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## LAW, CRIMINOLOGY & CRIMINAL JUSTICE | RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Anti-social behaviour, community and radical moral communitarianism

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**Abstract:** This article offers an insight into the lives of individuals who are repeat victims of antisocial behaviour (ASB). Drawing on data derived from 15 case studies, the authors demonstrate the plight that such victims endure on a daily basis. The research reveals that a number of victims feel abandoned by their communities and the authorities and, how for many, there is an overwhelming sense of being “trapped” within their own homes. The article also offers evidence to support previous claims that police crime data only captures a small proportion of the actual number of incidents of ASB that occur. We conclude by proposing an emphasis on individual and community responsibility and suggest that by adopting a radical moral communitarian approach ASB could be reduced as part of rebuilding communities.

**Subjects:** Crime and Crime Prevention; Housing; Police; Social Sciences; Urban Sociology; Victims and Victimology; Welfare

**Keywords:** antisocial behaviour; victimisation; police data recording; radical moral communitarianism



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### PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Antisocial behaviour (ASB) is a broad term used to describe the day-to-day incidents of crime, nuisance and disorder that make the lives of people a misery and encapsulates behaviours such as littering and vandalism to public drunkenness and noisy or abusive neighbours. Such a wide range of behaviours means that incidents can range from the relatively minor to targeted and repeated incidents. Official responses to ASB have been under increased scrutiny since the reporting of the Fiona Pilkington case. This paper offers an insight into the lives of repeat victims of antisocial behaviour and the responses they receive from the police and other agencies. It demonstrates that there are still issues around under reporting of ASB and reveals the extreme plight that some repeat victims endure. The paper proposes that rather than adopting a purely reactive approach to ASB, policies should be introduced in accordance with the prescriptions of radical moral communitarianism.

## 1. Introduction

Antisocial behaviour (ASB) is an umbrella term used to describe the day-to-day incidents of crime and incivility that make the lives of many people in this country a misery. Ranging from litter and vandalism to public drunkenness, aggressive dogs and noisy neighbours, such behaviours are not new, although the tolerance and management of these activities have become a “contemporary obsession” (Millie, 2007, p. 2). The New Labour Government elected in 1997 put issues of ASB at the top of their political agenda, clearly because of a recognition that such issues impacted extremely negatively on their traditional heartlands. Throughout their three terms in office, they demonstrated a great commitment to tackling the identified problem, introducing a range of initiatives, with the intention of “empower[ing] communities to take civic pride in their neighbourhoods” (Hodgkinson & Tilley, 2011, p. 2). Previously such behaviour was depicted as merely “a nuisance” and not always taken seriously by the police, although this was perhaps due to the nature of the behaviour being largely considered trivial, being more of a social problem than criminal activity, and therefore not regarded as “proper” police work.

Defining and grasping the true extent of ASB is nevertheless problematic, primarily due to the ambiguity as to what activities and actions actually constitute ASB; indeed, activities that can be censured as such are often tolerated or in some instances even celebrated, as in the case of famous graffiti artists. Moreover, this uncertainty exacerbates the already significant under reporting of the problem, for example, during 2011, 3.2 million incidents relating to ASB were reported to the police which were estimated to represent only one quarter of all ASB offences that were committed (HMIC, 2012). Despite this high level of under reporting, ASB remains a problem for the police and Innes and Weston (2010) found that 45% of all calls made by the public to the police related to ASB, while Millie (2007) observes that ASB provides an attractive “catch all category” to government in that it enables flexibility in policy with ASB becoming “the ‘bad stuff’ that happens that cannot be tackled through existing measures” (2007, p. 613).

The nature of response to victims of ASB by the police was to become a major issue, following the case of Fiona Pilkington and her daughter Francesca Hardwick, who were found dead in a burned out car in Leicestershire in 2007 after suffering years of abuse from gangs of youths. This was the crucial event that provided the impetus for changed perceptions and the nature of the response and focused the minds of the police service throughout the country, not least because an inquest in September 2009 found that police errors and inaction were partly responsible for driving Pilkington to kill herself and her severely disabled daughter. Returning a verdict of suicide on Pilkington, 38, and unlawful killing for her 18-year-old daughter, the jury decided that police failure to connect dozens of separate calls for assistance contributed to the deaths (IPCC, 2011). Consequently, dealing with such cases has understandably become a significant priority for, albeit an increasingly resource-stretched, police service.

