

SUBMISSION

TO	All Party Parliamentary Group for Victims and Witnesses of Crime
FROM	The Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC)
REGARDING	Inquiry into unreported child victims of crime

Summary

This submission is based on evidence identified during the course of our work, and focuses on:

- key messages coming from our recent youth engagement events.
- key findings from our recent public confidence survey.
- key data from our annual police complaints report.

The Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC)

1. The IPCC was established by the Police Reform Act 2002 and became operational in April 2004. Its primary statutory function is to secure and maintain public confidence in the police complaints system in England and Wales. It acts as an appeal body for some locally handled complaints and issues statutory guidance on complaints handling to police forces and local policing bodies. It undertakes independent investigations into the most serious cases; and has the power to manage or supervise police investigations. It has a statutory obligation to measure, monitor and where necessary, seek to improve the current complaints system. The IPCC is independent and makes its decisions independently of the police, government and interest groups.
2. The IPCC was created following both public and political concerns about the lack of an independent system to deal with complaints and conduct matters within the police service. Since that time its remit has been extended to include:
 - Criminal allegations against Police and Crime Commissioners and their deputies, and; the London Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime and his deputy;
 - the National Crime Agency (NCA);
 - Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC);
 - Staff who carry out certain border and immigration functions within the UK Border Force and the Home Office, and

- certain non Home Office police forces (including the British Transport Police and the Ministry of Defence Police).
3. The IPCC is run by a Chair, two Deputy Chairs, eight operational Commissioners and four non-executive Commissioners. Together they make up the Commission. Commissioners (other than the four non-executive Commissioners and the Chair) have an operational role and all Commissioners have responsibility for governance of the organisation. Commissioners are appointed by the Home Secretary and by law they must never have served as a police officer. The Commission is supported by a Chief Executive Officer, a small management team and a staff of about 480. In 2013/14, the IPCC received an annual budget of £32.5m.

Inquiry into the hidden victimisation of children

4. This submission is based on evidence identified during the course of our work. It focuses on the following four questions:
- What is the extent of hidden crime amongst children and young people and what are the barriers to reporting such crime?
 - Why do young victims not report their experiences to the police?
 - What are young people's experiences of reporting and does the police service need to change practice to address this?
 - Do young people have any trust in the elements of the criminal justice system or charities working in this area?
5. Our response does not include information about investigations that are ongoing. Emerging findings from these investigations are not yet in the public domain, and although they may be relevant to the inquiry, sharing them at this stage would risk prejudicing the investigations, inquests or criminal or disciplinary proceedings.

Young people's experiences of contact with the police

6. In 2014 we held a series of youth engagement events in London, Cardiff, Birmingham, and Bradford with young people aged 16-24. The events were designed to help us:
- raise young people's awareness of the complaints system and the IPCC;
 - find out more about the issues affecting young people's trust and confidence in the complaints system and the police more generally;
 - identify ways to help raise young people's awareness of how to complain, and
 - identify new ways for us to engage with young people and involve them in our work moving forward.
7. At the events young people told us that there were a number of reasons why they were either unwilling or unable to speak to police officers. These included:

- **Knowledge** – not all young people recognise what inappropriate, criminal or illegal behaviour is, or understand what the police’s role is and when they should involve them.
- **Access** – young people said that many of them are not confident to go into a police station or speak to officers.
- **Fear of stigma** – young people said they worried about being viewed as a “grass” by their peers, family or communities if it became known that they spoke to the police.
- **Shame** – young people said they felt less confident talking to the police about certain issues for fear that they would be judged, or that the police would not understand.
- **Fear that they won’t be believed** – young people said they worried that the police would always take the word of adults, teachers or those in positions of authority.
- **Negative experiences** – young people said that previous direct negative contact with the police (for example through stop and search), or hearing about the bad experiences of peers or family members, has damaged their trust in the police and has made them less confident or willing to turn to the police in times of difficulty.
- **Concern that they won’t be properly supported** – young people talked about the importance of having access to appropriate adults, advocates or other specialist support to ensure that their views and interests are properly represented and not overlooked, and how this support was not always readily available.
- **Lack of trust** - young people talked at length about how historic and current police failures, and the absence of positive news stories, often leaves them feeling that there is no point talking to the police - because “no one ever has a good experience” and “nothing ever gets investigated properly”.

