

Statistical summary
of a survey of

Abuse of counter extremists

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Summary

The level of abuse experienced by respondents to our survey is worrying.

- Over three quarters (78%) of counter extremism (CE) practitioners polled have experienced abuse, intimidation or harassment because of the work they do or for receiving government funding for countering extremism work.
- This abuse is having a chilling effect, with just over half (51%) of those who experienced abuse saying it makes them apprehensive about speaking up in public, including on social media.
- Around a third (34%) of those who stated that they had experienced abuse did not report it, with those that do marginally more likely to be satisfied than dissatisfied with the response.

We wanted to find out whether the experiences of abuse we heard about during our engagement was shared by others working in CE. Our survey suggests that counter extremists experience high levels of abuse, intimidation or harassment because of the work they do. Although the sample size is small and further research is required to establish this reliably, we are concerned that abuse towards counter extremists is prevalent throughout the sector.

Introduction

The independent Commission for Countering Extremism was formed in 2018 and is led by Lead Commissioner Sara Khan. Our vision is one where together we uphold our democratic way of life in a peaceful, plural and inclusive society.

Through our engagement, however, we have been told about the abuse counter extremists suffer in the course of their work. Some practitioner respondents to our public Call for Evidence into extremism supported this assertion. We wanted to find out whether these experiences are shared by others working in the field.

To better understand this, we conducted a short online survey of those who work in CE asking whether they had experienced abuse because of the work they do and what the impact of this abuse has been.

Methodology

The survey consisted of nine questions with a mixture of yes/no answers, a Likert scale and free text boxes. We based it on other surveys into harassment.¹

We wanted to hear from people working in CE. This includes, but is not limited to, public sector employees with a relevant CE or safeguarding roles and individuals working for relevant civil society organisations.

Respondents were recruited by email. We sent the survey to approximately 200 practitioners, including community coordinators and Prevent coordinators as well as civil society groups we have engaged with.

The survey ran for five days in July 2019 and received 83 responses. We were unable to determine the response rate because recipients were free to forward the survey on to others in the sector.

Given that the CE sector is comparatively small, it is possible that respondents to this survey had also previously responded to our Call for Evidence.

¹ For example: Ipsos MORI survey for Amnesty International on online abuse and harassment. 19 November 2017 (accessed: 18 September 2019) <www.ipsos.com/ipsos-mori/en-uk/online-abuse-and-harassment>

Respondent profile

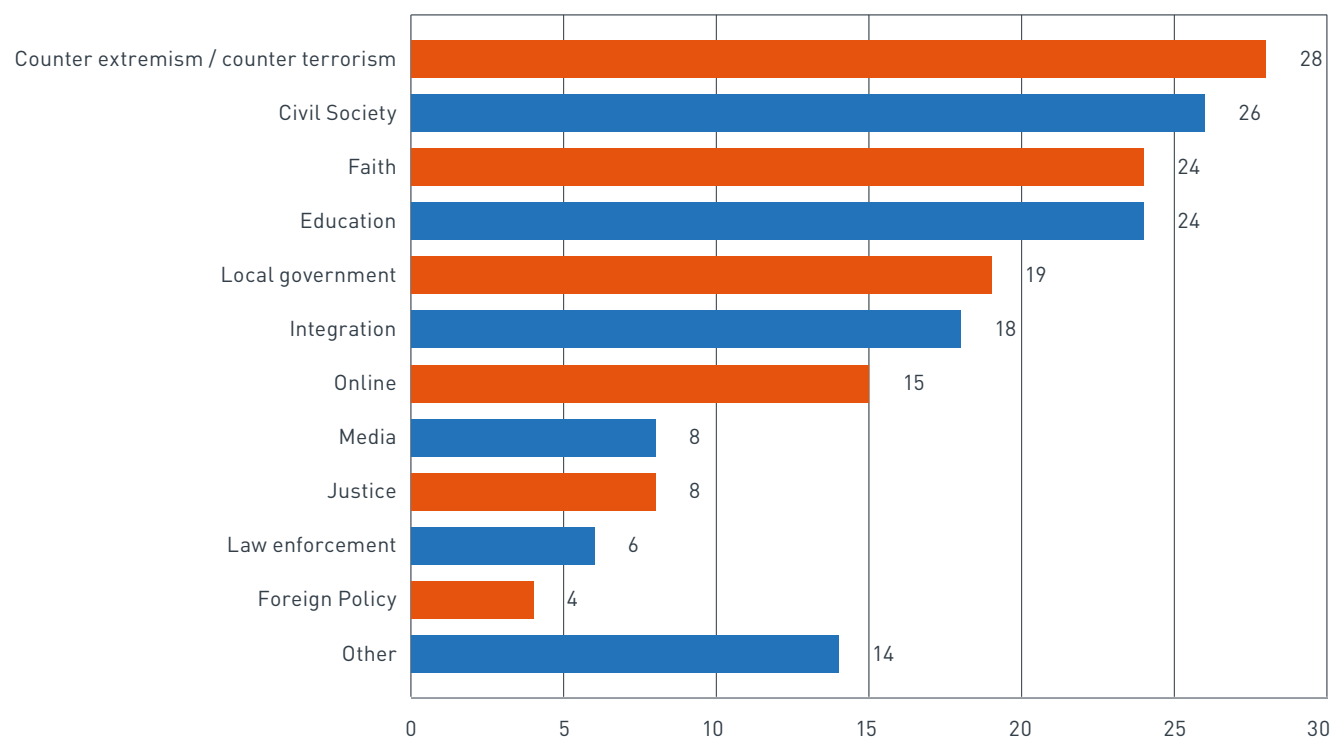
The survey was completed anonymously, and we did not collect demographic data.²

