

### Reducing anti-social behaviour

**The conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age can lead to health inequalities – the unfair and avoidable differences in health status.**

**Actions to tackle health inequalities demand the efforts of government, statutory organisations, the community, voluntary and private sectors. This Good Practice Guide to reducing anti-social behaviour is one of a series designed to capture information about health inequalities and highlight evidence-based interventions and key actions for improvement across sectors.**

**Other Good Practice Guides in this series can be accessed at [www.publichealth.hscni.net/publications/good-practice-guides](http://www.publichealth.hscni.net/publications/good-practice-guides)**

#### Why do it?

Anti-social behaviour (ASB) continues to have an impact on public reassurance and quality of life. The *Anti-social Behaviour (NI) Order 2004* defines ASB as “acting in a manner that causes or is likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress to one or more persons not of the same household as himself”. ASB covers a wide range of incidents and includes issues such as noisy neighbours, speeding traffic, drug use and people being drunk or rowdy in a public place.<sup>1</sup>

#### Health and social context

ASB is one of the key factors in people’s perception of crime. Although recorded crime has fallen in Northern Ireland, many people’s perceptions are that crime has actually increased. Tackling the range of anti-social behaviours that undermine people’s quality of life and make them feel unsafe improves confidence in communities and helps reduce fear of crime.<sup>2</sup>

- Poor health is highly correlated with fear of crime, which may be related to increased feelings of vulnerability. Women are much more likely to report high levels of fear of crime than men.<sup>3</sup>
- People in poorer health and people who think they live in an area of high disorder and lower social cohesion are more likely to report higher levels of fear, regardless of age. People who are already isolated or lonely are more likely to be afraid.<sup>3</sup>

- Fear of crime is an issue for older people in Northern Ireland and has a severe impact, particularly on the mental wellbeing of those it affects. Fear and stress contribute to poor mental health by creating anxiety.<sup>3</sup>
- Of the socio-demographic groups examined by the *2009/2010 Northern Ireland Crime Survey*, those most likely to perceive anti-social behaviour as a problem in their area were residents of the 20% most deprived areas of Northern Ireland (31%), people living in social rented accommodation (31%) and single adults with children (30%).<sup>4</sup>
- The ASB types most likely to be perceived as problems in their local communities were ‘rubbish or litter lying around’ (28%) and ‘teenagers hanging around on streets’ (26%), people using or dealing drugs (23%), people being drunk or rowdy in public places (22%) and vandalism, graffiti and other deliberate damage to property (22%).<sup>4</sup>
- Social incivilities, such as vandalism, neglected buildings, littering and substance abuse – which are often more common in deprived areas – create a perception of decline and an image of insecurity as it appears no one cares, which in turn feeds the fear of crime, regardless of actual levels of crime.<sup>3</sup>
- There is increasing recognition of the links between neighbourhood deprivation and individual health.<sup>5</sup> Children who live in ‘unsafe’ neighbourhoods may be exposed to greater risks of developing problem behaviours such as hyperactivity, aggression or withdrawal.<sup>6</sup>

#### Policy context

The causes of anti-social behaviour are linked to wider problems of social exclusion, including poverty, family breakdown, mental illness, drug and alcohol misuse and community disorganisation.<sup>7</sup> As a result a wide range of policy drivers exist, including, but not limited to:

- *Building a Better Future. The Northern Ireland Executive's Programme for Government 2008–2011*;
- *The Northern Ireland Policing Board and the Police Service of Northern Ireland: Policing Plan 2011–2014*;
- *Building Safer, Shared and Confident Communities; A consultation on a new community safety strategy for Northern Ireland, Department of Justice (January 2011)*;

- *Families Matter: Supporting Families in Northern Ireland Regional Family and Parenting Strategy, DHSSPS (March 2009);*
- *Care Matters in Northern Ireland – a bridge to a better future. DHSSPS (March 2007).*

## What works?

### For individuals/families

The most successful interventions are those that engage the individual in changing their own behaviour by ensuring they understand the impact of their actions on the community while offering them the necessary support for them to stop, such as youth conferencing schemes for those who have already engaged in ASB.<sup>7</sup>

**For families**, there is evidence that early years interventions can reduce the risk of involvement in crime and ASB in later life. Support through outreach, parenting skills, diversionary interventions and other intensive support mechanisms have demonstrated some successes. There is strong evidence linking criminal behaviour to early childhood experience and family surroundings.<sup>7</sup>

### In communities/settings

There is evidence that engaging with the local community has a positive impact on reducing ASB and the fear of crime. The following interventions have had positive impacts:

