



# Hate Crime

## Interim Report

Exploring students' understanding,  
awareness and experiences of  
hate incidents



national union of students

*“16 per cent of all respondents experienced at least one form of hate incident while studying at their current institution.”*

# Foreword

Universities and colleges are often described as microcosms – smaller communities reflective of our wider society. It is a testament to our times that the UK student population is a diverse group of people, with a range of racial and ethnic backgrounds, religious beliefs, physical, mental, and learning abilities, sexual orientations, and gender identities, an expression of the myriad of individuals in our society. And with this intersection of people comes an exciting collision of different ideas, viewpoints, and opinions – the heart of academia.

Such an environment is destroyed when students are targeted by anti-social behaviour or crime because of their differences and yet, for nearly one in six students, this is an everyday reality. In the first nationwide student-specific research on hate crime of this magnitude, we found that 16 per cent of all respondents surveyed experienced at least one form of hate incident while studying at their current institution. Moreover, compared to victims of non-prejudiced anti-social behaviour and crime, those who experienced hate-related incidents were more likely to be repeatedly victimised as well as suffer greater impact – and yet, by and large these cases went unreported and the student affected unsupported.

Though one could argue it is a minority of students victimised because of prejudice, these experiences touch us all. Hate incidents affect not only the individuals targeted, but their families, friends, and the wider community – on and off campus. Such occurrences encourage mistrust, alienation, and suspicion – and in turn, result in isolation, exclusion and barriers to communication.

Eradicating hate is a crucial step to ensure our colleges and universities are places in which a diversity of people and opinions is not only accepted, but celebrated. Each and every student has the right to express themselves without fear, whether that be in their lecture theatre, in and around their institution, or in broader society. NUS will work to ensure this becomes a reality.

**Ben Whittaker,**

Vice President, Welfare

# The Project

NUS launched its research exploring the extent and nature of hate incidents among students nationwide in June 2010, as part of a larger project funded by the Home Office to reduce student victimisation.

Between October 2010 and February 2011, NUS conducted an online survey of 9,229 students across the UK. The survey examined students' knowledge and understanding of hate crimes, their awareness of current initiatives on campus, and their experiences of a variety of anti-social behaviour and crime, including verbal abuse or threats of violence; physical mistreatment; vandalism or property damage; burglary, robbery, or theft; distribution or display of abusive, threatening, or insulting material; and abusive, threatening, or insulting communication intended to distress or harass.

Although information was collected on all incidents reported, respondents were asked to indicate whether they believed their experience was motivated by a prejudice or bias against their membership (or presumed membership) of the following protected characteristics: race/ethnicity, religion/belief, disability, sexual orientation, and gender identity. This data has provided us with the valuable ability to compare incidents by bias and non-bias.

While the project is ongoing, the following report serves to highlight key findings from the survey; a more extensive report will be available in August 2011. It is hoped this research will inform policy so we can work to reduce social tolerance of hate incidents, promote prevention and early intervention, and support and educate students.

**Anti-social behaviour** – any aggressive, intimidating or destructive activity that damages or destroys another person's quality of life (Home Office).

**Hate incident** – any incident, which may or may not constitute a criminal offence, perceived by the victim or any other person as being motivated by prejudice or hate (Association of Chief Police Officers).

For the purposes of this report, 'hate incidents' pertains to those perceived by the victim to be motivated by a prejudice against their race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, or gender identity. These may be referred to as prejudiced or hate-related throughout the report. Similarly, incidents in which the victim did not believe the perpetrator to be motivated by any prejudice will be referred to as non-prejudiced or non-hate related.

# Key Findings

## Prevalence of incidents

40 per cent (3,666) of all respondents stated they had been subject to at least one form of anti-social behaviour or crime while studying at their current institution. These experiences ranged from verbal abuse or threats of violence; physical mistreatment; vandalism or property damage; theft, burglary or robbery; distribution or display of threatening, abusive, or insulting material; and threatening, abusive, or insulting communication intended to harass or distress.

36 per cent of these incidents (2,032 out of 5,704) were believed to have been motivated by prejudice against one or more of the protected characteristics. A further six per cent (346) were thought to have been motivated by a bias against a characteristic other than race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, or gender identity – such as a prejudice against age, gender, or membership to a sub-culture.

In every type of incident, victims targeted out of prejudice were more likely to experience repeat victimisation than those of non-hate related instances.

## Hate incidents

16 per cent of all respondents (1,441 of 9,229) experienced at least one form of hate incident while studying at their current institution.

The criterion for a hate incident is based on the perpetrators' understanding of the victims' personal characteristics, whether they be real or perceived; thus, any respondent could potentially be a victim. However, certain groups were significantly more likely to be targeted.

### Racial or ethnic prejudice

Racial bias was believed to have been a motivating factor in 30 per cent of hate incidents, constituting 11 per cent of all incidents reported.

18 per cent of Black Minority Ethnic (BME) students stated they had been a victim of a racially-prejudiced incident, compared to four per cent of non-BME students.

### Religious prejudice

19 per cent of hate incidents reported in the survey were thought to have had some element of religious prejudice – making up seven per cent of all incidents reported.

Respondents identifying as Jewish, Muslim, or Sikh reported considerably higher rates of victimisation based on religious bias. 31 per cent of Jewish respondents, 17 per cent of Muslim respondents, and 13 per cent of Sikh respondents stated they had been victims of a religiously-prejudiced incident.