We asked respondents to select from a list of areas of expertise, and we received responses from individuals who identified as working in a range of fields, including CE and counter terrorism, civil society, faith and education.

Respondents could select multiple options, and so we were unable to determine the distribution of the sample.

2 Three of the 83 respondents answered “no” to the question “Do you consider your work as countering extremism or building resilience to it?”. All three went on to tell us that they personally have experienced abuse because of their work countering extremism so they have been included in the analysis.

Figure 1: Areas of interest covered by counter extremism practitioner respondents



Out of all respondents (n=83); respondents could select multiple options

What is the scale of abuse?

People working in CE experience abuse.

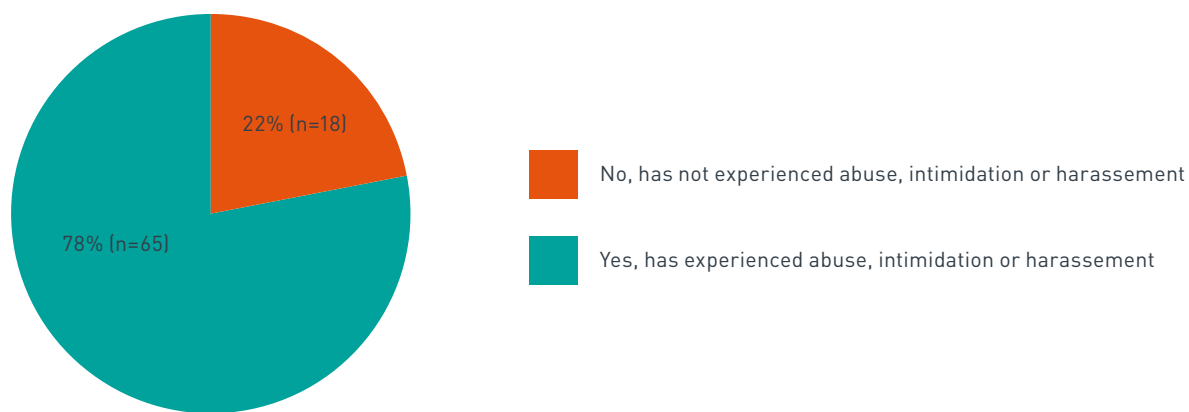
Seventy-six percent of respondents (n=63) told us that they have experienced abuse, intimidation or harassment because of the work they do. Almost a quarter (24%, n=20) said they had not experienced such abuse.

Forty-three percent of respondents (n=36) told us that they have experienced abuse, intimidation or harassment because they had received government funding for delivering countering extremism work. Over a quarter (28%, n=23) said they had not experienced such abuse; and 29% (n=24) selected “I haven’t received government funding for CE work”.