## 2. Research context

In terms of ASB victimisation (and similar to most crimes), police data reveals that a significant proportion of reported incidents were committed disproportionately against a small minority of people. This research sought to gain an insight into the everyday reality of victims of ASB who were reporting the highest levels of revictimisation. It was an exploratory project which took place in Mid City, a city in the Middle of England, shortly after the HMIC Inspection of the force area concluded that there was a “relatively high level of ASB recorded by police in Midshire in comparison with the rest of England and Wales” (HMIC, 2012). In addition, perceptions of ASB amongst those who had reported incidents were high with 63% stating that they felt that ASB was a big problem in their area (HMIC, 2012). Actual reports of ASB within the city revealed that approximately 22,000 calls relating to ASB were made to the police each year (Mid City CDP, 2012). It was clearly a significant issue.

The research sought to garner the views of repeat victims of ASB as, despite the plethora of reports produced by both the government and various agencies charged with addressing the issue of protecting vulnerable/repeat victims, there still remains a research deficit in engaging with vulnerable

victims. Furthermore, in the research area, as there was limited information regarding the profiles of the people who reported ASB, it was unclear whether there were particular types of persons who were more likely to be victimised.

The research aim was two staged. First, in order to develop a better understanding of the nature of ASB in the research area, a random sample of 2,000 complaint call reports made within a time-frame of one year was generated (just under 10% of all cases reported in the area). Each report was then examined (albeit at times with limited data). The second and more substantive aspect of the research and the focus of this paper involved conducting qualitative in-depth semi-structured interviews with a self-selecting sample of 15 repeat victims of ASB. The sample was generated by inviting the “top reporters” of ASB in the research area from the previous year. Individuals that appeared on the “top reporter list” were contacted via letter by representatives of the Midshire Crime Partnership offering details of the research and requesting their participation. Contact details of the research team were contained in the letter and the research team worked down the list of “top reporters”, until a sample of 15 was obtained. Individuals were only sent one letter, and consequently there was a high rate of non-response. It is thus acknowledged that those who opted to take part were those who were highly motivated to tell their stories and as such there are limitations to generalising the research findings.

### 3. Research findings

In accordance with the National Standard for Incident Recording (NPIA, 2011), three broad categories of ASB can be identified and each of these has an impact on individuals and their communities in different ways:

*Nuisance antisocial behaviour*—this category captures those incidents where an act, condition, thing or person causes trouble, annoyance, inconvenience, offence or suffering to the local community, in general, rather than to individual victims. It includes incidents where behaviour goes beyond the conventional bounds of acceptability and interferes with public interests including health, safety and quality of life.

*Personal antisocial behaviour*—is where the act or behaviour is targeted at an individual or group or has an impact on an individual or group rather than the community at large.

*Environmental antisocial behaviour*—includes incidents where individuals and groups have an impact on their surroundings including natural, built and social environments.

The cases we encountered during the course of this study fitted predominantly into the first two categories (although that is not to say that the activities deemed to be antisocial did not have some impact on the wider environment) and sometimes did not mutually exclusively fit into one of the two categories. On such occasions, the situation was more complex and posed significant problems for those charged with responding to the problem.

We present information derived from the interviews conducted with multiple repeat victims of ASB in “greater” Mid City. These are thus personal accounts based on the subjective interpretation of events by the victims. Table 1 offers an overview of the 15 victims in accordance with their subjective accounts.

One of the most disturbing and significant findings to emerge from the research was that repeat victims of ASB tend to be in some way “captive” in the accommodation in which they live. This could occur in a number of different ways and levels. For example, Victim 1 is trapped in the sense he feels unable to leave his property for fear of being abused by the perpetrators or his property being damaged in his absence. In a sense, he is a victim of circumstance in that the ASB does not seem to be targeted at him personally but because of the particular location of his property, he appears to take the brunt of “abuse”. He is also representative of a particular group of victims who have bought

