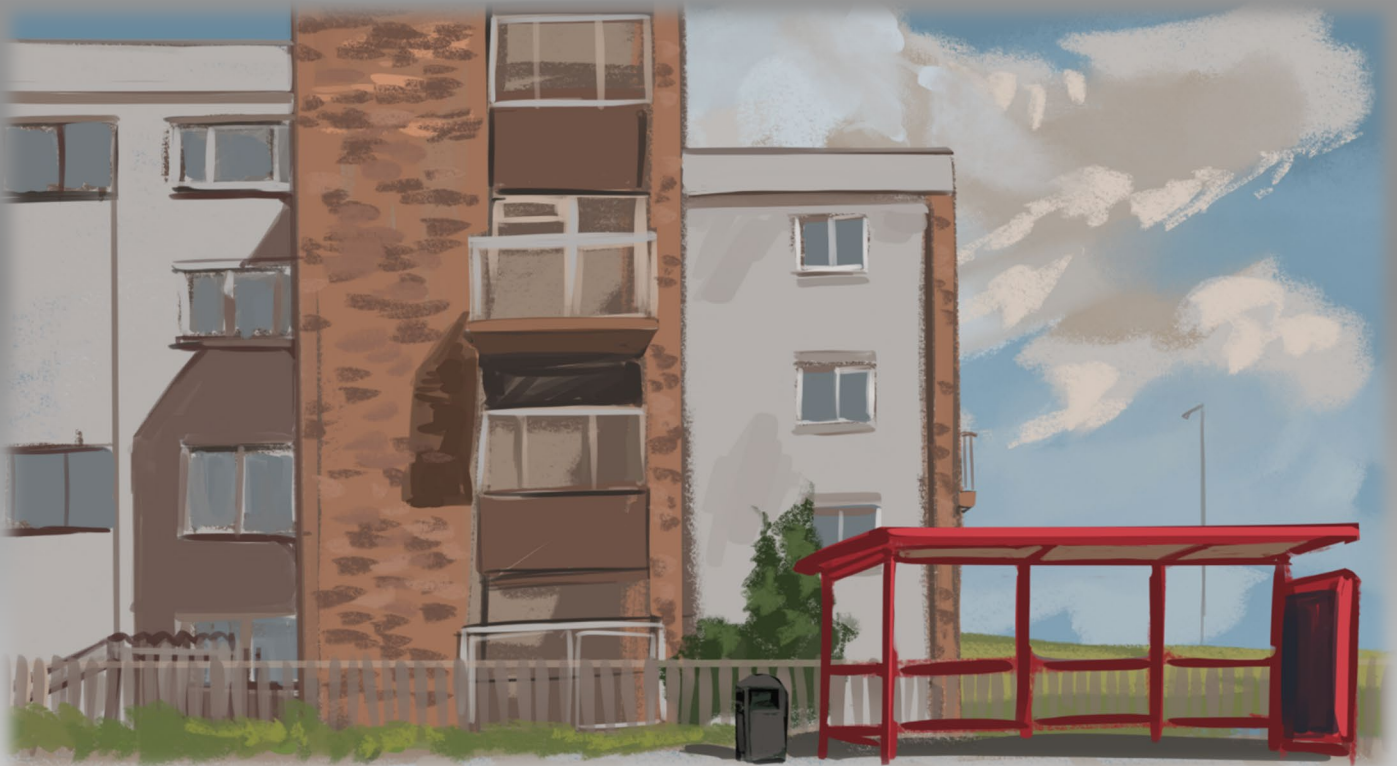


# WE SUFFER IN SILENCE

Exploring experiences of antisocial behaviour for  
people who have moved to the UK



## Summary Document

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## Introduction

Whilst the definition of antisocial behaviour has been subject to much debate (Burney, 2005; Cameron, 2023; Carr and Cowan, 2006), it can broadly be defined as a continuum of behaviours that may cause alarm or distress, ranging from relatively minor nuisance, such as an untidy garden, to more serious behaviours such as abuse and violence. Whilst some of the behaviours that could be termed antisocial are also criminal behaviours, for example assault or harassment, not all antisocial behaviour falls under the remit of criminal law (Flint, 2018). Nevertheless, it is widely accepted that the impact of antisocial behaviour, regardless as to whether it is also criminal behaviour, can be significant and long-lasting (Murray et al., 2024; Newlove, 2019). There has been a lack of research into people who have migrated and their experiences of antisocial behaviour, meaning the type, extent and impact of antisocial behaviour experienced by this group is missing from academic and practice debates. With recognition to the lack of existing information on antisocial behaviour experienced by people who have migrated to the UK, this research set out to explore:

- To what extent do migrants living in the Yorkshire and Humber region experience antisocial behaviour (ASB)?
- How do experiences of antisocial behaviour impact migrants and their families?
- How can experiences of migrants or recently settled populations of antisocial behaviour inform future research, policy and practice?