8. A number of participants shared their personal experience of recent contact with the police:

- One young person told us that they reported an incident to the police, but the police did not keep them informed of the outcome or whether any action had been taken. The individual did not make a complaint because they did not know how to.
- One young person told us that they tried to call the police repeatedly about incidents of domestic abuse. According to the individual, the police “kept saying that they were aware”, but no action was taken and the abuse continued. The young person did not make a complaint because they had no confidence that anything would happen as a result.
- One young person told us that they had reported a serious incident to the police. They did not feel that the incident was investigated properly, but they did not make a complaint because they were too scared about what would happen as a result.

- One young person called the police to complain about their neighbour. However, they said that the information was not treated confidentially. This experience damaged their confidence in the police.
 - One young person called the police regarding a serious incident. According to the individual, the police did not attend for several hours, despite someone being at immediate risk of harm. When the police eventually came, they went to the wrong address and never came back when they were called again. This young person said “the police are supposed to help, but they didn’t listen”. The person did not complain about their experience because they did not know how.
 - One young person came into contact with the police after they had been assaulted and robbed. The police dropped the case because of a lack of evidence. The young person said that throughout their contact with the police they felt that the police never believed their story and made no attempt to look for witnesses as a result.
9. A number of young people commented throughout the sessions that the police need to be better at communicating with young people, and explaining what their rights are and what young people can expect – whether this is telling a young person about their rights when they are stopped and searched, or explaining the next steps when they report a crime. The recent report on the All Party Parliamentary Group for Children’s inquiry into children and the police recommended that “the College of Policing should review police training to ensure it provides all officers with a solid understanding of the specific needs of children and young people . . . including how to communicate and engage with this age group.” Work in this area may go some way to addressing the issues raised by the young people that have attended our events.
10. The detailed notes from each event will be available on our website at www.ipcc.gov.uk from mid-December.

Young people’s experiences of the police complaints system

11. Since 2004 we have conducted regular surveys of the general public to explore awareness of, and confidence in, the complaints system.
12. Our research has consistently shown us that young people are less likely to be aware of how to complain, or be less willing to complain, and be less confident that their complaints will be handled fairly than any other age group.
13. Our analysis is based on the responses of young people aged 15-24, as numbers of respondents aged 15-17 are too small to enable us to conduct robust analysis and produce conclusions which are statistically significant.
14. The results of our latest survey were published in July 2014 and show the following:
- 22% (153) of 705 young people aged 15-24 had some form of contact with the police in the last 12 months, and
 - of the 153 young people 55% (85) were happy/very happy with the way police treated them during this contact.

15. The survey found that of the 705 young people aged 15-24 surveyed:
- 64% (453) said they would be likely to complain if they were really unhappy about how a police officer had behaved towards them, or had handled badly a matter in which they were involved;
 - 51% (362) said they would complain if a police officer was rude to them when they asked for assistance;
 - 75% (527) said they would make an official complaint if a police officer failed to properly investigate a burglary they reported;
 - 53% (376) said they felt confident that they knew how to complain, and
 - 52% (369) said they felt confident that the police would with complaints fairly.
16. Young people aged 0-17 typically only account for a small number of complaints made each year, despite high levels of contact with the police.
17. When we asked participants at our recent youth engagement events why young people do not complain when they have bad experiences with the police, they told us that:
- not all young people know how the police should behave, or what their rights are - so they do not always realise when they should make a complaint;
 - most young people do not know how to complain, because the process is not advertised, and the information does not feature in 'know your rights' material or on websites used by young people;
 - not everyone wants to walk into a police station or talk to an officer to make a complaint, sometimes people just want to talk to someone face-to-face who is independent of the police;
 - some police officers try to discourage young people from complaining;
 - some young people are concerned about being labelled as "a grass" – it is not part of their culture/generation to "tell tales";
 - some young people worry that they will not be believed or taken seriously, particularly if they've been in trouble in the past - they also fear that if they make a complaint the police won't help them in the future if they need them;
 - some young people think that complaining is not worthwhile as "nothing ever changes", and
 - some young people worry that the police will close ranks and stick up for each other.
18. As part of our ongoing work we will be looking at how we can respond to the issues raised by young people. More information about the work that we will be undertaking in this area will be available on our website at www.ipcc.gov.uk from mid-December.