### Disability-related prejudice

Disability-related prejudice was believed to have been a motivating factor in six per cent of hate incidents reported in the survey, constituting two per cent of all incidents reported in the survey.

Eight per cent of respondents who considered themselves to have a health condition, impairment, or disability stated they had been victimised in a disability-related hate incident, compared to less than one per cent of non-disabled respondents.

### Prejudice against sexual orientation

Nearly a quarter (24 per cent) of hate incidents – nine per cent of all incidents reported – were believed to have been motivated by a prejudice against the victim's real or perceived sexual orientation.

31 per cent of Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual (LGB) students surveyed experienced at least one hate incident related to their sexual orientation, as compared to two per cent of heterosexual respondents.

Gay students were most likely to be targeted, with 43 per cent of respondents stating they had been

a victim, compared to 40 per cent of lesbians and 19 per cent of bisexual students.

### Prejudice against gender identity

45 per cent of respondents who indicated their gender identity was not the same gender assigned at birth, and 17 per cent who preferred not to say, had been a victim of at least one transgender-related hate incident.

### Prejudice by association

15 per cent of hate incidents were thought to have been motivated by the victim's association with people of a certain characteristic. This accounted for five per cent of all incidents reported in the survey.

## Impact

Victims of hate incidents were much more likely to have personal problems connected to their experiences than those of non-hate related incidents.

In 23 per cent of hate incidents, the victim reported resulting mental health problems – nearly twice as high as victims of non-hate related incidents (12 per cent).

Similarly, in 17 per cent of hate incidents, the victim stated their experience had affected their acceptance of other social groups – four times as much as in non-hate related incidents (four per cent).

## Reporting

Incidents went widely unreported overall. However, victims of hate incidents were less likely than those who had experienced a non-hate related incident to officially report their experience.

Victims reported to someone in an official role at their university or college in only 13 per cent of hate incidents. In less than one in ten instances did the victim go to the police.

# Worries and behaviour change

*“Act less of how I want to truly be.”* – Survey respondent

28 per cent of students surveyed stated that they alter their behaviour, personal appearance, or daily patterns specifically in order to avoid prejudiced incidents. This number was considerably higher for victims of hate incidents, rising to 54 per cent.

# Understanding and awareness

*“I never truly realised how much my school does not protect/support us from such incidents. I actually have no idea what they would do if such incidents occurred.”* – Survey respondent

The vast majority of students surveyed (95 per cent) were aware that victims of hate crime could be anyone, not necessarily only those that belong to minority social groups. The same number also recognised that a hate crime occurs if a perpetrator targets an individual on the belief they hold a particular characteristic – whether this presumption is correct or not.

However, respondents appeared to have a more limited understanding of when they should report a hate incident, and to whom. 36 per cent did not believe they could report these incidents to organisations other than the police and one in five thought only hate incidents that constituted a criminal offence should be reported at all.

Likewise, most students were not aware of any hate crime services provided at their university. 64 per cent of respondents did not know if their university or college provides information about where victims of hate incidents could go for help and support; 70 per cent were similarly not aware if their students' union provides information, help, or support.

# Prevalence

*“I would say a lot of people are affected by it [hate crime], more than people will admit and they'd rather keep these experiences to themselves.”*

– Survey respondent

Respondents were asked whether they had experienced a range of anti-social behaviour or crime: verbal abuse or threats of violence; physical mistreatment; vandalism or property damage; theft, burglary, or robbery; distribution or display of abusive, threatening, or insulting material; and communication intended to harass or distress. Respondents were able to report multiple types of incidents, as well as indicate whether they were motivated by prejudice or not.

40 per cent (3,666) of all respondents stated they had been a victim of at least one of these incident types while studying at their current institution. Overall, 5,704 incidents of different types of abuse were reported (not accounting for repeat victimisation within one category – for example, a student experiencing multiple incidents of verbal abuse). 36% of these (2,032 out of 5,704) were believed to have been motivated by prejudice against one or more of the protected characteristics. A further six per cent of incidents (346) were thought to have been motivated by a bias against a characteristic not covered in the survey.