**Table 1. Repeat victims of antisocial behaviour**

Victim	Disability within household	Accommodation	Summary of victims description of ASB issue	Frequency	Police contact
1 Male white (72)	No	Owner-occupier	For the last few years groups of young people (16–25 years) have been street drinking outside his city centre house. Their behaviour comprises screaming and shouting, urinating in his garden and smoking marijuana. Such behaviour often goes on until after midnight.	Daily	He calls the police, sometimes every night. Often the group disband before police arrive, which can be hours after the initial call was made.
2 Female white (45)	Yes	Owner-occupier (previously social housing)	The main problem stems from two or three families on the estate whose children mess around until late at night. They throw stones at the victim's window, put fireworks in their bin, have tied their cat's tail in knots, painted on their door, verbally abused their daughter (who lives nearby) and assaulted and been abusive to their son aged 10.	Varies can be daily	Calls 999 if emergency, otherwise 101 if they think it is serious enough or they need a crime number. Feels that the police response is just a protocol now and think the police are fed up with them and they are wasting their time.
3 Male white (38)	Yes	Social housing	He has problems with his neighbour in the flat above who has poured bleach on him, cut his TV cable, cut his washing line and put a brick through his window. He believes he is being targeted because he is gay.	Can be daily	He does not call the police anymore. He is scared of the consequences and the possibility that things may get worse. When he has called in the past, they have been ineffective and he does not feel he was taken seriously.
4 Female SE Asian (31)	No	Owner-occupier (previously social housing)	Problems with her neighbours—dogs barking, loud music, bad language, abuse, loud visitors, windows smashed, car vandalised and racial abuse. Had CCTV installed in her back garden as the neighbour's children kept climbing over her fence. This has made things worse and they call her "watchdog" and "paedophile".	Daily	Only when needs a crime number.
5 Female white (41)	No	Social housing	Aggressive, threatening behaviour by a couple who were housed next door to her the Council after they had been evicted from another address. Female came at her with a crowbar and then scratched her car. She took out an injunction against her, but the abuse continued but was perpetrated by her partner and her friends. Mostly suffers verbal abuse and vandalised of her property, is being treated for depression caused by antisocial behaviour.	Daily	She does not always call the police. When she does call, they do not always turn up and can take a few hours. She feels like she is just being a nuisance to the police by calling all them all the time and not taken being serious.
6 Female white (58)	Yes	Social housing	Problem with neighbour's children and their friends (aged 12–18 and involves up to 20 young people). Comprise drug dealing, trespassing onto her property, breaking street lights, swearing and making noise—sometimes until 1am. It happens every night.	Daily	She calls the police when there is a serious incident, such as climbing over her walls. When she calls, they ask about the incident but not her previous experiences.
7 Female white (48)	Yes	Privately rented	Children from the estate play on the park (children's play area) outside her window. Balls thrown at her window, been shouted and sworn at, have stones thrown at her windows. She believes that she is more victimised than others in area as she has been out and confronted them before when a football was kicked through her window. Her partner was subsequently assaulted by the youths.	2/3 times per week	Calls police and tells them what is happening. Response is usually too late and the kids have gone by the time they get there.
8 Female white (54)	Yes	Social housing	Problem with her neighbours—a "rough family"—friendly at first, their daughter played round at her house, but they used to leave her there until late at night and arguments developed from there. Loud music until 3:00 am, arguing continuously (shouting and swearing and throwing things), drinking every night and verbal abuse towards her (intimidates her). Ongoing for last few years and has escalated—got worse since she confronted the neighbour.	Daily	Contacts the police—not every time something happens—but by the time they get there the noise has stopped and it goes back up as soon as they leave. Thinks this makes her look bad and that she is wasting police time.

(Continued)

**Table 1. (Continued)**

Victim	Disability within household	Accommodation	Summary of victims description of ASB issue	Frequency	Police contact
9 Female white (54)	No	Owner-occupier	Has a problem with a neighbour—plays late music late at night, falls over drunk; leaves TV on and often leaves the water running. Only met the man once and suspects he is on drugs. Believes the antisocial behaviour is not personally targeted at him, but that it is just the neighbour's lifestyle. Victim does not want to move as it is a nice flat. ASB prevents him from sleeping and he is on antidepressants.	Daily	He keeps a record of every event, but only calls the police if it happens for a long period of time. When he calls the police, he gives them his reference number and then they know it is an ongoing situation and they can see his previous reports.
10 Male white (66)	Yes	Social housing	Has a problem with neighbours. The house has been rented by a young girl (18 years old) who has a baby and a boyfriend who is now in prison. There are constant parties, fights in the street. Neighbour and friends sit outside the house drinking, littering, smoking, making noise and playing football.	Daily	He continuously calls the police and they came to the street. On one occasion, he called four times in one night.
11 Male white (46)	Yes	Owner-occupier (previously Social Housing)	Problems started in 1999 and have gradually got worse—the last three years have been particularly bad. Problems with a neighbour—an elderly woman, but she has a large extended family who come to visit regularly and make trouble. Started when they asked the family to move their car so an ambulance could get through to his wife. Did not like being told what to do. Problems include: verbal abuse, noise, slamming doors, aggressive behaviour, car and garage door damaged. Big group of them and its intimidating.	Sporadic but can be daily	He monitors and logs incidents when they happen and only calls police when most serious incidents occur. He calls 101 or beat manager/ASB team on his mobile. PCSO used to call on regular basis to see how they were and take their logs back to the station—this has not happened since the PCSO moved stations.
12 Female white (68)	Yes	Owner-occupier	Has a problem with her neighbour. Problem escalated when she went round and asked him to turn his TV down. ASB comprises loud noise, verbal abuse, singing early in morning, tapping at her window when they leave their house and shouting insults through walls. They drink a lot and litter the areas with alcohol bottles.	Daily	She first called social services as she wanted them to help the neighbour, but “they did not want to know”. When things are really bad she has to call the police.
13 Male white (46)	Yes	Owner-occupier (previously Social Housing)	Victim is disabled and believes that people are deliberately trying to wind him up. Children scream outside his house. People congregate near his house to drink and often this is accompanied by loud music and shouting in the street.	Daily	Calls the police when it becomes too much. Beat manager gave him his mobile number.
14 Female white (69)	No	Owner-occupier	Problems with neighbours which include: drinking, drug-taking and dealing, prostitution, youths causing trouble and neighbours being loud. Two or three houses on street cause all problems (owned by Housing Association). She does not know why she was targeted—suspects it was just because she is different. She goes to church, works (until she retired) and likes to keep herself to herself.	Daily	She contacts the police—but only calls when desperate.
15 Male white (44)	Yes	Social housing	He has a problem with his neighbour in the flat above him. Neighbour regularly takes drugs and drinks heavily. He is very noisy and has threatened him. Lots of screaming and shouting and kicking of doors from his neighbours flat and he has a drum kit which he uses at all hours	Daily	Calls the police either via 999 or the local station number.

