

The fear factor

PSNI in Foyle appeal to frightened foreigners to get in touch

The PSNI are encouraging people to face their fears and report incidents of racial abuse or attack even though this will cause a hike in crime figures.

Statistics show a 22 per cent increase in the number of racially motivated incidents in the Foyle district in 2009 with 50 reported incidents in 2008/2009.

Despite this shocking figure Foyle's PSNI Minority Liaison Officer Sergeant Robin Young says this is 'only the tip of the iceberg' and would urge anyone who has been the victim of a racially-motivated incident to report it to the [PSNI](#).

He added: "I must stress that among these reported incidents actual attacks are few and far between but we are well aware that there are a mass of incidents that go unreported. We are also prepared for our crime figures to rise as confidence in reporting increases.

"I think historically Northern Ireland has always had an element of racism. But it wasn't as common or prevalent in the past as it is now. No-one wanted to come and live in Northern Ireland because of our reputation for terrorism. Now we have a lot more migrant workers coming in. We are starting to see more connections here with white supremacy groups. It's like a politics of fear. Extremist groups focus on a concern in the community, like the recession and the lack of jobs. People then piggyback on the fears generated by this.

"For a long time the Polish people were getting a very, very hard time in the Northwest but it's really hard to say which group suffers the most now. It changes from time to time. In Belfast at the moment it's the Romaines that are being attacked.

"Anyone that is seen to defend the Romaines community is coming under attack and there are even websites run by white supremacy groups trying to identify these defenders from photos taken at campaigns. This is very worrying.

"I met a black girl a couple of months ago in Derry and she was just driving through the city on a warm day with the window down. She was stopped at a set of red lights when a guy cycled past on a bicycle and gave her a whole pile of racist abuse and cycled on. I'm a police officer and I'm used to people shouting abuse at me because people do that but she got really upset because of the entire randomness of the thing. She doesn't know who the guy is and the guy doesn't know who she is.

"He just sees the fact that she is coloured and decides he's going to give her a whole pile of abuse through her window. He didn't attack her, he didn't assault her, he didn't threaten her, he just gave her an awful amount of abuse about the colour of her skin. She's left thinking, now I don't want to go out because I don't know if that guy is following me, is he stalking me? Is he going to find out where I live?"

Sergeant Young explained: "One of my roles involves 'hate incident practical action'. If your home is attacked, or your windows broken, or you are worried as many people are about fire, you know there is a wide range of stuff we can hand out free to victims of hate crime, which make people feel a little safer in their homes."

Sergeant Young shared: "There was a Polish family had their car graffitied. On a scale of one to ten you would think it wasn't that serious because they didn't use permanent marker and a wipe of a cloth took it off but there was stuff about Rangers football club, and 'Polish get out'. There was also sectarian stuff. This just shows how people stereotype. They automatically assumed that all Polish are Catholic when in actual fact this particular family were Brethren.

"You get into a very sad situation where people have left their own country to start again and they don't feel safe. They don't want to live in the house anymore. It's the fear of crime that grips them. They wonder will they be attacked with fire next time.

"We can give people a special letterbox fitting to prevent arson. We can give personal attack alarms. It's not just talk with the PSNI we do deliver. "The important thing is to help people not feel like prisoners in their own home. It is time people understood that different isn't dangerous. Just because someone has come from another country and is working in a factory for minimum wage does not mean that they have stolen their job. I know a foreign man working in Limavady as a pizza deliverer and he is a structural engineer in his own country. So why should somebody without any qualifications think they have more right to that job?"

He says: "It is vital that people report anything they think is racially motivated. They can go to [Seeds](#) or can report it online. We will never get a real clear picture of what racism is like in Northern Ireland unless we get everybody to report what's going on to us. The fear can sometimes seem worse than the incident but the fear is what drives racism.

"Racism is built on the politics of fear. The fear that they are over here and taking our jobs, they are going to subsume your whole society, impact on everything you believe in and everything you know. This is just not true."

About this story

This story was written by: Shannon, Michael, Jack, Emma, Thomas and Tola.

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