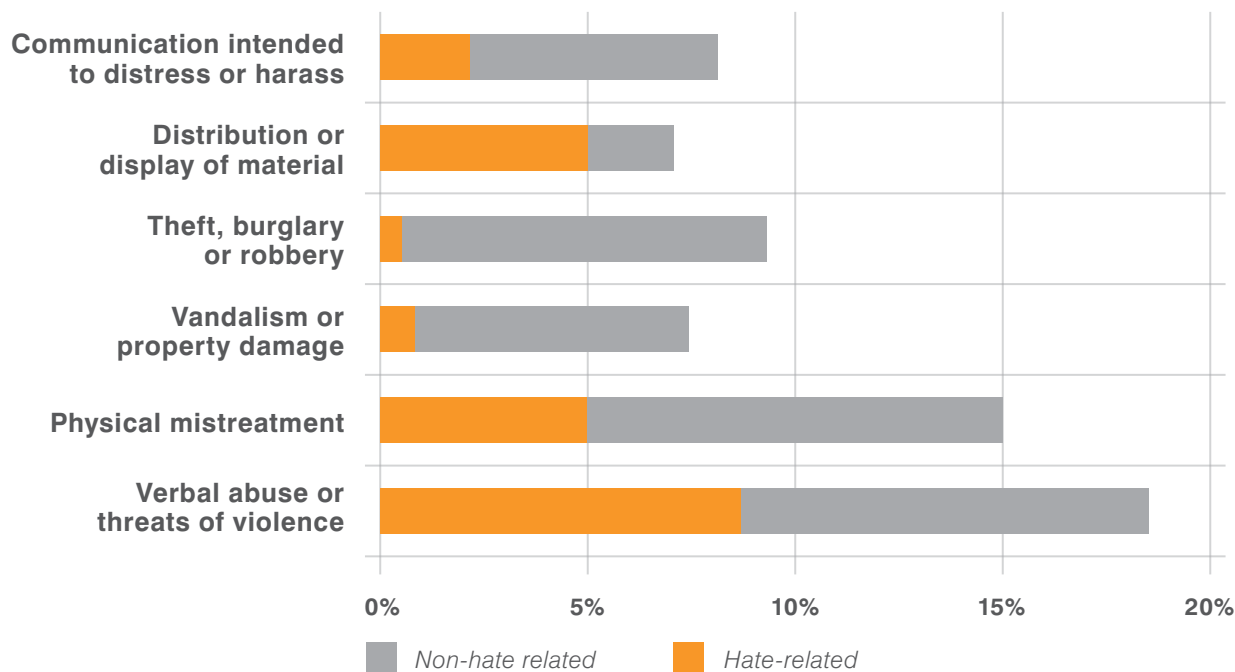
## By incident type

### Verbal abuse and threats of violence

18 per cent of respondents (1639) experienced one or more forms of verbal abuse, including threatening, abusive, or insulting words, threatening behaviour, or threats of violence.

In nearly half of these incidents (48 per cent) the respondent believed the perpetrator was at least partly motivated by a prejudice against their membership (or presumed membership) in a particular race/ethnicity, religion/belief, disability, sexual orientation, or gender identity.

This means that in total, eight per cent of students experienced some form of hate-related verbal abuse while studying at their current institution.



### Physical mistreatment

15 per cent of respondents (1377) experienced one or more forms of physical mistreatment. These ranged from low-level incidents, such as being spat upon, held down or physically blocked, to more serious incidents such as those involving unwanted sexual contact, being choked, dragged, burnt, or assaulted with a weapon.

In a third of these incidents, the victim believed the perpetrator was motivated by a prejudice against their membership (or presumed membership) in one or more of the protected characteristics.

### Vandalism and property damage

Seven per cent (665) of respondents reported an incident of vandalism (someone deliberately defacing or doing damage to their residence) or property damage (someone deliberately damaging, tampering with, or vandalising personal belongings); of these, 17 per cent were thought to be hate-related.

### Theft, burglary and robbery

Nine per cent (864) of students surveyed experienced at least one incident of personal theft (personal belongings stolen from bag, pockets etc.), property theft from outside the home (for example, from a doorstep, garden, or garage), burglary (someone illegally entering a residence

to steal, inflict bodily harm or cause criminal damage), or robbery (someone taking something by force or threat of force).

While a large number of victims did not see the perpetrator face-to-face and thus could not conclusively state whether it was hate-related, eight per cent of those who fell victim to theft, burglary, or robbery stated their belief that the incident was motivated by a prejudice against one or more of the protected characteristics.

### Display or distribution of material

Seven per cent (635) of respondents experienced someone distributing or displaying writing, signs, or visible representation they found to be threatening, abusive, or insulting (for example, graffiti or leaflets). Of these, 70 per cent were believed to have been motivated by a prejudice against a social group on the basis of their race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, or gender identity.

### Abusive, threatening, and insulting communication

Eight per cent of respondents (717) experienced abusive, threatening, or insulting communication intended to harass, alarm, or distress them. This took place in a variety of forms, including by telephone or text message, post, e-mail, or messages transmitted through the Internet (such as via Facebook, Twitter, or an online blog). 28 per cent of these incidents were thought to have been hate-related.