modest properties when they moved to an area, which was at the time quieter and more respectable. With the passing of time, the area has become less pleasant and with the arrival of ASB, he has found it impossible to sell his property. This we found to be a common situation.

Case Study 9 also involves an owner-occupier, in this instance, living in a flat with a problematic individual above her making considerable noise at all times of day and night. She does not want to move because she has a nice flat and would probably have difficulty selling it anyway in the circumstances. Being private property, she does not have the recourse to requesting that social housing providers control or even move their problematic tenants, although we found that council and housing association tenants had little success in getting their landlords to act in these situations. This was certainly the case with Victim 15, who was a social housing tenant who had very similar problems with the tenant living above him who was said to have significant issues with drink and drugs, which fuelled his regular noisy and often belligerent ASB.

Case Study 2 provides another example of a victim trapped in an owner-occupied house which she is unable to sell because of the ASB in their locality, which has got progressively worse during the 16 years they have lived there. The house is on a local housing estate rather renowned in recent years for its ASB and criminality. The victims are fearful and “trapped in their own homes” for much of the time, not least because of their concern about what might happen to their property in their absence. As the victim stated, “If I could sell my house and move, I would of done it years ago. It’s just not a very nice place to live”. This victim like three others in the sample (Case studies 4, 11 and 13) had exercised their “Right to Buy” and participated in what the then Secretary of State for the Environment termed would be one of the most important social revolutions of this [the twentieth] century. However, for this particular group of home owners, the reality of owning a property on a social housing estate was one of negative equity, persistent and unrelenting ASB and local authorities who “no longer cared about them”. This particular victim emphasised the point that she was actually frightened to leave her home for any period of time for fear of the damage that they would find on their return. She revealed that on the last occasion they had been on a family holiday, they returned to find that their property had been vandalised. As the victim in Case Study 4 observed, “I feel bullied, I can’t go anywhere ... I don’t feel it’s a home. It’s my prison”. Case Study 11 involves a victim routinely subjected to unpleasant abusive behaviour by the aggressive extended family of an elderly neighbour. Case Study 13 involves a disabled victim who believes that the widespread group abusive behaviour to which he is subjected is actually encouraged by his disability, a situation similar to the infamous Pilkington case.

A number of respondents commented on how they had moved into an area and subsequently witnessed the “tipping” of their neighbourhood into something less amenable than when they had purchased their property. In particular, victims levied criticism towards Housing Associations and Social Housing providers for changing the composition of their living space. This centred upon the lack of neighbourhood governance in that respondents suggested such organisations acted in their own self-interest which could often be to the detriment of the wider community. This was particularly evident in Case Study 14, where the victim had purchased her house in the 1970s, in an area which had subsequently seen a Housing Association purchase a number of properties in the vicinity, which were used as multi-occupancy residences for transient families and individuals evicted from properties owned by other social housing landlords. One particular housing association specialised in housing people with alcohol and drug problems which acted as an *antisocial behaviour attractor* (cf. Brantingham & Brantingham, 1995 and their notion of crime attractors), importing a previously unknown social problem into the area. The victim recounted how recently she had experienced problems with the tenants of the Housing Association properties which included street drinking, drug-taking and dealing, prostitution, rowdy youths, burglary, criminal damage, arson and frequent “crazy” late-night parties. She had contacted the Housing Association on numerous occasions to complain about the issues but claimed they “were uninterested and did nothing”. While such reported apathy may appear contrary to the regulatory role undertaken by housing providers in the management of ASB (Flint & Nixon, 2006), the victim suggested that it could be accounted for by the

fact that the majority of the problems she reported occurred during the evening, whereas the Housing Officer only ever visited her during office hours, and as such never witnessed the ASB she had experienced.