- Community safety neighbourhood warden schemes that engage with the local community and provide a visible patrol presence address low-level ASB and low-level crime and provide communities with reassurance which in turn reduces fear of crime. These schemes have had positive outcomes in dealing with ASB and reducing the fear of crime.<sup>8,9,10</sup>
- Interventions that reduce the potential for young people to become involved in ASB, eg targeting peak times/settings when high levels of ASB are reported have demonstrated successful results as has the Get Home Safe Campaign to reduce the incidence of late-night crime and disorder. Responsible beverage service programmes are frequently included in the broad-based interventions that have shown reductions in violence, for example, 'Operation Socialise'.<sup>2,11,12</sup>

- Capacity-building measures to community ownership and involvement in crime/ASB prevention and schemes such as Neighbourhood Watch.<sup>13, 14</sup>
- These schemes can help people feel safe in their local neighbourhoods, with a greater sense of community and a perceived lower level of crime.<sup>2</sup>
- Designing out crime by taking account of lighting and supporting community clean-ups to improve their environment.<sup>15, 16</sup>
- Physical interventions such as alley-gating which aims to tackle ASB and reduce fear of crime among those living in houses within gated areas is successful in reducing and sustaining a reduction in crime and anti-social behaviour over time.<sup>17,18</sup> A study in Liverpool demonstrated that positive impacts on perceptions and experience of crime and ASB have been maintained over a four year period.<sup>19</sup> Following a pilot project in Belfast, 89% of respondents believed that gates had a positive impact on reducing fear of crime.<sup>20</sup>

### For schools

There is some evidence that early intervention schools-based programmes have a positive impact by improving the abilities of children to manage and control their feelings and to raise their awareness and empathy towards others. Research has indicated that children who have participated in such programmes are less disruptive, less aggressive and less likely to participate in ASB.

- Second Step aims to empower children to think for themselves about their behaviour and to develop problem-solving strategies to address particular behavioural difficulties or problems.<sup>21</sup>
- Roots of Empathy works with 8–9 year old children to create a classroom culture of acceptance and inclusion.<sup>22</sup>

### Policy level

In addressing concerns around ASB, the importance of effective partnership working has been recognised by the UK government and local agencies alike, as has the necessity of a three-pronged approach to tackling it – prevention, intervention and enforcement.<sup>7</sup>

The Community Safety Unit (located within the Department of Justice) is responsible for driving legislative changes to help deliver community safety.<sup>2</sup> This has included, for example, the introduction of

anti-social behaviour orders (ASBO) which are civil court orders applied for by the police, councils or Housing Executive.<sup>7</sup> The complex nature of ASB means that additional legislation, such as the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act (Department of the Environment), will also have an important impact.

### Measures for which evidence is lacking or unclear

- Evidence around the effectiveness of punitive measures in reducing and preventing ASB is ambiguous.
- The multi-faceted nature of ASB creates a complex arena and the actual levels of ASB may not reflect the true levels of occurrence due to perceptions of anti-social behaviour tending to be higher than reported levels and a lack of reporting in some areas.

## What can we do?

### Key actions for health improvement

Reducing crime, the fear of crime and anti-social behaviour depends upon the appropriate partner agencies working together effectively at a neighbourhood level. Neighbourhoods require solutions to different problems of crime and anti-social behaviour tailored to particular circumstances. The Audit Commission recommends a whole improvement programme for neighbourhood action based on a clear framework. The framework assumes a partnership approach and is based on a five-stage approach:

- know and understand your wards and neighbourhoods;
- find out what concerns local people;
- analyse the particular local problem;
- take action, including short and long-term action;
- reassure local people.<sup>23</sup>

Community Safety Partnerships are multi-agency partnerships made up of local statutory bodies (for example councils, the Police Service of Northern Ireland, Youth Justice Agency, Northern Ireland Housing Executive, Health and Social Care, Education and Library Boards, the Fire and Rescue Service, the Public Health Agency, the Probation Board and the Department for Social Development), voluntary and community groups and successfully deliver

community safety projects addressing the spectrum of community-safety issues, including anti-social behaviour.<sup>2</sup>

### Policy

Cross-departmental consideration of a range of measures to tackle anti-social behaviour at three levels – prevention, intervention and enforcement. The consultation document on the new community safety strategy for Northern Ireland recognises the need for effective partnership working to deliver local solutions to local problems.<sup>7</sup>

### Enforcement

Protect the public from behaviour that causes or is likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress; role of police, Housing Executive and councils. Partnership and working with communities when dealing with ASB is a critical part of this process.

### Community in partnership with statutory agencies

For local people, making places safer is dependent on how confident they feel in the ability of agencies to understand their concerns. If people have concerns about community safety they should contact their local Community Safety Partnership, which currently operate in every council area.

Where agencies are accessible and have clearly identified frontline workers to report and deal with problems, local people need to be involved in developing the solutions and providing feedback; improvements in tackling local crime and ASB are tangible.

Addressing crime and ASB must be linked to other improvements in the environment to enhance the quality of life for people.<sup>23</sup>

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