## By incident characteristic

### Race or ethnicity

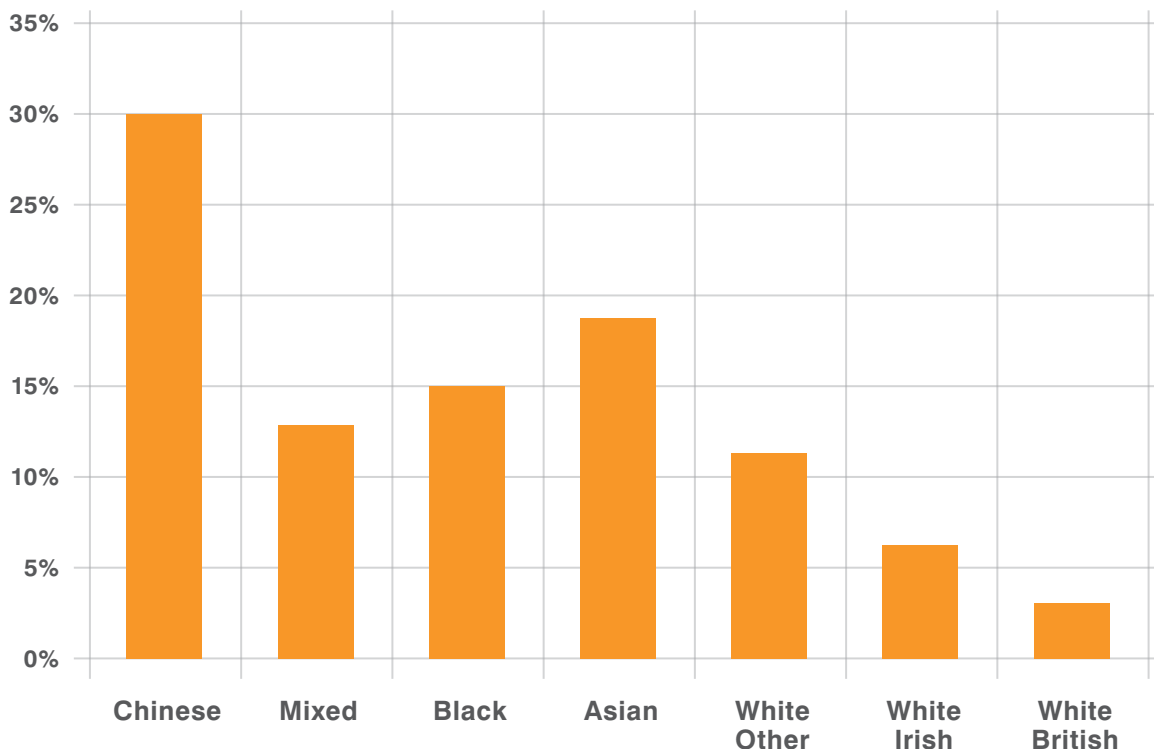
*“I have experienced racist comments and attitudes ... [due to my] Nepalese background. In the past, we’ve been sworn at in public, called names, had ridiculous comments such as “ching chong ching” [directed at us] and even been thrown snowballs at by a group of teenage boys! ... I feel as if this type of discrimination is ignored, and sometimes even accepted, in society. It disgusts me how I am either treated differently, ignored, or labelled as an inferior ethnic minority just because of the colour of my skin, my physical features and my foreign name.” – Survey respondent*

Racial bias was believed to have been motivating factor in 30 per cent of hate incidents, constituting 11 per cent of all incidents reported.

18 per cent of BME students experienced at least one racial hate incident during their current studies, compared to only four per cent of non-BME students.

Those of Chinese descent were most likely to be victims with 30 per cent reporting a racial hate incident. 19 per cent of Asians stated they had been victimised because of a prejudice against their racial or ethnic identity. A further 15 per cent of Black students and 13 per cent of mixed race students also reported a racial hate incident.

*Proportion of students within each ethnic group victimised in a racial hate incident*



*Please note: Base numbers vary according to how many respondents identified themselves as a member of that particular ethnicity and may be small compared to the overall sample.*