The victim in Case Study 5 offered a similar account of how “problem” individuals and families were being moved into previously respectable and non-problematic communities and were subsequently being highly disruptive. In her case, she suggested that the small cul-de-sac where she lived had been “a pleasant and neighbourly” environment until it was disrupted by a family who were housed as her neighbours after being evicted from two previous addresses. In this particular case, the newcomers were reported to have had a serious impact on any previous social solidarity that had existed by importing different standards and social outlooks into the neighbourhood and did not adhere to the “grammars of living” (Rose, 2001). In part with this, ASB was manifested in the routines of the victim and her new neighbours. She worked (and therefore wanted to sleep at night) and her neighbours who did not work liked to keep noisy nocturnal hours and sleep during the day. In this case, the victim (who was a working single mother) had also received complaints from her neighbours for her noise levels which she claimed was simply putting on the washing machine prior to leaving home on a morning for school drop-off and a day’s work. Such instances highlight the different lifestyles and social values found in a neighbourhood and, in this case, the social cohesion which once was ensured through prevailing sets of norms and values had disappeared. She observed that since the arrival of the new family, a number of problems had been experienced by both herself and her neighbours impacting negatively on the sense of community that she had previously experienced. Primarily, the once strong community had become fragmented:

People just don’t care anymore ... There is no sense of community. At certain times people will pull together but when it comes to trouble nobody wants to get involved. There is “community” but only when it suits people.

Case Study 9 demonstrates another dimension to antisocial behaviour where someone who had purchased a house on a social housing estate had let it privately to an 18-year-old girl who had a young baby. Her boyfriend was in prison. Such arrangements clearly circumvent any public sector housing policies and the young woman had taken advantage of her freedoms to invite her many friends to the house for a virtually continuous rowdy party, invariably spilling out into the street making an intolerable noise for the victim. Such general rowdiness from groups of invariably young people making excessive noise, damaging property and becoming overtly aggressive and abusive when challenged was also prevalent in Case Study 6.

This lack of collective spirit and social ties within the neighbourhood impacts on the ability of the communitarian approach to tackle ASB (see e.g. Yau, 2014). Indeed, across the sample, a similar “part time community spirit” was reported. For example, Victim 8 suggested that despite suffering the same level of ASB that she was enduring, her neighbours were unwilling to get more involved, instead relying on her to confront the problem. She stated that no one else, “wants to put their head above the parapet” for fear of possible retaliation with a number of victims expressing concerns around not wanting to be identified as a “grass”. In his seminal work, Sutherland (1937) alludes to the hatred and disgust felt towards informers and the subsequent informal sanctions that are handed out within the criminal community, and a number of respondents within the sample referred to the danger of reprisals for reporting issues to the police was real and prevented others from speaking out. Victim 7 had actually acquired the label of “grasser” and suggested that this led to the previously general nuisance ASB becoming specifically targeted personal abuse. Victim 4 was also labelled as a “paedo” after installing CCTV in her property to monitor and record the ASB she was enduring.

A similar reluctance to report events to the police for fear of reprisal is a common feature amongst ASB victims (see Heap, 2010), yet within this study, it was only one reason for the low level of reporting of ASB to the authorities. Indeed, it was evident that amongst the sample there were victims who

had developed a high-tolerance threshold towards ASB, with most stating that they only contacted the police when they felt “desperate” or felt it had got “too much”. Eleven of the victims interviewed stated that they experienced problems on a daily basis, yet according to police data, the highest number of reports in a year by any of the individuals in the sample was less than 15 and for some there were only two or three incidents recorded on police systems. Consequently, a considerable number of incidents of ASB that had taken place had apparently not been reported to the police, and thus failed to show in the statistics. This could of course be for a number of reasons and is not an uncommon finding (see also Godfrey & Lawrence, 2005), but a significant—if not the central—explanation within this sample that most of the victims had access to their neighbourhood police officer’s mobile phone, had direct numbers to their local station or were in touch with members of the wider policing family. Not calling the police via the control room had a resultant unintended consequence of a number of instances not being recorded or perhaps much more controversially, an *intended* consequence allowing reports to be “cuffed” as reporting ASB via these methods resulted in many incidents being kept “off the books” (Bottomley & Coleman, 1981). Indeed we subsequently discovered from speaking to a member of the “wider policing family” who was part of Mid City’s response to ASB that despite being co-located with the police, they did not have access to police IT networks. As a consequence by not reporting incidents via the police control room, the victims were unwittingly influencing the level of police response which was largely dictated by reactive responses to “hot-spots”. Such issues were of concern and were reminiscent of the Independent Police Complaints Commission criticism of Leicestershire Constabulary for its “failure to provide a cohesive and effective approach to the anti-social behavior” in the Pilkington case.