Taken together, 78% (n=65) of respondents have experienced abuse, intimidation or harassment because of the work they do or for receiving government funding for countering extremism work.³

3 This includes two respondents who answered “no” to the question “Have you personally received abuse, intimidation or harassment because of your work countering extremism?” but answered “yes” to the following question “Have you ever received abuse, intimidation or harassment because you have received government funding for delivering countering extremism work?”.

Figure 2: Counter extremism practitioner respondents experience of abuse, intimidation or harassment



Out of all respondents (n=83)

The small sample size meant that we were unable to test whether experiences of abuse were more commonly associated with particular areas of practitioner expertise.

What is the impact of abuse?

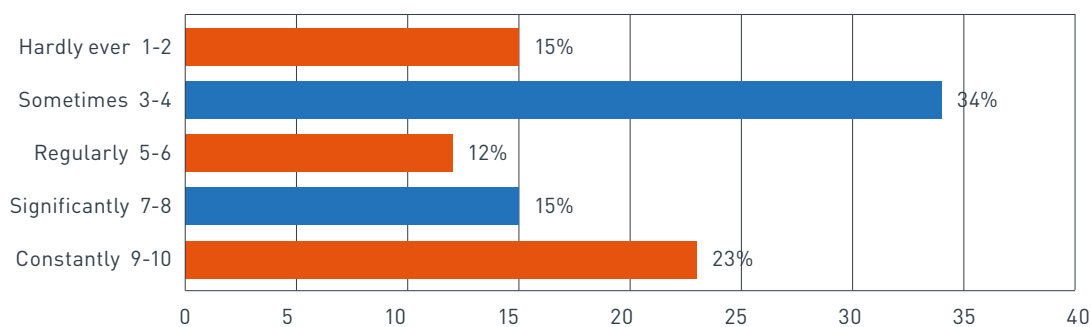
The impact of abuse on people working in CE is significant.

We asked respondents “How much of an impact has this abuse / intimidation / harassment had on you?” on a scale from 1 to 10. Respondents could choose to leave this question blank.

The 65 respondents who told us that they had experienced abuse, intimidation or harassment reported various levels of impact.

Of the 65 respondents who experienced abuse, around a third (34%, n=22) reported the abuse as “sometimes” having an impact, while almost a quarter (23%, n=15) reported it as having an impact “constantly”. Fifteen per cent (n=10) reported the abuse as “hardly ever” having an impact 12% (n=8) reported it as “regularly” having an impact, and 15% (n=10) reported it as “significantly” having an impact.

Figure 3: How much of an impact has this abuse / intimidation / harassment had on you?



Out of total respondents who experienced abuse, intimidation or harassment (n=65)

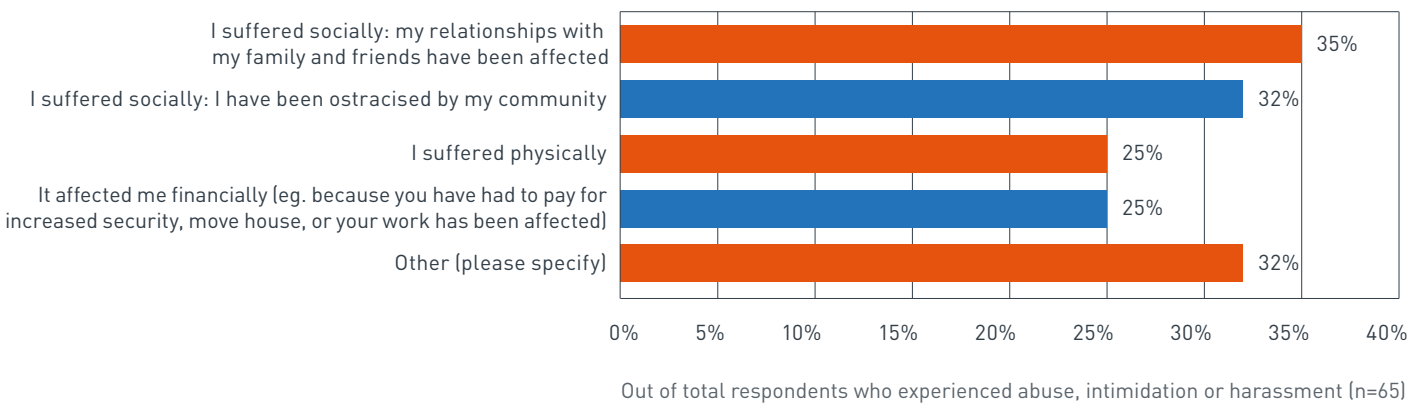
We asked respondents to select from a list of financial, physical or social consequences of this abuse. Respondents could select multiple options or choose to leave this question blank.⁴

