

Chapter 6

Case Studies

The following case studies are a small selection from the many examples available.

Case Study 1

In 1998, a young gay man was attacked in his home by two assailants. They beat him up and trashed his flat. After calling the police, two officers arrived. When the officers realised that the victim was gay, their attitude changed. Instead of treating the attack as a hate crime, they implied that the victim was somehow responsible for what had happened. They took a statement and then left him on his own. No attempt was made to ensure that the young man was safe, secure and supported. The attackers returned and the police were called again.

The follow-up to this incident was also lacking; the young man was not offered any information about Victim Support services and detectives failed to gather all the available evidence from the scene of the crime. This young man left his home to return to live with his parents because he was so fearful of the perpetrators returning.

This incident prompted the creation of the Berkshire Anti-Homophobia Group as it highlighted the underdeveloped links between the local bisexual, gay, lesbian and trans-gendered community and the police.

Case Study 2

(This young man is now 28. He was 25 when these incidents began).

The verbal abuse began when I moved in with my dad in Swindon in November 1995. It began with name calling and whistling in the street, probably because my partner at that time was a bit camp. It then progressed to comments and rubbish being left on my path and then on my door in the morning. I had been warned by my GP that I was heading for a breakdown because I had been working too hard, so all of this didn't help. This put a lot of pressure on my relationship, which was beginning to break down. The next door neighbour used to shout abuse, calling me a "fucking queer", and she used to bang on the wall, day and night. If her kids

wouldn't go to sleep, she used to say that "the dirty queer will come and get you if you don't go to sleep". Her four-year old was terrified of me. When I asked her what her problem was, she threatened to get her husband onto me, and he came round and called me names too, he called me a "filthy pervert" and threatened to beat me up. Very soon, everyone in the neighbourhood knew that I was gay. They used to talk to me, but when they found out that I am gay, they changed. They used to pull their children out of the way if they saw me coming.

The weekends when my dad was away were the worst, especially when people came back from the pubs on a Friday and Saturday night. The men used to stare threateningly. In the morning I used to find dog shit pushed through my letterbox. They used to box my car in so I couldn't get out. Then I would have to go round to their houses and ask them to move it. They used to ignore my knocking and not answer the door.

One day, kids were jumping on my car. I chased them off and one of their fathers came at me, shouted abuse and threatened me with a crowbar. The next door neighbours used to spread lies and gossip and used to encourage their kids to verbally abuse me.

A gang of teenagers in Swindon town centre attacked me. They verbally abused me, again, calling me a "fucking queer". I was getting sick of all this abuse and so I hit one of them.

I felt I was living on the edge of my nerves. My whole body language said 'leave me alone'. I was sometimes scared even to go out. I hid in the house for a week once when my dad was away. I developed a fear of large groups of people, of being singled out.

The dog shit through the letterbox continued. The banging on the wall continued. The verbal abuse and threats continued. One day I called the police. They were okay eventually, but at first they thought I was exaggerating. The local kids thought I was a monster. One kid told his father that I had tried to pull his trousers down. Nobody listened when I said that I was gay and not a paedophile. I was abused myself as a child.

I left work because someone had begun to spread rumours about me. No one wanted to talk to me. They just ignored me. My supervisor told me that I had no future in the job because I was gay.

I sometimes felt that I was losing it, losing my head. I began to shout back at the woman next door. I was sick of playing the role of a victim and I wanted to fight back.

I went to the press and made a statement to a journalist. She didn't publish because she didn't want to bring even more trouble for me by highlighting the case.

I became very ill, and began to suffer from paranoia. The Christmas of 1996 was the worse. The kids next door were singing horrible songs and chants about me. The dad next door then said he was going to give me 'a Christmas present'. It

was a piece of wood he was going to hit me with. My dad asked them all to leave me alone, and told me to just ignore what they said and did.

I was attacked one day in the job centre. This is because I had become well known in the town. Again they verbally abused me, pushed me and then went for me. I hit them back. The police were called and split us up. They were waiting for me outside, chanting that they were going to get me in town.

