

# #SaferToBeMe? LGBTPhobia in North East England: Research Findings (2025)





# Executive Summary

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**In response to receiving over 2,000 online hate messages during the delivery of our Pride Festival in 2024, OUT North East, in partnership with the Northumbria Police Crime Commissioner and supported by The William Leech Charity, launched a regional survey to better understand the levels of LGBTphobia currently being experienced by many in our community.**

The aim was to give voice to the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ people and allies in our region and to begin a wider conversation about safety, inclusion, and the support available. The survey ran throughout our Summer of Pride Festival, which took place from June to September 2025 across Sunderland, Gateshead, and South Tyneside. A total of 312 people took part, and the survey was open to anyone in the region who wished to share their views or experiences.

The results paint a deeply concerning picture. Respondents reported a rise in LGBTphobia both online and in public spaces, with many expressing they feel less safe than they did in previous years. There is also a notable reluctance to report incidents, often due to a lack of awareness around how to report and low confidence in the outcomes. Funding has now been secured to conduct a more detailed study of LGBTphobia in Gateshead, and we hope to work with partners to look at other areas across the region.

This report is the beginning of a much-needed and long-overdue conversation.



SUSAN DUNGWORTH  
NORTHUMBRIA  
**POLICE & CRIME  
COMMISSIONER**





# Literature Review





# Homophobic and Transphobic Hate Crime in the North East of England

## Introduction:

The prevalence of homophobic and transphobic hate crime has become a growing concern in the United Kingdom over the last two decades, with recorded incidents rising sharply in recent years. While national data highlight significant increases in hate crimes motivated by sexual orientation and gender identity, regional variations remain understudied, particularly in areas outside London and other major metropolitan centres. The North East of England, encompassing police jurisdictions such as Northumbria, Cleveland, and Durham, offers a distinctive case study. The region is characterised by post-industrial socio-economic challenges, a comparatively smaller but active LGBTQ+ community, and an uneven geography of support services.

This section of the report reviews existing academic, policy, and third-sector literature on homophobic and transphobic hate crime in the North East of England. It situates these findings within national debates to assess whether the regional experience mirrors or diverges from broader trends. Themes explored include prevalence and patterns of hate crime, reporting practices and relationships with policing, the contribution of charities and NGOs, intersectionality and compounded vulnerabilities, and the policy and service landscape. In doing so, the chapter argues that the North East illustrates the complex interplay between structural disadvantage, local policing culture, and the resilience of community organisations in shaping responses to homophobic and transphobic hate crime.

## Patterns and prevalence:

Nationally, recorded hate crimes motivated by sexual orientation and gender identity have risen markedly since the Home Office began disaggregating data in the late 2000s. In England and Wales, 26,152 hate crimes based on sexual orientation and 4,732 based on transgender identity were recorded in 2021/22, representing increases of 41% and 56% respectively from the previous year (Home Office, 2022). Scholars debate whether these increases reflect actual rises in hostility, or improved recording and greater willingness to report (Mason, 2020).

In the North East of England, both police data and local press coverage confirm sharp growth. Morris (2022) reported that LGBTQ-related hate crime more than doubled between 2016/17 and 2020/21 across Northumbria, Cleveland and Durham forces, rising from 458 to 951 recorded offences. In total, nearly 3,500 offences motivated by sexual orientation or transgender identity were recorded over that five-year period. This mirrors the national picture of steep increases, but local stakeholders, such as LGBTQ+ organisations, emphasise that many incidents remain unreported, especially in rural and post-industrial communities, where LGBTQ+ visibility is lower and stigma remains pronounced.

Freedom of Information (FOI) disclosures from Northumbria Police provide further insight into 'Non-Crime Hate Incidents' (NCHIs), meaning incidents motivated by hostility, but falling below the threshold of criminality. Between 2018 and 2024, the force recorded 268 homophobic NCHIs and 66 transgender-related NCHIs (Northumbria Police, 2024). These figures illustrate that everyday harassment, intimidation and verbal abuse are a routine feature of some people's LGBTQ+ life in the region, even if they do not escalate to criminal prosecution. Importantly, the disparity between homophobic and transphobic NCHIs may reflect under-reporting among trans people rather than lower levels of hostility, as qualitative evidence suggests that trans communities often face more severe stigma and marginalisation (Bachmann and Gooch, 2018).



# Homophobic and Transphobic Hate Crime in the North East of England

The prevalence of hate crime in the North East must also be contextualised within broader socio-economic conditions. The region has persistently higher levels of deprivation and unemployment compared with the national average (ONS, 2021). Research on hate crime suggests correlations between socio-economic stress, political disaffection, and the scapegoating of minorities (Perry, 2001). It is therefore plausible that structural inequalities in the North East contribute to the volume and intensity of hate crime targeting LGBTQ+ communities.

## **Reporting and policing:**

The decision to report hate crime is influenced by a complex interplay of personal, cultural and institutional factors. National surveys consistently find that a majority of LGBTQ+ victims do not report incidents to the police, citing fears of not being taken seriously, concerns about being outed, and low confidence in criminal justice outcomes (Stonewall, 2017).

In the North East, these dynamics are particularly pronounced. Pickles (2019) conducted a qualitative study with LGBTQ+ individuals and police practitioners, finding that awareness of LGBTQ+ liaison roles was limited and that trust in the police remained fragile. While some positive relationships were established through community engagement, many participants described police officers as lacking a broader understanding of LGBTQ+ experiences and some perceived the institution as unresponsive. This echoes national critiques of 'performative' liaison roles that fail to deliver substantive cultural change within policing (Miles-Johnson, 2015).