Of the 65 respondents who experienced abuse, over a third (35%, n=23) said that their relationships with family and friends have been affected, and 32% (n=21) said they have been

ostracised by their community. A quarter (25%, n=16) said they have suffered physically, and another quarter (25%, n=16) said they have been affected financially.

Almost a third (32%, n=21) selected “other” and had the option to describe the impact in their own words.

Figure 4: Did this abuse affect you, financially, physically or socially?



We also asked respondents to select from a list of psychological consequences of this abuse. Respondents could select multiple options or choose to leave this question blank.

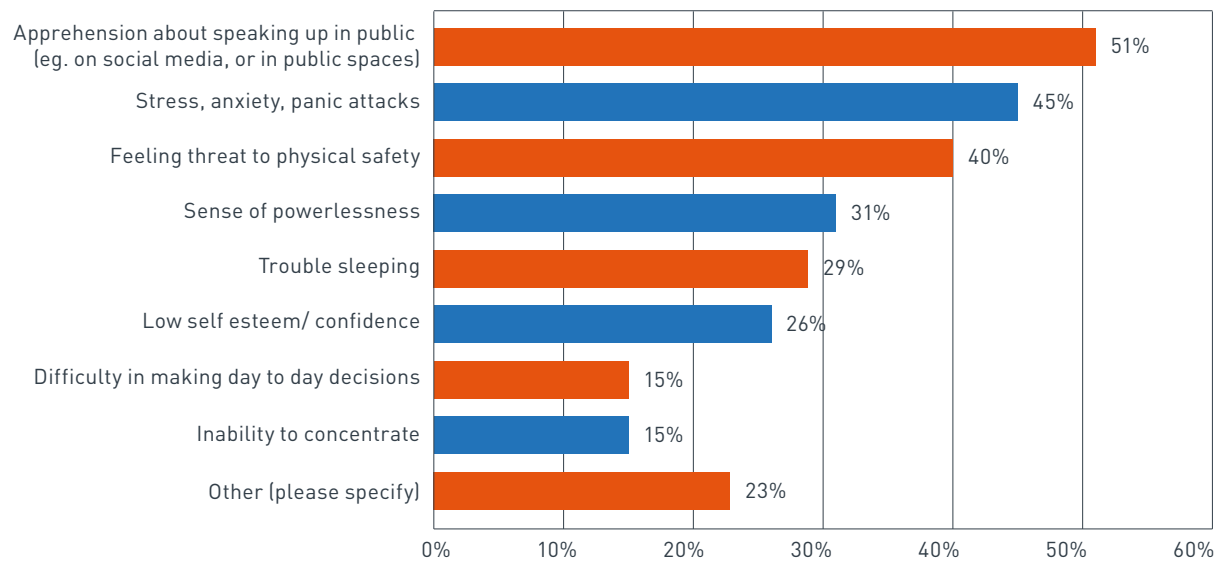
Of the 65 respondents who experienced abuse, just over half (51%, n=33) reported apprehension about speaking up online or in public, 45% (n=29) reported suffering stress, anxiety or panic attacks and four in ten (40%, n=26) reported feeling a threat to their physical safety.

These consequences were followed by a sense of powerlessness (31%, n=20); trouble sleeping (29%, n=19); low self-esteem/confidence (26%, n=17); difficulty in making day to day decisions (15%, n=10); and an inability to concentrate (15%, n=10).

Around one in five (23%, n=15) selected “other” and had the option to describe the impact in their own words.

4 One limitation of our survey is that it is not clear whether respondents were referring to one or multiple experience/s of abuse, intimidation and harassment relating to their CE work or funding.

Figure 5: Did this abuse affect you psychologically?



Out of total respondents who experienced abuse, intimidation or harassment (n=65)

In their comments, those who experienced abuse and selected “other” when asked about its effect told us:

“I suffered mentally due to online harassment.”