The issue of the inaccuracy of police recordings of ASB incidents was also exacerbated by the fact that within the sample, victims also stated that they did not contact the police as they often thought that they were perceived as “wasting police time” or were not being taken seriously. Moreover, a number also expressed the opinion that the police “couldn’t really do anything” or there was little point in contacting them unless they wanted a “crime number” to claim off an insurance policy. This “cost benefit calculation” (Skogan, 1984) undertaken by the victims within the sample undoubtedly led to the significant under reporting of incidents to the police. We found that the lack of accuracy of police data was not only a cause for concern in terms of the frequency of ASB, but also the inaccuracy of recording. For example, the review of the random sample of 2,000 complaint calls analysed for this research indicated a high proportion of ASB was recorded (49%) for behaviour which included violence (13% of those involving weapons). In addition, within the sample, some of the disclosures made to the research team suggested that some of the ASB would have been more appropriately recorded as “hate crime”. For example, two-thirds of those interviewed stated that they, or a member of their household, had a disability (and this was a factor in some incidences of victimisation), while other respondents alluded to acts which indicated that they were targeted due to their race or sexuality. In the case of Victim 3 (who suggested that he was being targeted because he was gay), his experience of contacting the police had not been positive and he had found them unsympathetic to his concerns and even thought that on one occasion, they were “laughing at him”.

## 5. Discussion

It is necessary to reiterate our note of caution at this point. The victims we interviewed were a self-selecting group who responded to requests for an interview in return for a nominal fee (£12 shopping voucher). They thus were sufficiently motivated to do so and it might well be that they were not representatives of repeat victims of ASB in Mid City and those who did not accept the offer of an interview. We do not know, although a number of key themes were to recur throughout the interviews conducted, the main theme being that all interviewees were victims of targeted ASB centred on their homes. The most immediate and overwhelming reaction we received when talking to the victims was the drastic emotional impact that their experiences had had on them. Many reported sleepless nights and fears of leaving their house, emphasising the significance that ASB can have upon an individual and families. The interviewees were invariably surprised by the extent of victim distress which had not been expected at the outset of the research. The victims indeed seemed motivated by

a concern that someone should hear about their problems and do something about them. The offer of the shopping vouchers became rather an embarrassment for the interviewers who often felt the offer of the paltry amount was somehow trivialising the experiences of the victims.

The evidence from our research suggests that there is considerably more ASB than the statistics suggest. In short, there appears to be a significant under-reporting of the problem for the multiple reasons we have identified above. Significantly, we heard that other people were victims of more generalised but unpleasant ASB on a regular basis, but liked to keep low profiles and “not get involved”, not least because they were frightened of reprisals. Thus, other tenants or owner-occupiers living on the same street have been reluctant to complain about perpetrators, even though the behaviour could be impacting appreciably on the quality of their lives. The disturbing message with undertones of the criminal underworld was that it was unwise to be seen as a police informer. All our interviewees living on social housing estates, whether tenants or owner-occupiers, all understood, or at least had come to understand, that being an informer was likely to bring them further trouble. It was clear to see that the values of the criminal fraternity are a dominant force on these estates.

We have already noted the very common feeling among victims of being “trapped in their homes” sometimes because of age, disability or illness, but there was another highly significant meaning to this term. It is invariably difficult, if not impossible, to move if the house is owner-occupied and, in particular, is on a social housing estate that has deteriorated in the years since they had bought it, not least because problematic individuals and families being moved (or in the case of private tenants moving) into previously respectable and non-problematic communities and being highly disruptive. We were told that there is no longer a sense of community and clearly these newcomers can have a serious impact on any previous social solidarity importing different standards and social outlooks, clearly some of which are indisputably criminal. Communities are undoubtedly divided and these divisions can manifest in the strangest of ways.

For example, we identified that there can be a major clash between those working and seeking sleep at night and the workless leisure classes who like to keep noisy nocturnal hours. This is epitomised by what we have termed the “8 o’clock conundrum”, where the workless complain about law-abiding workers getting up in the morning and making noise. This is an interesting issue warranting further comment.