Alongside a literature review of existing research, qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted with 28 participants, including four people seeking asylum, nine people with refugee status, seven other types of migrants and eight professional stakeholders working with these groups. Ethical approval was granted by Leeds Beckett University School of Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee.

## Findings

The findings of the research are summarised below:

- The vast majority of participants felt that antisocial behaviour they had witnessed or experienced was targeted in some way related to their ethnicity or migration status, including targeting houses known to be let to asylum seekers or refugees, verbal racist abuse and physical assault.
- Children experienced antisocial behaviour from other children but also from adults who appeared to target them with verbal abuse and, in one instance, assault.
- Some participants experienced antisocial behaviour from other people living within their accommodation, or specifically for refugees from Ukraine, from the host families they were housed with, making it difficult for them to separate themselves from the issues they were experiencing.
- Antisocial behaviour could be experienced from services, including welfare providers, shop assistants and the police. The examples given suggest that antisocial behaviour can be perpetrated by those who are meant to be deterring, preventing and responding to it.
- Female participants experienced racialised and sexualised abuse and assault which appeared to be motivated by intersecting identities of gender, ethnicity and migration status.
- Antisocial behaviour experienced from children and young people included more general antisocial behaviour caused by groups of young people in the street, or more targeted behaviours such as bullying of children and verbal abuse. Responding to antisocial behaviour from children was felt to be especially difficult as participants felt it was inappropriate to call the police on children, but also largely did not feel able to respond to the child themselves.
- There are numerous barriers to reporting antisocial behaviour, including: language barriers, lack of understanding of the process, belief nothing will be done, negative perceptions or experiences of the police, fear of repercussion and more personal barriers such as feeling overwhelmed with other issues, a wish to appear grateful or to keep to themselves. Combined, these barriers suggest much of the antisocial behaviour experienced by asylum seekers, refugees and migrants may not be reported to any services and therefore remains an almost invisible issue to those who do not work with this group.

- There were some positive experiences of reporting antisocial behaviour, characterised by quick responses to the initial complaint, clear and consistent communication and the feeling of being listened to and respected.
- More often, there were negative experiences of reporting antisocial behaviour, where participants did not hear back or did not hear back for a long time after reporting antisocial behaviour. Participants did not feel listened to or respected by services they reported antisocial behaviour to. This is consistent with findings of existing research into experiences of reporting antisocial behaviour more generally (Murray et al., 2024).
- Some participants felt they should ignore antisocial behaviour to prevent any escalation and discuss the issues with other migrants to get their advice and reassurance, rather than report formally.
- The impact of antisocial behaviour was clear on the health and wellbeing of those who experienced it, especially related to mental health. Feelings of humiliation, frustration, anger and unhappiness could have long term impacts on an individual's health and overall wellbeing and led to them feeling unwelcome and unsafe in their local communities or homes.
- There was also evidence of impact on physical health including the immediate impact of physical assault such as broken bones, stitches in a hospital and for one, severe brain injury. Additionally, participants reported being unable to sleep following antisocial behaviour.
- There was some recognition that the impact of antisocial behaviour was worsened by existing circumstances and previous trauma, leading to more severe and longstanding impacts. This is particularly important when considering how the impacts of antisocial behaviour could, in some cases, be worse for people who have migrated, especially those seeking asylum and with refugee status.
- The impact of antisocial behaviour on children's feelings of safety and on their overall mental health was seen as worse than the impact on adults, especially for children who had migrated to the UK and already experienced changes to their living circumstances that may have been outside of the family's choice or control.
- Some participants changed their behaviour following experiences of antisocial behaviour, linked to impacts on health and wellbeing, with the frustration, stress and upset of antisocial behaviour leading to migrants changing their behaviour. Some spoke of no longer socialising with people

who hadn't experienced migration after becoming fearful of interactions with others, whilst others decided they had to move property to prevent further antisocial behaviour from those they lived with or who lived near them.

- To prevent antisocial behaviour, participants spoke of the need to try to fit in with the local community and build connections. Whilst this could be seen as an attempt to take more control over the likelihood of victimisation, it could be argued to be unreasonable to expect migrants to try to prevent something already outside of their control by changing their own behaviour. However, this does highlight the importance of improving community cohesion and building trust between migrant and non-migrant populations and services.
- More reporting was seen as vital to getting a more accurate reflection on antisocial behaviour and could lead to more resources aimed at the issue. Participants spoke of a wish to report anonymously or through charities where there was discomfort speaking to the police for fear of repercussions or not being taken seriously.
- Calling out antisocial behaviour when witnessed was seen as a good response from the community to help prevent further antisocial behaviour towards migrants in the area.
- More resources are needed to support the voluntary and community sector and other services working towards increased community cohesion and integration, as well as to services responding to reports of antisocial behaviour to encourage trust and relationship building between communities.
- More research is needed in this area to understand experiences of antisocial behaviour victimisation for migrants and to develop better preventative and reactive responses to antisocial behaviour for this group.

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