



In the Spotlight...

Discriminatory abuse

In this Spotlight on Practice...

The Care and Support Statutory Guidance defines discriminatory abuse as ‘forms of harassment, slurs or similar treatment because of race, gender and gender identity, age, disability, sexual orientation or religion’.

Any unequal treatment based upon age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex, or sexual orientation (protected characteristics) is discriminatory abuse.

Specific examples include, but are not limited to:

- Verbal abuse, derogatory remarks or inappropriate use of language related to a protected characteristic
- Acts or comments motivated to harm and/or damage, including inciting others to commit such acts
- Denying access to communication aids, or not allowing access to an interpreter, signer, or lip-reader
- Harassment or deliberate exclusion on the grounds of a protected characteristic
- Denying basic rights to healthcare, education, employment, and criminal justice relating to a protected characteristic
- Substandard service provision relating to a protected characteristic

In this edition you can, find information about ...

- What is discriminatory abuse
- Key messages
- Working with discriminatory abuse
- Learning from reviews
- Further information
- Contacts

Types of discrimination

There are 4 types of discriminatory behaviour under the Equality Act 2010:

Type	Description and Example	Applies to:
Direct discrimination	When someone is treated less favourably because of a protected characteristic (actual or perceived), or because of their association with someone who has a protected characteristic.	All protected characteristics.
Indirect discrimination	When policies, procedures, ways of working or rules are applied equally to everyone and put people with a certain protected characteristic at a disadvantage compared with those who do not share that characteristic.	All protected characteristics except for pregnancy and maternity.
Harassment	Intentional or unintentional behaviour that violates dignity and creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.	All protected characteristics except for pregnancy and maternity, marriage, and civil partnership.
Victimisation	When someone is treated unfairly as a result of making a complaint about discrimination.	All protected characteristics.

Key messages

Discriminatory abuse is one of the least reported categories of abuse. In 2023-24, discriminatory abuse featured in less than 1% of concluded section 42 safeguarding enquiries, locally and nationally. Only 2% SARs from 2019-23 were completed under this category of abuse.

Factors such as poor recording of protected characteristics, stigma, intersectionality, and improper information sharing may affect how discriminatory abuse is interpreted, identified and reported.

Discriminatory abuse may not be recognised as abuse, as it manifests itself alongside other types of abuse. People often have multiple intersecting characteristics and may be targeted in relation to different characteristics at different times, or multiple characteristics simultaneously.

Discriminatory abuse extends beyond interpersonal harm and requires practitioners to understand the structural, social and environmental factors that shape the person's daily experiences, such as poverty, housing or neighbourhood safety.

Discriminatory abuse requires person-centred responses, underpinned by practice vocabulary and meaningful conversations. Practitioners should promote advocacy, acknowledge power and inequality, and value the voices of marginalised people and communities.

Greater public awareness about discriminatory abuse and targeted approach to 'at risk' groups are important, as people may not be able to identify discriminatory abuse or may not be aware of safeguarding processes or where to access support.

Working with discriminatory abuse

- Working with discriminatory abuse is extremely sensitive and may be difficult to talk about due to stigma/shame. This requires practitioners to engage with empathy, show understanding, and build rapport and supportive relationships
- Some protected characteristics are visible while others may be hidden. People may have multiple protected characteristics, therefore, an intersectional lens is essential when working with discriminatory abuse
- It's important to establish what significance the protected characteristics may have in terms of the motivation for abuse, everyday experiences of discrimination, future risk of abuse, and barriers to safety, recovery and overall wellbeing
- It's important to see the person and their history, understand the impact of trauma and marginalisation, and create trust. This includes the person's network and relationships important to them. This will enable to ensure that the person receives the right support, and that their rights are upheld
- Practitioners need to ensure that they don't underestimate the importance of the person's protected characteristics and address unconscious bias. Our own practice and organisational factors can reinforce stigma and it's crucial that we guard against this
- Dealing with discriminatory abuse through one-off interventions is unlikely to be effective. Follow-up and preventative work regarding the potential for repeat incidents are crucial
- Practitioners should be aware of local and national support services for signposting purpose. Specialist, culturally specific and local voluntary sector services are important when working with discriminatory abuse. This should include advocacy and peer support

Learning from reviews

Several Safeguarding Adults Reviews have dealt with situations where discrimination led to, or was a feature of abuse and the death of adults with care and support needs.

For a full appreciation of what happened, practitioners are encouraged to read the reports in full.

Further information on reviews featuring discriminatory abuse can be found here - [Discriminatory abuse: a briefing for practitioners | Local Government Association](#)

[Steven Hoskin, Serious Case Review, 2007](#)

Steven Hoskin was a 39-year-old man with learning disabilities, who was tortured and murdered by a local gang.

The review found that despite numerous calls to health and social care services, housing and the police, action was not taken to prevent Steven's abuse and death.

[Fiona Pilkington, Serious Case Review, 2008](#)

Following ten years of harassment by local youths, Fiona ended her life and that of her 18-year-old daughter, Francecca Hardwick, who had learning disabilities.

The review found serious failings by the police to carry out their responsibilities to protect the family from harassment and ASB.

[Gemma Hayter, Serious Case Review, 2011](#)

Gemma was a 27-year-old woman with learning disabilities, murdered by those she thought were her friends.

The review highlighted issues around eligibility for support, no assessments of risk, lack of multi-agency approach and poor communication between services.

[Winterbourne View, Serious Case Review, 2012](#)

Widespread abuse of residents with learning disabilities and autism was uncovered in a BBC Panorama programme.

The review highlighted an organisational culture of abuse, as well as issues around multi-agency working, commissioning and inspection.

[Peter Farquhar, Independent Safeguarding Review, 2020](#)

Peter's abuser defrauded, manipulated and poisoned him, resulting in his murder.

The review highlighted issues with a lack of open, inclusive culture around LGBTQ+ relationships in the church community, as well as issues with safer recruitment, information sharing and safeguarding responses.

Further information

- [Discriminatory abuse self-assessment tool: safeguarding adults | Local Government Association](#)
- [Discriminatory abuse: a briefing for practitioners | Local Government Association](#)
- [Podcast - Discriminatory abuse – developing practice responses | Research in Practice](#)
- [Developing practice with discriminatory abuse | Research in Practice](#)
- [Webinar: Have we learned the lessons from Steven Hoskin's murder? – SCIE](#)
- [Discriminatory abuse: a briefing for practitioners | Local Government Association](#)
- [Discriminatory abuse: time to revive a forgotten form of abuse? | Emerald Insight](#)

For further information, please visit our website



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