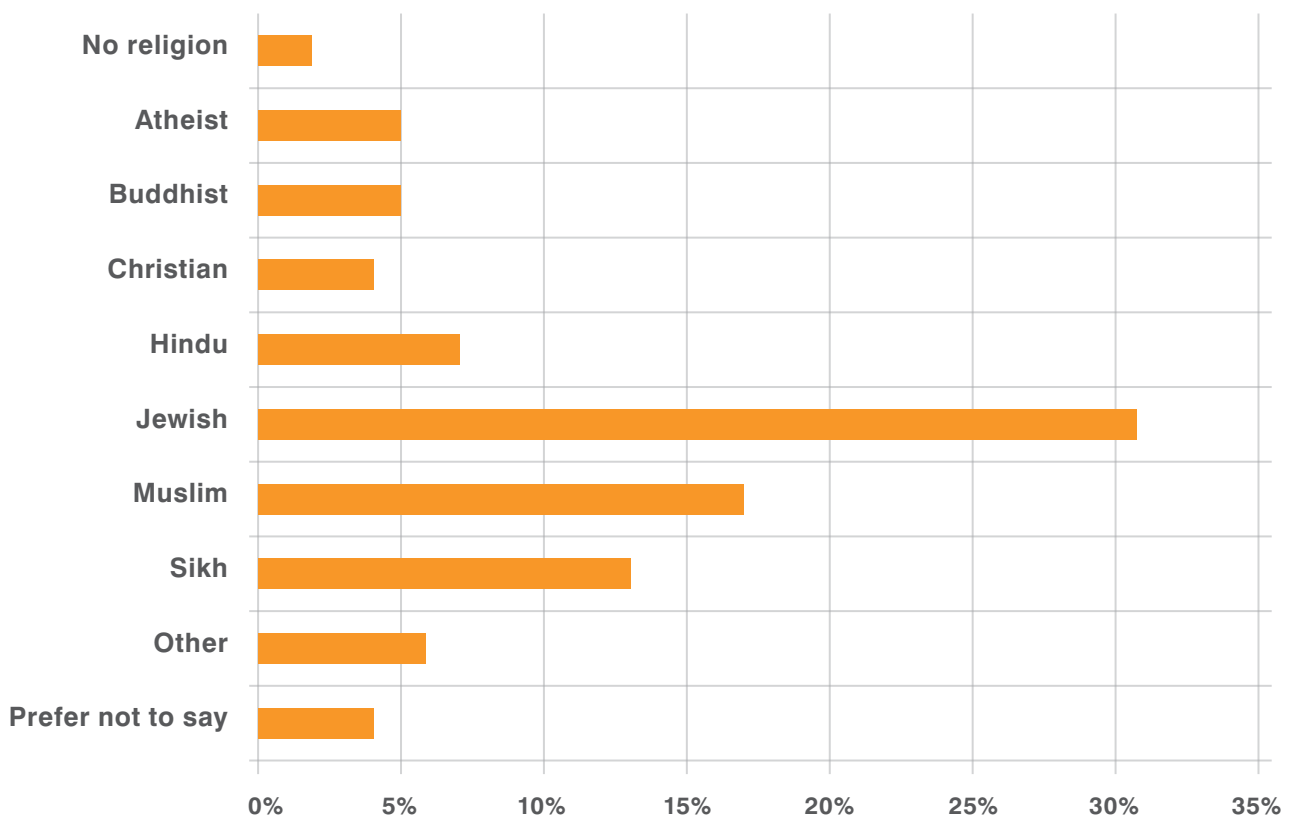
## Religion or belief

*“When I was younger I used to be quite dedicated to my faith but after having people make jokes I’m embarrassed to say what I am, depending on the type of people I’m around. I pretend to not have any involvement in my culture because of what other people might say.” – Survey respondent*

19 per cent of hate incidents were thought to have an element of religious prejudice, making up seven per cent of all incidents reported in the survey.

Respondents identifying as Jewish, Muslim, or Sikh reported considerably higher rates of incidents motivated by a prejudice against their religion than other religious groups. 31 per cent of Jewish respondents, 17 per cent of Muslim respondents, and 13 per cent of Sikh respondents stated they had been a victim of a religious hate incident.

### *Proportion of students within each religious group victimised in a religious hate incident*



*Please note: Base numbers vary according to how many respondents identified themselves as a member of that particular religion and may be small compared to the overall sample. Religions in which no self-identified respondent reported a hate incident were omitted from the graph.*

## Disability

*“I was subject daily for two years to public comments, minor physical attacks and Facebook bullying due to my disability. Students who had been friends throughout school suddenly stopped hanging around with me as it was such a mainstream culture they ditched me in order to achieve acceptance themselves. I suffered greatly for two years before making a stand and demanding the college took these incidents seriously.”* – Survey respondent

Six per cent of hate incidents – constituting two per cent of all incidents reported in the survey – were motivated by a prejudice against the victim’s disability (or presumed disability).

Eight per cent of respondents who considered themselves to have a health condition, impairment, or disability reported a disability-related hate incident, as compared to less than one per cent of non-disabled respondents.

Those with visible disabilities were more likely to experience disability-related prejudice. Nearly one in four (24 per cent) respondents with a physical impairment, and 15 per cent with a sensory impairment, stated they had experienced anti-social behaviour or crime motivated by a prejudice against their disability.

12 per cent with a mental health condition and the same number with a learning difference experienced a disability-related incident. Just under one in ten respondents with a long-term illness and a further five per cent of respondents with an ‘other’ disability also reported victimisation due to prejudice against their disability.

## Sexual orientation

*“While studying I experienced the worst form of hate crime regarding my sexuality. It was very frightening and affected my studies. I had no idea what to do and it made [me] incapable of concentrating. It would have been good to have someone to talk to. It broke me down [and] I am still nervous and wary and still unsure to what to do about it. At times I am okay and other times I am as nervous as a cat on a hot tin roof.”* – Survey respondent

Nearly a quarter (24 per cent) of hate incidents – nine per cent of all incidents reported in the survey – were believed to have been motivated by the perpetrator’s prejudice against a certain sexual orientation.

31 per cent of LGB respondents reported at least one incident that they believed was motivated by a bias against their sexual orientation, compared to only two per cent of heterosexual respondents.

Gay respondents were most likely to experience anti-social behaviour or crime related to their sexual orientation, with 43 per cent reporting at least one incident. This was closely followed by lesbian respondents, with 40 per cent stating they had experienced an LGB-related hate incident.

Just under one in five (19 per cent) bisexual respondents were victimised because of their sexual orientation; a further eight per cent who preferred not to say their sexual orientation also reported an LGB-related hate incident.

## Gender identity

*“I am careful to ensure that my outward appearance matches my birth-assigned gender when in public places despite this being incredibly uncomfortable. I avoid discussions about gender/sex/sexuality and religious situations. I take care to ensure that any identifying details about me cannot be traced online. It very much feels like I have to live a double life.”* – Survey respondent

The survey defined gender identity as a person’s self-identification as male, female, neither, or both, which may not be the gender they were assigned at birth.

16 per cent of hate incidents reported – six per cent of all incidents reported – were believed to have been motivated by a prejudice against the victim’s gender identity.

40 students indicated that their gender identity was not the same as the gender they were assigned at birth – 18 (45 per cent) of whom reported victimisation due to prejudice against their transgender background.

Seven of the 42 students (17 per cent) who preferred not to say whether their gender identity was the same as the gender they were assigned at birth also reported being a victim of transgender hate.

This compares to only three per cent of respondents whose gender identity was the same as assigned at birth reporting an incident involving transgender prejudice.

