

A portrait of Sophie Lancaster, a young woman with dark hair and red dreadlocks, smiling. She has multiple piercings, including a nose ring, lip rings, and a tongue ring. She is wearing a red top. The background is dark with a pattern of black roses.

THE SOPHIE LANCASTER FOUNDATION ALTERNATIVE SUBCULTURE HATE CRIME SURVEY

COMMENTARY
PUBLISHED OCTOBER 2023

www.sophielancasterfoundation.com

Registered Charity Number: 1129689

BACKGROUND – THE LAW COMMISSION HATE CRIME REVIEW

The Sophie Lancaster Foundation decided to launch the UK's largest survey to find out how hate crime is affecting the lives of people from alternative subcultures following the Law Commission review into Hate Crime, published in December 2021 (ISBN 978-1-5286-3067-2).

In the Report, the Law Commission recommended that Alternative Subculture was not added to the monitored strands of hate crime. For characteristics to be added to the current five already monitored, three criteria had to be met.

The first, 'Additional Harm' was met:

"We therefore accept that the 'additional harm' criterion is met in respect of alternative subcultures. The work of academics such as Garland, the testimony we have heard from The Sophie Lancaster Foundation ... powerfully demonstrate the way in which members of alternative subcultures experience these crimes as an attack on their core identity, and this in turn causes wider fear amongst the affected community." (Paragraph 7.131)

The second criterion demanded a 'Demonstrable Need' for protection and the Report stated:

"However, we are of the view that the available evidence of this criminal targeting does not establish a strong demonstrable need to extend protection to this group." (Paragraph 7.132)

For the Sophie Lancaster Foundation, this is at odds with the experiences that alternative people have related over the last fifteen years and indicated the need to gather evidence, rather than suggesting any doubt that criminal targeting is prevalent.

Finally, and disturbingly, for the third criterion, 'Suitability' the Law Commission stated:

"We are mindful of the significant concerns ... groups such as paedophiles or extremist groups could plausibly fall within a broad definition of 'alternative subcultures'." (Paragraph 7.134)

For the Law Commission summing up, to conflate alternative subcultures with paedophiles is unforgivable. For an already demonised and marginalised group this reinforces the prejudicial and stereotypical accusations of immorality and criminality. If a different definition is needed say so; but this text simply plays to the gallery and comforts the moral entrepreneurs in their view of alternative subcultures as deviant.

HOW CAN YOU PROSECUTE A HATE CRIME WHEN YOU DON'T RECOGNISE IT?

Sophie Lancaster's murder was sentenced as a Hate Crime. His Honour Judge Russell QC who presided over the case, said in his sentencing observations:

"I am satisfied that the only reason for this wholly unprovoked attack, was that Robert Maltby and Sophie Lancaster were singled out for their appearance alone because they looked and dressed differently from you and your friends. I regard this as a serious aggravating feature of this case, which is to be equated with other hate crimes such as those where people of different races, religions, or sexual orientation are attacked because they are different."

Judge Russell QC

This recognition of hate crime is paramount. We know from victims of hate crime, they want to be treated with respect and taken seriously. When a crime is tagged as a hate crime, the police take it more seriously; there is more support for victims; and not least, perpetrators receive enhanced sentencing.

While alternative subcultures is not a monitored strand of hate crime, the chances of hate crime against alternative people being identified and investigated as such, is slim. We know that alternative people are seen as complicit when they suffer hate, as they 'draw attention to themselves' and 'choose to look like that'. These views are reinforced in countless ways, in the media, on TV, in social media, in the Law Commission Report. If the justice system is representative of our society - no wonder the alternative community have little confidence that their voices will be listened to and they will be seen.



THE SURVEY

The Sophie Lancaster Foundation recruited an expert panel made up of academics and hate crime experts from the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) Independent Advisory Group on Hate Crime, the Centre for Hate Studies at the University of Leicester, the University of Plymouth, the University of Surrey and from Stop Hate UK and RTSI (Right to Subcultural Identity), Sweden. A survey was developed and ran from June to December 2022. It was promoted on social media, online, in print and at festivals and 290 surveys were completed.

The survey aimed to find out:

- the types of hate crime people from alternative subcultures experience
- the effect it has on their lives
- the levels of hate crime reporting

Key Findings

Type of Hate Crime

Verbal Abuse

71% have been regularly or occasionally verbally abused
Only 6% said they have been never verbally abused

Threats or Harassment in Person

87% have been threatened or harassed in person
For 51%, this occurs regularly or occasionally

Threats or Harassment Online

71% have been threatened or harassed online
46% suffer from this regularly or occasionally

Physical attack

56% have been physically attacked
For 17%, this occurs regularly or occasionally

80% of participants experience at least one of the above forms of hate crime on a regular or occasional basis.

