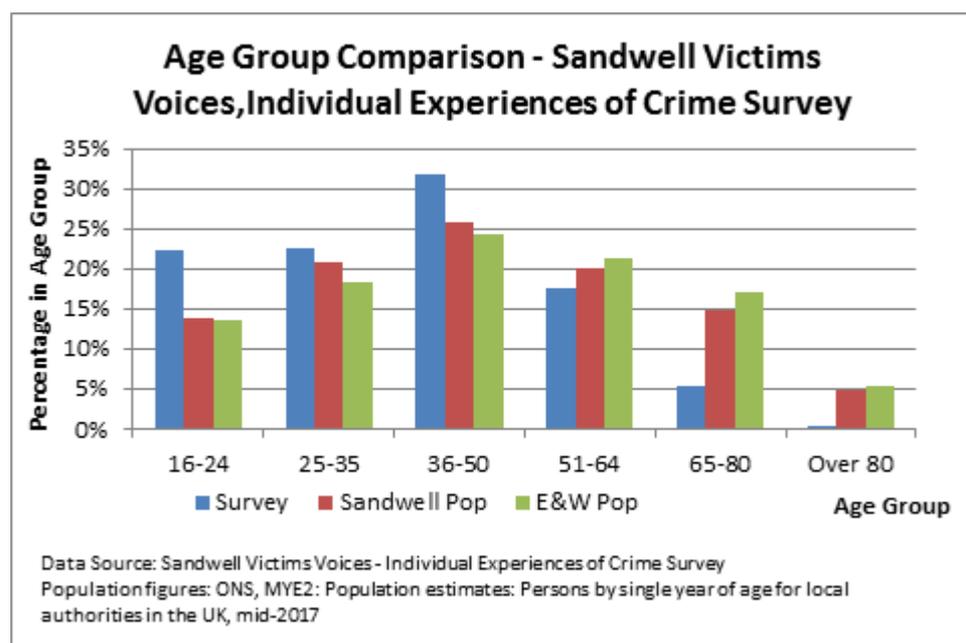
Summary of Methods Used to Promote the Individual Survey.

- Organisations which participated in the 2014 survey were all contacted and invited to become involved again. For a number of reasons only one did so directly.
- Promoted to Victims Panel Member Organisations.
- SCVO staff were briefed and given printed packs to promote both surveys where they could to relevant parties.
- Presentation at SCVO Breakfast Meeting.
- Appeared regularly in SCVO weekly newsletter distributed to over 2,200 organisations and individuals.
- Promoted to Sandwell Networkers Group and packs given to interested/relevant parties.
- Featured in Express and Star.
- Sandwell College promoted it to their staff and students.
- SCVO posted it on Twitter and Facebook regularly by and retweeted by councillors and others.
- Promoted through Sandwell Council via email to 4,500 staff.
- Also circulated on Sandwell Council E-Bulletin to 5-7,000 residents.
- Posted on WMNow by Jessica Redmond, WM Police to 2,884 residents.
- Interviewed for Black Country Talking Newspaper and arrangements made to support visually impaired participants.
- Youth Commissioners of Police and Crime Commission were asked to promote it.
- Posters were displayed in range of public places such as Libraries, Tesco, Shop Mobility etc.
- Individual contacts were made with a wide range of organisations such as Victim Support, YMCA, Succeed etc.
- Victim support text the link to the survey to all their current clients.
- Approaches were made to Russian and Polish Communities through EMCONET and Walk of Life respectively and the survey was translated into both languages.

Appendix Four

Age Group Comparison

Age Group Comparison - Sandwell Victims Voices, Individual Experiences of Crime Survey				
	Survey Responses		Sandwell - Population	England & Wales - Population
Age Group	Count	%	%	%
16-24	71	22.3%	13.9%	13.5%
25-35	72	22.6%	20.8%	18.4%
36-50	101	31.8%	25.7%	24.3%
51-64	56	17.6%	20.1%	21.4%
65-80	17	5.3%	14.7%	17.1%
Over 80	1	0.3%	4.7%	5.4%
Total (Aged 16 & Over)	318	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Prefer not to say	10			
Data Source: Sandwell Victims Voices - Individual Experiences of Crime Survey Population figures: ONS, MYE2: Population estimates: Persons by single year of age for local authorities in the UK, mid-2017				



Appendix Five

Ethnicity Profile of Survey Respondents Compared to Sandwell Census Data.

Ethnicity	Survey Response %	Sandwell Data % *
White British	53	66
White Irish	0.93	0.7
White-any other background	8.98	
Mixed White and Black Caribbean	1.55	2
Mixed White and Black African	0.62	0.2
Mixed White and Asian	1.86	0.7
Mixed any other background	0.31	
Asian or Asian British-Indian	8.96	10
Asian or Asian British Pakistani	5.57	4.5
Asian or Asian British Bangladeshi	7.74	2.1
Asian or Asian British-any other Asian background	0.31	
Black or Black British Caribbean	2.79	3.7
Black or Black British African	2.48	1.46
Black or Black British-Any Other Background	0.31	0.5
Chinese	0	
Any other ethnic group	2.79	2.8
Prefer not to say	3.41	

*From Sandwell Trends

Note: Census Data has more categories of Ethnicity than the Individual Survey so direct comparisons are difficult to make for some groups.