## Association

*“I live together with my partner and crime against his ethnic identity has affected the both of us. As a white person I have never suffered from racism and experiencing it for the first time near the age of 30 can be quite a shock. If it was the case that I split up with my partner for fear of suffering from racism, I would consider it a horrible result of hate crime.”* – Survey respondent

In addition to the protected characteristics, respondents were asked whether they believed the incident was motivated, or partly motivated, by their association

with persons of a certain race/ethnicity, religion/belief, disability, sexual orientation, or gender identity – for instance, being the partner or friend of someone who is presumed to have a certain characteristic. This question was posed for every incident type, with the exception of the distribution and display of threatening, abusive, or insulting material, since in these cases the perpetrator does not generally directly target individuals.

15 per cent of hate incidents were thought to have been motivated by the victim’s association with a person and the perpetrator’s prejudice against that person’s protected characteristic. This accounted for five per cent of all incidents reported in the survey.

## Repeat victimisation

The survey asked respondents whether they experienced a variety of criminal or anti-social behaviour. If they had, the survey then asked whether they had been victims of that particular type of incident once or twice, several times, or many times. In every type of incident, repeat victimisation was higher among hate victims than non-hate victims.

Type of Incident	Once or twice		Several times		Many times		Don't remember	
	Hate	Non-hate	Hate	Non-hate	Hate	Non-hate	Hate	Non-hate
Verbal abuse	55%	73%	31%	19%	11%	4%	3%	4%
Physical mistreatment	73%	77%	17%	11%	5%	2%	5%	10%
Vandalism, property damage, theft, burglary, or robbery	65%	88%	26%	10%	6%	1%	3%	2%
Distribution or display of material	63%	67%	24%	20%	9%	4%	4%	10%
Communication intended to distress or harass	60%	66%	25%	24%	13%	6%	3%	4%

## Location

While students reported a range of locations in which they were targeted, a large proportion of incidents occurred at the victim’s place of study – the exception being in cases of vandalism, property damage, theft, burglary or robbery, which predominantly occurred at or near the student’s home.

41 per cent of incidents involving hate-related verbal abuse took place at the student’s institution, including in the learning environment (accounting for 15 per cent), students’ union (four per cent), or other areas of the university or college (23 per cent). The three next most frequently reported locations was on a street, road, or alley (16 per cent), at or near the student’s home (11 per cent), or at or outside a bar or pub (eight per cent).

31 per cent of involving hate-related physical abuse took place at the institution, mostly in other areas of the

university or college outside of the learning environment or students’ union. Other commonly cited locations included at or outside a night club (23 per cent), on a street, road or alley (12 per cent), or at or outside the victim’s home (11 per cent).

64 per cent of incidents involving display/distribution of threatening, abusive, or insulting material occurred at the student’s place of study, with 41 per cent of these incidents taking place in and around areas of the university or college other than the learning environment or students’ union. A further 13 per cent took place on the street, road or alley.

Location was not asked in instances of abusive, threatening, or insulting communication due to their remote nature.

# Impact

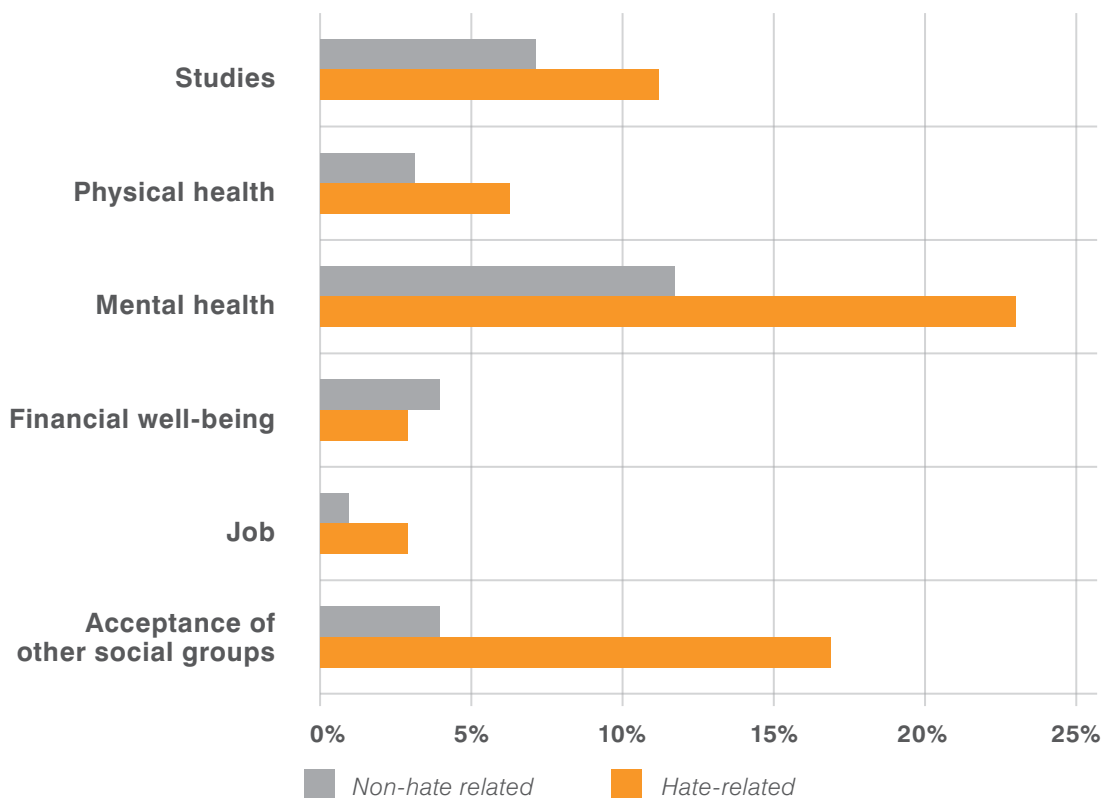
*“Small incidents which are terrifying to experience, but easily brushed off, are often more serious than being struck. If they occur regularly, they slowly wear away your mental strength until you can no longer take it, and you either bottle it, or react to it.”* – Survey respondent

Victims of hate were much more likely than victims of non-hate related incidents to experience problems as a result, particularly related to their mental well-being and acceptance of other social groups.