My dad couldn't cope and he asked me to leave. I stayed at a friend's house for a few weeks, occasionally sleeping in my car to get some space. I sold most of my possessions to get by. I approached the local Gay Men's Health Worker for help. My GP said that I was a danger to myself, by this time I was feeling suicidal. All my plans for my life were being thwarted and I felt that there was little I could do. I had also become terrified of being followed.

Reading Borough Council's Housing Department found me a temporary flat in Tilehurst. Unfortunately for me, the previous tenant knew my ex-next door neighbour in Swindon. The harassment began again. My car was attacked, rubbish was pushed through the letterbox and the local kids used to lie that I had touched them up and that they'd get their dads onto me.

One morning a man came to the door. He said he knew who and what I was. He accused me of being queer and a paedophile. He threatened to break in to my flat and steal all my belongings. I pushed him down the path and out of the gate at this point. Then he invited me to come down the road to meet his mates, that they really wanted to meet me. He went off, and I went inside to get a crowbar. This vigilante response was because I was getting so desperate. Then some of them came up the road. One was carrying a big block of concrete and the other a wooden post. The concrete was thrown at me, grazing my face. The post was thrust into my ribs and I dropped the crowbar. I was then repeatedly hit with the post and crowbar. They also kicked me in the head and my back. One of the gang said, "Don't kill him". Then another said, "Why? He's only a queer". Two elderly neighbours screamed at them to stop (they were later too scared to come forward as witnesses of the attack). I tried to get up but my legs and arms were numb. My sight was also going. It was all blurred. I went down the road to get help from a friend. Meanwhile, they threatened me, telling me that they were going to come back and give me some more. I got to my friend's house and collapsed. He called the police. I was taken to hospital and later the police station. The police advised him to move out of the area and that they were onto this gang for other offences. My friend wanted me to stay, but I knew I wouldn't be safe. I tried to get a council transfer to Reading, but they couldn't help me because I did not have any local connections. Basingstoke District Council was able to help, and I moved to Kingsclere.

Here the abuse continued, from a neighbour (once he found out I was gay) and from local kids. I lost my job because kids trashed my car and I couldn't get to work. I was becoming more and more paranoid and I used to play up that I was a mental case so that people would be wary of me and would leave me alone.

In September of 1997 I went to court to prosecute one of the attackers. He went down for 12 months. I was also warned never to go back to Swindon because I would be killed.

In May 1998 I had a breakdown and was diagnosed with mild schizophrenia. I was also put on medication. The consultants in the mental health system initially didn't believe me. They thought I was making it up and thought that I had always had schizophrenia. They said it was all to do with me smoking cannabis occasionally. But my mental health problem was because of all the things that had happened to me.

It was mental torture and I thought I was going mad when all this stuff was going on. I just wanted to die. It was all too much, the humiliation, being branded a paedophile, etc.

It almost sounds unbelievable doesn't it? All of this nearly destroyed me. But I know of worse incidents, against friends and other people I know.

My life is improving now. I live in Reading with a supportive partner. My neighbours are supportive too and I feel relatively safe. Hopefully things will carry on getting better.

Case Study 3

In 1997, a gay man was attacked after being followed from a bar in Reading town centre. He was seriously beaten up and set on fire with a lighter. Several layers of clothes fused with his skin and he was hospitalised with third-degree burns. This incident was not reported.

Case Study 4

In 1998, a young gay man was raped in a cruising area in Reading town centre at night. As this young gay man had a partner, he did not want to prosecute for fear that his partner would find out about where he was.

Case Study 5

In response to ReachOUT's Local Secondary Schools Survey, a headteacher stated that a young gay man had left school early and unexpectedly because of the bullying he had experienced. The bullying was so severe that he required medical attention.

Case Study 6

ReachOUT's research interviews with young bisexuals, gays and lesbians in 1998 found that several had experienced bullying at school. Some of these young people experienced severe and systematic bullying, to the point where they were playing truant to avoid it. Consequently, their academic development was affected. None of these young people reported the bullying to anyone for fear that it would get worse.

Case Study 7

Over the past two years, ReachOUT has organised three self-defence workshops for the young people, following requests from them. These young people often complained of being fearful on the streets, especially at night and when leaving gay venues.