Routine activities theorists, Cohen and Felson (1979), relate crime rates to a “household activity ratio”, that is, the percentage of all households that are not husband–wife families or where the wife is employed outside the home. Their observations, which seem somewhat dated, relate to a world of full employment, where men—and some women—got up in the morning and went to work, returning in the evening and going to bed relatively early. Recreational noise levels were limited to the radio and television and probably only for a relatively short period in the evening; a pattern repeated across whole housing estates built from the 1930s onwards to house working people. A number of the repeat victims commented on the antisocial noise to which they were subjected being exacerbated by shoddily built, small, local authority housing and this problem is clearly greater in a world of commonly available loud sound systems used at all times of day and night. We might observe that this is a strange parallel universe where people with different lifestyles and social values live cheek by jowl and inhabit different time zones. The problems of ASB would clearly be reduced if all people in the same neighbourhood kept the same hours as they did when these estates were designed and built.

The main concern of repeat victims of ASB is that it invariably takes a long time before they get a positive resolution in their case from the authorities and the victimisation stops. The great majority of the cases we encountered had gone on for years without any satisfactory resolution and victims were clearly frustrated by the impasse and the failure of anything to change. The situation post-Pilkington is now clearly changing and the police and other agencies have come to recognise that these cases need to be resolved. The research team nevertheless encountered people who have had

a very bad personal experience of ASB, over an extended period with little being done by agencies, who in some cases were themselves at a loss as to what they could do. What became clear to us during the course of this research was that any of these victims could easily have become “another Pilkington”. We would not have been surprised. They were so distressed.

Partnership working is clearly essential to the ASB response. The police have the powers to tackle significant ASB and have been given new ones in recent times; it will be important to ensure that these are used timeously and effectively. A central aim of this research has been to explore the experiences of repeat victims. We take the view that the multi-agency response should do everything it can to ensure there are not repeat victims. The introduction of the measures within the ASB, Crime and Policing Act 2014 should enable the authorities to intervene at an early stage and prevent cases such as those reported in this paper to get out of hand. We have heard cases of perpetrators ceasing their ASB when warned by the authorities, but drifting back to their old ways subsequent to their orders, restrictions or conditions ending. As such, a strong message which emphasises that there will be a rigorous intervention at a very early stage (and this can mean eviction) if they do not behave appropriately (specific deterrence) is required, which in turn reinforces a much wider message to communities (or particular housing estate), that such activities will not be tolerated (general deterrence), thus helping to push back the moral boundaries of what people find acceptable. This demonstrates to the public that the police and other agencies are on the side of the community and that they will protect them from those individuals who try to exert control over housing estates through fear of reprisal. Adoption of such policy may be an example of “the criminology of intolerance” that Young (1999) warned against in his critique of zero tolerance policing; yet, within this sample we suggest that the victims we spoke to had endured hardships beyond the limits of tolerance. He is, however, right in stating that, “One person’s order is disorder to another, one groups ‘normal’ behaviour creates intolerable conditions for others” (Young, 1999, p. 139). This then is surely the crux of the issue— how can individuals with incompatible lifestyles live harmoniously within the same community?

The concept of community is a contested one in the social sciences (Hopkins Burke, 2008, 2014a). Everyone we interviewed during the course of this research referred to a lack of community and we are clearly going through a period of significant and rapid social change, which is changing the nature of the social worlds which we inhabit. As we observed above, the residents of large high-density social housing estates no longer share the same life experiences and may well not share the same values. Workers and the workless live alongside each other. While a recent report from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation had found little evidence to support the notion of intergenerational cultures of worklessness (Shildrick, MacDonald, Furlong, Roden, & Crow, 2012), interviewees within our sample told us they lived next door to people, who not only did not work, but had never worked. They spoke of completely alien lifestyles and it was clear that the lives of the two groups were invariably incompatible. This is the complex and difficult social world which has to be policed and where ASB has to be tackled. It is our view that such cases should be dealt within the context of radical moral communitarianism.

Radical moral communitarianism developed by Hopkins Burke (2014a, 2014b, in press) has its origins in the communitarianism which was so influential with the recent “New” Labour governments in the UK. Influenced by the work of Etzioni (1993, 1995a, 1995b) in the USA, communitarianism challenges the one-sided emphasis on “rights” that we encounter with traditional liberalism and proposes that people need to accept their responsibilities to the communities in which they live and wider society, as a condition of their entitlement to rights. The influence of this discourse has become widely felt in every aspect of the public sector in recent years.