In 23 per cent of hate incidents, the victim reported experiencing mental health problems related to their experience – nearly twice as much as victims of non-hate related incidents (12 per cent).

Similarly, in 17 per cent of hate incidents, the victim stated their experience had affected their acceptance of other social groups – almost four times as much as in non-hate related incidents (four per cent).

***Do you have any problems now, or have you had any, that you believe are attributed to this incident? Please tick all that apply.***



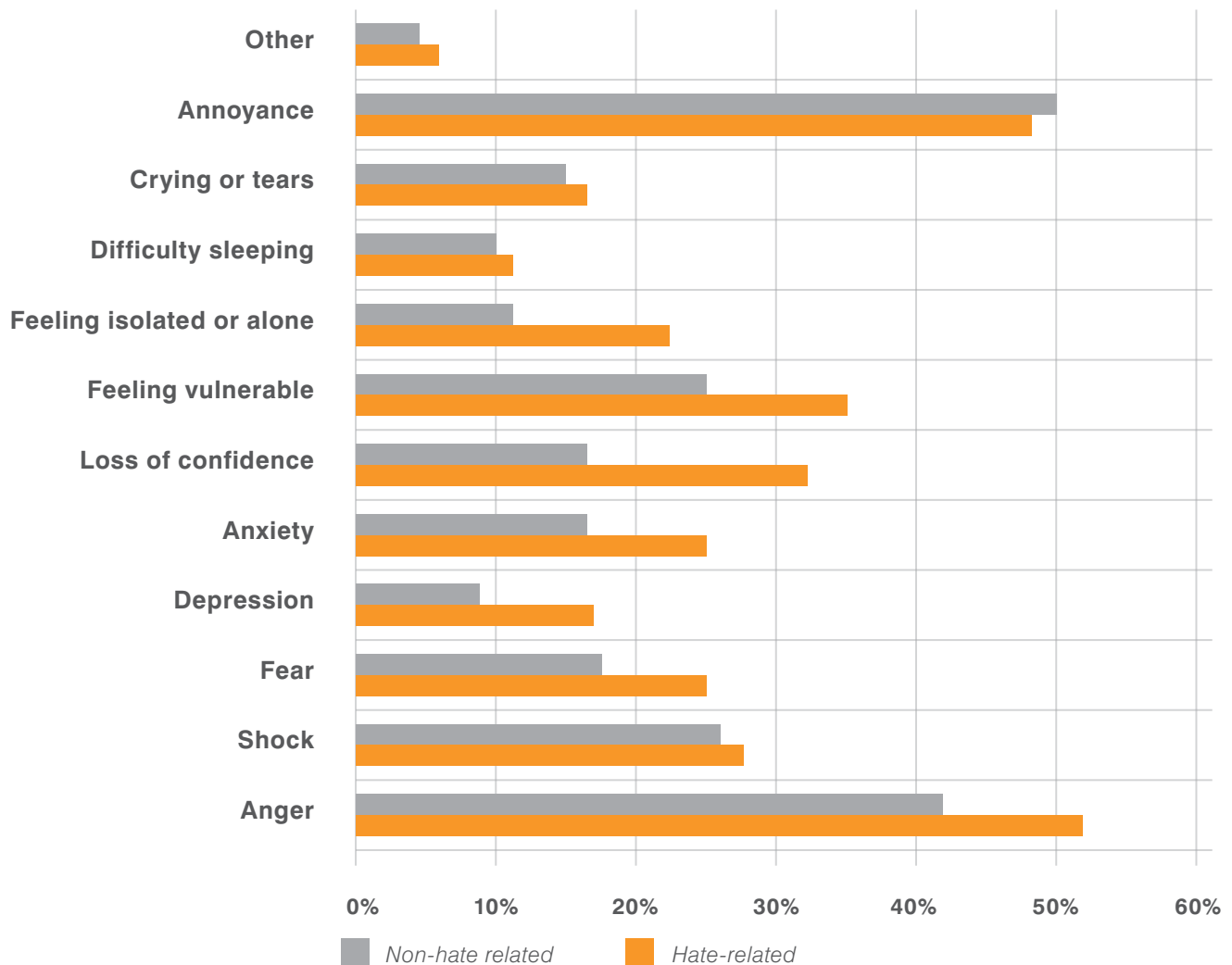
***“My confidence was destroyed by the incident. It led to severe depression and a stay in a mental hospital, and my PhD studies never really recovered. Other factors affected this but the incident described here severely impacted on already difficult circumstances.”*** – Survey respondent

Emotional reactions such as anger, annoyance, and shock were common among all victims. However, those who experienced hate incidents were far more likely to feel emotions related to their self-esteem and sense of inclusion. This was present even in low-level experiences, suggesting that it is not necessarily the incident itself, but the prejudice that motivates its occurrence that is most injurious – the experience effectively being an attack on the individual’s sense of self and identity.