“I constantly feel on my guard, waiting for someone to show their true feelings about Jews. Regularly conversations with new people start with 'how do you feel about Israel?', as if my "Jewishness" is assessed by or my feelings about the conflict/ country (good Jew or bad Jew).”

“My work is affected as I am accused of being a spy, a sell-out, a coconut, a munafiq - religious hypocrite, and kuffar a non-believer. Mentally it impacts my well-being. Being British and Muslim should never be a test of loyalty to one or the other.”

“Made me question whether I wanted to remain in this line of work.”

“Feeling ostracised and that you are the odd one out in the wrong. Making you doubt yourself that you are wrong and have been brainwashed. In extreme cases I have been concerned about the safety of myself and my immediate family.”

“The constant abuse also affects mental health, it can make one edgy or nervous going out in public.”

What happened after abuse occurred?

While most CE practitioners reported the abuse through a variety of channels, satisfaction with responses is mixed.

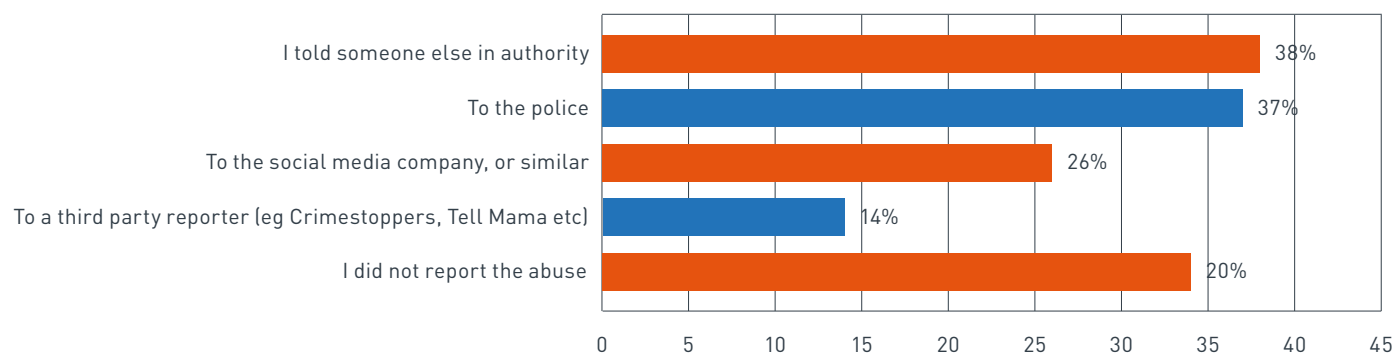
Respondents were asked whether they reported the abuse and to select from a list of four reporting channels. Of the 65 respondents who experienced abuse, 71% (n=46) told us that they reported this abuse through at least one of these four channels.

Thirty-eight percent (n=25) of respondents who experienced abuse told someone else in authority, 37% (n=24) reported it to the police, a quarter (26%, n=17) reported it to a social media company and around one in seven (14%, n=9) chose a third party reporter. Respondents could select multiple options.

Thirty-four per cent (n=22) of respondents who experienced abuse told us that they had not reported it.⁵

5 This includes three respondents who told us that they had not reported the abuse but provided answers to the follow up questions regarding the reporting channels used. Respondents were given multiple options and so in some cases may have been referring to multiple instances of abuse. For example, one of these three respondents commented, "In some instances I can't be bothered with the hassle".

Figure 6: Did you report this abuse?



Out of total respondents who experienced abuse, intimidation or harassment (n=65)

Forty-six of the 65 respondents who told us that they had experienced abuse went on to report it in some way. Of these 46, responses were mixed: with 24 reporting being satisfied with the response and 22 being dissatisfied.

In their comments, those who suffered abuse and reported it told us:

“Last year a work colleague endorsed tweets denouncing me and another colleague as racists and Islamophobes, who should be sacked from our posts [...], the [organisation] was much more concerned with protecting the perpetrator than protecting us as victims.” ⁶

“I would have liked attack videos to be taken down.”

“Feel like as a provider you're just left on your own...do the graft, the ugly challenging work then that's it.”

⁶ Name of organisation removed for privacy reasons.

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