Radical moral communitarianism is a variant on the communitarian theme which proposes that the earlier US variant came to overemphasise responsibilities to the detriment of rights, and thus calls for a rebalancing of the two. Thus, individuals have rights and responsibilities while, at the same

**Table 2. Rights and responsibilities in a moral communitarian society**

Rights	Responsibilities
The provision of an adequate income on which to live at the appropriate stage of life.	To play an active role in the economy while fit and healthy and of working age.
The provision of good quality affordable accommodation/housing of an acceptable size and proper rights of tenure.	To be a good neighbour and a responsible member of the community and not engage in antisocial behaviour to the disadvantage of fellow citizens.
To be treated with fairness and respected by all agencies, institutions and individuals regardless of occupation, social position, age, disability, ethnicity, gender, religion and sexual preference.	To treat others with fairness and respect regardless of occupation, social position, age, disability, ethnicity, gender, religion and sexual preference.
The provision of good quality health care to all at all stages of their life.	To maintain a reasonable standard of natural health where possible.
The provision of a high quality appropriate education and training.	To fully engage and participate in appropriate education and training and to behave appropriately.
To be protected from crime and antisocial behaviour in our communities.	Not to engage in crime and criminal behaviour.

time, so do communities. The important thing is to maintain a negotiated balance between the two at both a macro and micro level. Table 2 provides a brief summary of the rights and responsibilities that a citizen could enjoy in a moral communitarian society built on trust and respect.

It is these notions that influenced the thinking of the research team during the course of the research and significantly our reflections on the data have contributed to the development of the theory. It is nevertheless beyond the parameters of this paper to discuss all of these closely linked rights and responsibilities and the reader is directed towards Hopkins Burke (*in press*) for a detailed account.

From a radical moral communitarian perspective, the responsibilities of people include behaving themselves and being good neighbours. Many of these cases of ASB we encountered could have been nipped in the bud at early stage with an early forceful zero-tolerance intervention before generalised actions became targeted. This does not nevertheless automatically mean eviction which should only be used as a very much last resort. Thus, it is proposed that cases which have their origins in neighbourly disputes, where previously friendly relationships have gone bad, some form of mediation could be appropriate. Victim Support has the expertise in this area and told us that they would like to get involved in a wider restorative justice response to ASB, which is itself a crucial element of a radical moral communitarianism criminal justice intervention. We nevertheless need to signal another note of caution here. Some people who have been targeted by ASB object to mediation on the basis that there is some assumption of shared guilt by the different parties. This issue therefore needs to be treated carefully.

People (including perpetrators when they behave themselves) have rights and maintaining peace and harmony on housing estates and elsewhere is difficult to achieve where all tenants and occupants have come to be collectively stigmatised and treated as second-class citizens. Many social housing estates have arguably become unpleasant places in recent years since their transition from housing the great majority of workers in the post-Second World War period to “social housing”, the increasing repository for people with (invariably multiple) social problems which “respectable” people avoid. If you live in an owner-occupied house on the worst of these estates your chances of escape are virtually non-existent.

## 6. Conclusion

It is proposed from a radical moral communitarian perspective that all citizens should have access to suitable, good quality, affordable, preferably public sector-owned accommodation of an acceptable size, with proper rights of tenure and the rent paid linked to the ability to pay.

Significantly, there should also be an end to the stigmatisation of local authority and housing association housing estates labelled as “social housing”. Conservatives, Greenhalgh and Moss (2009) controversially, but quite correctly, observe that social housing has become synonymous with welfare housing, where both a “dependency culture” and a “culture of entitlement” predominate. They found two-thirds of social tenants were of working age but unemployed and only 22% were in full-time employment. Fifty per cent of social housing—some two million homes—is located in the most deprived 20% of the country. The authors of that report observe that public sector housing is run as a national service that fails many of the very people it was designed to help and delivers a risible return on assets. This view is not just held by Conservatives. The Labour Mayor of Newham, Sir Robin Wales, recently told a conference that many “council estates have become what they were fighting in the first place—social ghettos”.

As such there is a need to deliver rebalanced mixed communities that incentivises people into employment, instead of leaving them in welfare ghettos. There is, moreover, an economic as well as a social case for reform: a conservative estimate values public sector housing stock at around £300 billion, and yet the return on capital investment is barely 1% (Greenhalgh & Moss, 2009). There is thus a demand for good quality housing built to decent specifications with appropriate soundproofing, which could and should be made available to wider sections of society on suitable long-term tenancy agreements, with the proviso that the tenants do not engage in ASB (Hopkins Burke & Hodgson, 2013). Essential to this strategy is the crucial notion of rebalancing of communities so that so called “respectable” people are in the majority and where it is their standards of behaviour that prevail. There should thus be the provision of public sector housing for key workers with rents dependent on income and designated accommodation provided for recognisable serving police officers and others from the “policing family” as part of a return to the “police house” system. This inclusive housing strategy would, in our view, help rebalance and restore communities to the glory days of public sector housing in the 1950s and 1960s.

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