In one in three hate incidents, the victim reported loss of confidence and feelings of vulnerability. In 22 per cent of hate incidents, the experience resulted in the victim feeling isolated or alone.

17 per cent of hate incidents caused the victim to suffer from depression, compared to only nine per cent of non-hate related incidents.

***Did you have any of these emotional reactions after the incident?  
Please tick all that apply.***



# Reporting

Incidents – be they hate-related or not – went widely unreported by their victims.

Overall, victims of non-prejudiced incidents were slightly more likely to report the incident than those of hate-related incidents. In 17 per cent of non-hate related incidents, the victim reported it to someone in an official role at their university or college; this number dropped to 13 per cent for hate incidents. The exception was in cases of physical abuse, where victims of hate incidents were more likely to be reported than those of non-hate related incidents.

Reporting to the police was similarly low – with the same trend being that, across the board, hate incident victims were less likely to report than non-hate related victims in any capacity. Victims reported to the police in 17 per cent of non-hate related incidents, compared to only nine per cent of hate victims.

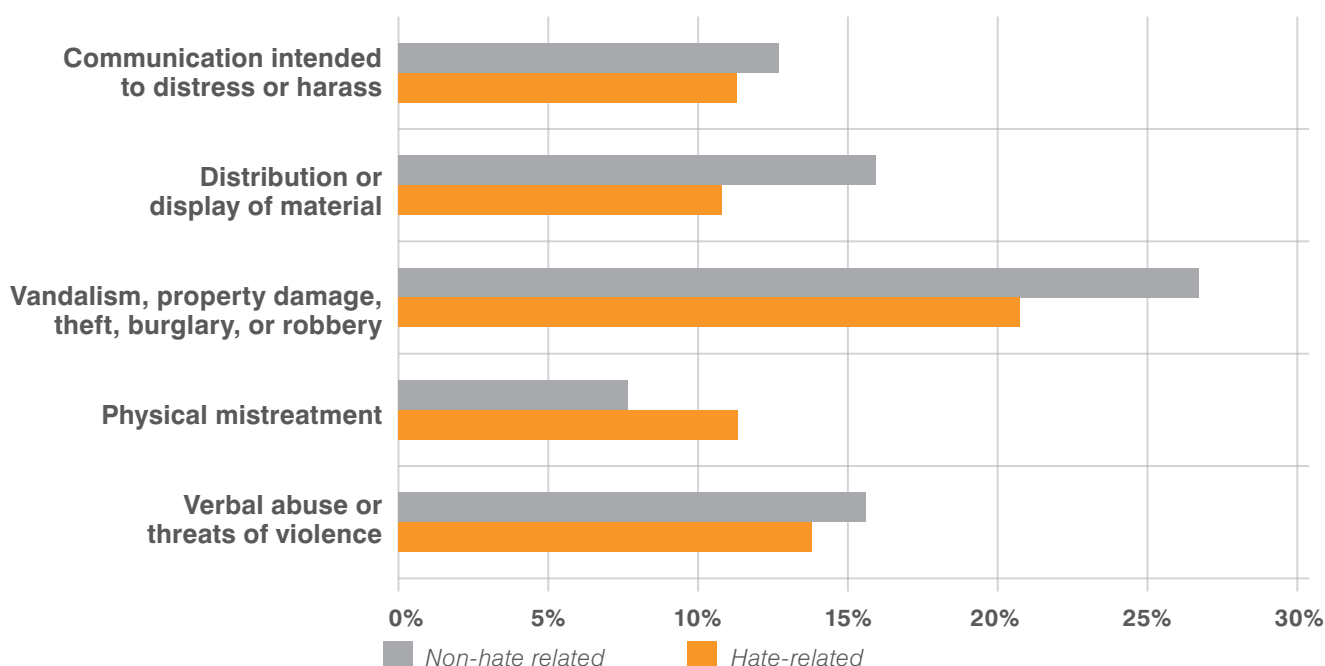
Frequently cited reasons for not reporting hate incidents included not thinking it to be serious enough; feeling it was too common an occurrence to report; not believing the police could or would do anything about it; and not thinking the incident would be taken seriously. A significant minority of victims stated concern of reprisals and retribution, as well as feelings of shame and embarrassment, prevented them from reporting the hate incident.

**This interim report has only touched the surface of hate-related incidents in student communities in the UK.**

**A full-length research report will be available in August 2011 detailing the extent and nature of hate incidents experienced by students. This will include an in-depth analysis of each protected characteristic, a profile of hate crime perpetrators, and an examination of current reporting mechanisms. Recommendations and guidance for students' unions will also be discussed.**

**To find out more about the project, please contact Stephanie Neave at [stephanie.neave@nus.org.uk](mailto:stephanie.neave@nus.org.uk) or visit [nus.org.uk/hatecrime](http://nus.org.uk/hatecrime)**

*Did you ever report this incident to anyone in an official role at your college, university, or students' union?*



*“It is not necessarily the incident itself, but the prejudice that motivates its occurrence that is most injurious – the experience effectively being an attack on the individual’s sense of self and identity.”*



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