5% of participants experience all above forms of hate crime on a regular or occasional basis.

Why Respondents were Targeted

86% stated they were targeted because of their subcultural status or membership or because they looked alternative

Impact of Hate Crime

Respondents answered as follows:

- 84% Made me feel anxious
- 69% Made me avoid certain areas or routes
- 37% Made me change my appearance/the way I dress
- 27% Made me feel suicidal
- 27% Made me want to move from my home

Only 3% of respondents cited that they experienced none of the above impacts of hate crime.

27% stated that the hate they were subjected to made them feel suicidal.

Hate Crime Reporting

Respondents answered as follows:

- 73% of respondents have never reported their hate crime
- 29% said they didn't think anyone would take it seriously
- 13% stated they did not know who to speak to
- 12% said nobody could have done anything to help

Reporting Mechanisms

The vast majority of those that did report their hate crime, reported it to the police - 19% of all respondents.

69% were fairly or very dissatisfied with the experience.

THE SOPHIE LANCASTER FOUNDATION RESPONSE

The data speaks for itself and backs up the experiences recounted to us in the emails and calls we receive every week and at every festival and event we go to. Alternative people are harassed, demonised, marginalised and assaulted on a regular basis, simply for being who they are. When there are conversations about hate crime, it ends up being about what they were wearing or their 'choices' and not about the attitudes and behaviours of perpetrators. What really hurts victims is when they try to tell someone what's happening, the same prejudices and excuses are reiterated "yes, of course they shouldn't hit you but let's be honest if you look like that you are bringing it on yourself."

Three statistics to remember:

- 1 80% of respondents experience at least one form of hate crime on a regular or occasional basis.
- 2 73% of respondents have never reported their hate crime.
- 3 27% of respondents said the hate they received made them feel suicidal.

QUOTES FROM THE SURVEY

"I've been bullied all the way through secondary school for being alternative and not once did anyone do anything to stop it. I wish more people took alternative subculture hate crime seriously."

"I had my jaw broken in 3 places when I was pushed to the ground and repeatedly kicked in the face. The incident started with verbal harassment then escalated. I was attacked by 5 people because of the way I look."

"I have suffered abuse for being a member of the alternative subculture ... for 22 years. As a result, I have crippling anxiety and I avoid large crowds of people I suspect would direct abuse towards me. My 14 year old daughter ... is goth. She gets quite a lot of abuse online and at school for being who she is. This needs to change."



Our Commitment

Advocacy

- We will seek more funding for advocacy work to better support the alternative community
- We will tell the stories and experiences of alternative people so their voices are heard
- We will consult with the community about hate crime reporting and try to identify the most effective ways to encourage more reporting and support those that suffer from hate crime
- We will produce more guidance for the community to help them recognise hate crime and understand the law and their rights

The Justice System

- We will increase our training with the police and justice professionals to tell Sophie's story and highlight the effect hate crime is having every day on alternative people
- We will campaign to have more police services recording alternative subculture hate crime
- We will request a meeting with the Law Commission to understand why they reached the conclusions they did and feed back the impact their words had on the community

Education

- We will seek to deliver more work in primary schools recognising early intervention is essential in helping to shape attitudes to people who are different to us
- We will ensure our training helps young people understand what hate crime is and why they have a right to be who they are without fear and prejudice
- We will promote more extensively how to report all types of hate crime
- We will work with senior leadership teams in schools to help change negative cultures and challenge stereotypical views of alternative people
- We will increase our education output to get our message into more schools
- We will ensure free resources are available so that budget is never a barrier to accessing Sophie Lancaster Foundation support
- We will pilot the creation of Sophie Lancaster Foundation Societies in universities to inform the views of the next generation of professionals in sectors such as education, the justice system and health and well-being and mobilise their support

Report Hate Crime

If you experience hate crime:

In an emergency Call the police on 999

To report hate crime:

True Vision	National police hate crime reporting website. www.report-it.org.uk
Stop Hate UK	National hate crime helpline and reporting. (Local funding agreements apply, check if your area is covered.) www.stophateuk.org
Local Police	Non-emergency reporting, call 101.
Victim Support	Various agencies provide support across the UK. (Check their website to see what support is offered in your area.) www.victimsupport.org.uk



www.sophielancasterfoundation.com
enquiries@sophielancasterfoundation.com
Registered Charity Number: 1129689

Thanks to our partners in the research:



UNIVERSITY OF
SURREY

UNIVERSITY OF
LEICESTER



RTSI RIGHT TO
SUBCULTURAL
IDENTITY