

Anti-social behaviour on rise UK

When was the last time you witnessed or experienced at first-hand an act of anti-social behaviour? The answer is probably within the last 24 hours.

Anti-social behaviour has always been with us but, unlike most types of crime, it is on the increase and all too prevalent in most parts of the UK.

Not surprisingly the Government, local Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships, the police, neighbourhood wardens and neighbourhood watch schemes are all trying to tackle anti-social behaviour.

There is evidence from the British Crime Survey and other sources that older people get upset, anxious and annoyed about anti-social behaviour that affects them and their local or social communities. But which types of disorder are these exactly and what is being done to remedy the problem? Some clues to the answers to some of these questions are to be found in two recent publications.

The Home Office's *Defining and Measuring Anti-social Behaviour* provides some disturbing statistics. On one day in September 2003 in England and Wales alone, a total of 66,107 reports of acts of anti-social behaviour were reported to official agencies. This makes an estimated count of 13.5 million reported acts annually. The daily cost to the tax payer is estimated at £14 million. And that does not include the 'social cost' suffered by victims and local communities.

Types of anti-social behaviour include joy-riding, drug dealing, verbal abuse, pestering and dropping litter, plus a whole host of other types of nuisance behaviour. Help the Aged would like to hear from senior citizens' forums and pensioner groups that have been involved in initiatives to combat anti-social behaviour, and what outcomes were achieved. There is scope for spreading good practice.

Another piece of research by Rowland Atkinson and John Flint, from the Department of Urban Studies at the University of Glasgow (Policy and Politics, Volume 32), shows that those living in urban areas have ambivalent attitudes to tackling anti-social behaviour. The authors found that different types of crime and disorder were perceived as 'big' problems in 'affluent' and 'deprived' neighbourhoods. But they also discovered that community spirit, neighbourly activities and trust also varied, as did the responses to threats. More surprisingly was the finding that local residents of deprived areas, which are often seen as 'disempowered and disorganised', were prepared to intervene in ways that suited them. They were indeed 'fearful of repercussions' and becoming a 'target' locally but still prepared to take action.

For more information, visit www.crimereduction.gov.uk/antisocialbehaviour39.htm

Alan Burnett

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More police on the streets

Help the Aged has welcomed the proposal by the Home Secretary to fund an increase in the number of police community support officers on our streets. It is planned that by 2008, there will be a total of 24,000 community support officers in England and Wales 'to patrol the streets and offer reassurance to the public'. The aim is to bring about a situation in which people worry less about becoming a victim of crime and are less likely to feel that anti-social behaviour is a problem in their area.

The Charity is calling for the Home Secretary and Police Chiefs to encourage 'purposeful patrolling'. It is essential that these new officers: find out the places that older people are afraid to go to because they feel unsafe, and patrol in these areas; stop anti-social behaviour, such as riding cycles on the pavement, making excessive noise after dark, graffiti and littering; and are ready to respond quickly to calls and complaints from older members of the public.

We would be pleased to collaborate with police forces to ensure that the needs of older people are met. Research undertaken by Help the Aged shows that many older people are anxious about crime, particularly those who live in high crime areas, live on their own, are in poor health or have been a victim of crime themselves. All our surveys show that older people want more police on the streets.

Alan Burnett

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