

Mate Crime

What is mate crime?

There is no statutory definition of mate crime in UK law. The term is generally understood to refer to the befriending of people, who are perceived by perpetrators to be vulnerable, for the purposes of taking advantage of, exploiting and/ or abusing them. This can strongly but not exclusively associated, with people with a learning disability, learning difficulties or mental health conditions.

Mate Crime happens when someone ‘makes friends’ with a person and goes on to abuse or exploit that relationship. The founding intention of the relationship, from the point of view of the perpetrator, is likely to be criminal. The relationship is likely to be of some duration and, if unchecked, may lead to a pattern of repeat and worsening abuse. Whilst there is no legal definition of mate crime, in many situations mate crime will be an example of disability hate crime.

Factors that can impact mate crime:

1. Mate crimes might have been invited, or appear to have been invited, by the person with a learning disability, raising issues of mental capacity, consent and informed choice. There may even be positive payoffs for the victim (attention, excitement, ‘friendship’, etc.), so the typical outcomes of hate crime - physical injury, distress, complaint – may not be manifest.
2. Mate crimes are not necessarily criminal. A typical non-criminal mate crime might involve someone living on their own who has a group of friends that they meet up with on Friday nights. Whilst this relationship may be genuinely one of friendship, it is still exploitative if the person with a learning disability always supplies the venue, the beer, has their fridge raided, their phone used, and is always left to clear up afterwards.
3. Mate crimes are likely to occur in private, for example, in people’s own homes, rather than the more public sphere of much hate crime. Increasingly this includes online crime.
4. Mate crimes are likely to occur (though not exclusively) within long-term relationships. These relationships may have started as, or may actually still be, genuine friendships. Even if they are not, they may appear to be so to many observers. It is difficult for many people to conceive of these relationships containing an element of abuse .
5. Mate Crimes are unlikely to be disclosed by someone with a learning disability. This may be for a number of reasons including not recognising the abuse for what it is, considering the relationship more important than the abuse that takes place within it, embarrassment/ shame, and fear of retribution.

6. Until recently mate crime has been unrecognised in hate crime materials, educational resources, safeguarding procedures, etc.

Given the right circumstances, we are all ‘vulnerable’ and some of the following reasons may render us so:

- We all need friends.
- People are often living very isolated lives.
- Learned compliance.
- People still live sheltered lives.
- Most people with learning disabilities are outside the system.
- Social exclusion and poverty.
- Historical social attitudes towards disability. What are the features of mate crime? There are features of mate crime which can provide significant challenges to recognise and provide support for victims:
- Social isolation: Targeted individuals often lack the support network that many people take for granted and the level of social isolation in which some people live, at the margins of society.
- Lack of support from agencies: people who are targeted are often those who do not meet the criteria for a high level of services.
- Fear of reporting: when victims do recognise that something is wrong, they may be too afraid to report it.
- Use of threats to control victims: threats are a common feature of hate crimes across the board, but seem to play a particularly strong role in cases of mate crime, where the perpetrators want to control the victim.
- Accusations of sexual misconduct: accusations of a sexual nature are a very common feature of mate crime and are often used by perpetrators to justify an escalation in violence
- Lack of response for request for help: when victims do try to get help, agencies often fail to act on their reports.

Types of abuse

The Perpetrator might try to exploit the following forms of abuse:

1. Financial Abuse – lend or steal money or exploit labour.
2. Physical Abuse – exert force to control the individual.
3. Emotional Abuse – manipulate or mislead the person, make them feel worthless.
4. Sexual Abuse – coerce the person into prostitution or sexually exploit them.
5. Criminal exploitation – coerce or groom the person to commit criminal offences.

Victims of mate crime might display noticeable changes in behaviour, such as:

- Unexplained injuries
 - Bills not being paid/sudden loss of assets
 - Weight loss
 - Isolation from usual contacts
 - Withdrawal from services
 - Changes in behaviour or mood
 - Changes in friends or noticeable forms of control
- Common trends in mate crime
- Perpetrators are often predatory ‘friends’, support workers, acquaintances, neighbours, local residents, school children, groups of young adults or family
 - Incidents are likely to escalate in severity and frequency
 - Multiple perpetrators can be involved in incidents condoning and encouraging the main offender, often filming on mobile phones and sending pictures to friends or social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter or YouTube
 - False accusations may occur calling the victim a paedophile or ‘grass’
 - There may be repeated attacks with excessive violence
 - Cruelty, humiliation, degrading treatment (may be related to the nature of the disability e.g. blindfolding someone with a hearing impairment, destroying mobility aids etc.)

What should be done?

In many situations mate crime will be an example of disability hate crime and this should be reported to the police as such.

Mate crimes require a greater multi-agency response and in many cases can be complex in nature. It is extremely difficult for a person to come forward and agencies across the country need to be aware of the signs and potential impacts. This can be due to a fear of not being believed; not recognising the abuse as a crime; fear of repercussions; or being afraid to report a perceived friend or family member in many cases. It may also be there have usually been previous incidents, and at times the crimes often become regular and target the individual victim or their family/friends.

What can the church do?

- Raise awareness amongst your members of the issues people with learning disabilities, their families, carers and support workers face in churches
- Publish guidelines for welcoming people with learning disabilities (and people on the autism spectrum) into church services
- Equip your welcome teams through training
- Train leaders to help make the teaching and worship in Sunday services accessible to people with learning disabilities

- Run special ministry or small groups for people with learning disabilities.
- Train individuals to befriend people with learning disabilities, ensure they check in with them regularly about what they have been doing, who is visiting their home and the people who are their friends.

Useful contacts:

[Livability: Is the lead Christian organisation for people with learning disabilities.](#)

[Victim Support](#)

[Mencap](#)

[ARC \(Association for Real Change\)](#)