19. Separately, we have concerns about how young people, as complainants, are treated as witnesses, at Crown Court, appeals and misconduct hearings, as cases progress in an attempt to establish an officer's guilt or innocence. The process of being called to give evidence in a formal setting is often intimidating and stressful for adults, but it can be even more so for young people. In cases where there are several officers involved, the young person can be repeatedly cross examined by the individual legal representatives that are representing each officer.
20. We have taken steps to support young witnesses where they come into contact with us through independent investigations, and we will be working with relevant national policing leads and forces to ensure that young people receive appropriate protection and support where they are required to participate in similar processes..

Sharing learning from our work

21. We are committed to sharing our knowledge and expertise with other agencies working in this area to help improve policing and standards, and in turn, improve confidence in the police. As part of this work we regularly share information with:
 - Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) to inform inspections being undertaken;
 - the College of Policing to inform the development of Authorised Professional Practice (APP) and training being developed for the police service;
 - parliamentary inquiries, other agencies or government departments working to improve standards in policing, and
 - policy makers, managers and frontline officers across the police service via our regular Learning the Lessons Bulletins and through a variety of thematic research.
22. The inquiry might also be interested in a number of cases which the IPCC has been involved in where police failures to deal with incidents involving young people have been identified. These have included police failures to:
 - respond appropriately to incidents involving young people, because important information about historic incidents involving them has been overlooked or not given proper consideration when deciding on the appropriate level of response.
 - properly record or investigate reports from young people alleging that they have been the victim of criminal activity – including theft, assault and physical or sexual abuse.
 - properly investigate historic allegations of sexual abuse, and identify the ongoing threat to young people.

Case 1: Acting on a report of child abuse

A man called police to report that he had been sexually abused and raped between the ages of 10 and 15 and that he was reporting the matter now because

he was concerned that the man involved was now abusing another young person.

Despite the concerns raised, no immediate action was taken to safeguard the wellbeing of the young person at risk and to prevent them from being subjected to further abuse. The man responsible for the abuse was not arrested until some 59 days after the matter was first brought to the attention of the police.

Following his arrest, the man was granted street bail by the arresting officers and went on to have contact with the young person he had been abusing.

The man was subsequently charged with 19 charges of rape and sexual activity and the taking of indecent images of children. He pleaded guilty to all charges and received a 12-year prison sentence.

[More information](#) about this case is available on our website.

- act on concerns of parents, teachers, neighbours or other agencies about young people being at risk of sexual exploitation, grooming, physical or sexual abuse, neglect or cruelty, or immediate harm.
- act on information about young people suspected of being at risk of harm.

Case 2: Acting on information from CEOP

After carrying out research into a number of child abuse images, the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) passed intelligence to a force which included the name, address and contact number for one of the suspected offenders.

Although CEOP was confident it had provided enough information for officers to obtain a warrant for the address, confusion over the identity of the offender, and whether children were still at the property, meant that officers did not take immediate action to visit the property and identify whether any children were still at risk.

An officer checking a local computer system was eventually able to identify a man linked to the property as being one of the men in the images.

Despite this positive identification, a number of days passed before officers executed the warrant due to staffing levels.

The man identified in the photo was arrested and charged with ten offences against his stepchildren, including three offences against one of the children who was still resident at the property. The latest offence had taken place three to five days before the warrant was executed.

[More information](#) about this case is available on our website.

- make links between ongoing cases with the result that the activities of organised gangs or prolific offenders go unchallenged.
- share information or work together with other agencies to safeguard young people's welfare.

23. A variety of other case studies illustrating some of the points listed above can also be found in Learning the Lessons Bulletins, research reports and investigation reports which are available to download from our website at www.ipcc.gov.uk.

Independent Police Complaints Commission

4 November 2014