Clayton, Donovan and MacDonald (2016) provide further evidence through their study of the now closed Arch, a third-party reporting service in the North East. Their analysis demonstrated that third-party reporting captures significant volumes of incidents missed by police statistics, highlighting the under-representation of hate crime in official data. They also revealed how austerity-driven funding cuts undermined third-party providers' ability to maintain outreach and support, thereby limiting reporting options for victims in the North East of England.

Policing strategies in the North East have included the promotion of Safe Reporting Centres and the designation of LGBTQ+ Liaison Officers. However, evaluations suggest that many victims remain unaware of these mechanisms, and those who are aware may remain sceptical of their efficacy (Pickles, 2019). This disconnect illustrates a much broader national challenge which suggests that while police forces increasingly emphasise hate crime as a priority, the lived experience of victims suggests a gap between policy rhetoric and practice (Chakraborti and Hardy, 2015).

## **Charities and NGO contributions:**

Given the limitations of statutory responses, third-sector organisations such as charities and NGOs play a crucial role in addressing homophobic and transphobic hate crime in the North East. The Newcastle United Foundation's NUCASTLE hub exemplifies this role, operating as a Safe Reporting Centre in partnership with Northumbria Police (Newcastle United Foundation, 2022). Such initiatives provide neutral, non-police spaces for disclosure, thereby reducing barriers to reporting for victims who may distrust formal institutions. The Police and Crime Commissioner's Victim Support Roadmap (Northumbria PCC, 2023) further highlights the contribution of organisations such as Pride Action North and Connected Voice Advocacy, which provide tailored support for LGBTQ+ victims.



# Homophobic and Transphobic Hate Crime in the North East of England

These services offer emotional support, assistance with navigating the criminal justice system, and advocacy for those who choose not to report formally. However, like their national counterparts, regional LGBTQ+ charities often operate under precarious funding arrangements, limiting their reach and sustainability (Formby, 2017). The dependence on NGOs to fill gaps left by statutory services also raises questions of equity, as more rural and coastal communities in the North East often lack proximity to such organisations, compounding geographical inequalities. In evidence of this, research on rural LGBTQ+ experiences suggests that isolation, lack of anonymity, and limited service provision exacerbate the risks and impacts of hate crime (Valentine, 1998; Hines, 2010). In this sense, reliance on charity-based provision may entrench uneven geographies of safety within the region.

## **Lived experiences of homophobia and transphobia in the North East:**

Whilst quantitative data establish the scale of incidents, qualitative research and NGO reports provide indispensable insight into the everyday lived experience of LGBTQ+ people. This body of work demonstrates that hostility is embedded across multiple social spaces, including public, domestic, digital and institutional, and that its impacts extend beyond single events to shape life choices, mental health and community participation, which are outlined below.

### **Settings and methods of abuse:**

- **Public spaces and nightlife:** Street harassment, verbal abuse, unwanted touching and hostile shouting are commonly reported in city centres and night-time economies. Pickles (2019) documents accounts from North East residents who describe verbal aggression when walking home from nightlife areas and a perception that some venues are insufficiently proactive in preventing or responding to anti-LGBTQ+ behaviour.
- **Workplaces and education:** Though under-reported, bullying and exclusion in workplaces and educational institutions are reported in regional and national studies. Victims describe micro-aggressions, misgendering, exclusion from social networks and, in some cases, formal harassment (Stonewall, 2017, Pickles, 2019).
- **Domestic and intimate contexts:** Studies show that homophobic and transphobic abuse is not only public and interpersonal but can also take place within households and relationships, including coercive control, emotional abuse and threats related to coming out (Macdonald et al, 2021).
- **Online and hybrid harassment:** NGO briefings report substantial online hostility, including targeted abuse, doxxing and coordinated campaigns, that frequently spills into offline harms (Report-It/Stop Hate, 2020, Bhakta et al, 2021).

### **Reporting and disclosure:**

Victims often prefer third-party organisations for disclosure due to distrust in police, anticipating misgendering or minimisation of complaints (Pickles, 2019, Stonewall, 2017). Partial disclosure techniques, such as telling friends or an LGBTQ+ worker without formal reporting, is common, and reflects pragmatic strategies to balance safety and visibility (Galop, 2021).

### **Coping strategies:**

LGBTQ+ residents employ strategies including concealment, restricted mobility, migration to urban centres, and engagement with community networks. Mental health impacts such as anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation are widespread (Macdonald et al., 2021, Bachmann and Gooch, 2018).



# Homophobic and Transphobic Hate Crime in the North East of England

## **The experiences of LGBTQ+ people in Gateshead, South Tyneside and Sunderland:**

Although regional studies often aggregate experiences, local analysis reveals distinct patterns in Tyne and Wear despite data being very limited:

### **Gateshead:**

FOI data suggest lower recorded hate crime numbers compared to Newcastle, but under-reporting is prevalent (Northumbria Police, 2024). Residents often travel to Newcastle for nightlife, exposing them to urban-hostility environments, while small neighbourhoods create visibility-based risks (Pickles, 2019, Macdonald, 2015).

### **South Tyneside:**

Coastal and post-industrial conditions have been noted to amplify isolation. Public-space harassment, especially around transport hubs and seafronts is common, while limited service provision from LGBTQ+ organisations (often due to funding) compounds vulnerability (Galop, 2021, LGBT Foundation, 2020). Disabled residents experience compounded barriers to mobility and support (Macdonald et al, 2021).

### **Sunderland:**

Sunderland records higher reporting levels and visible civic engagement, including historic Pride events and some advocacy organisations. Nevertheless, mistrust of statutory institutions persists, with residents often favouring third-sector disclosure (Pickles, 2019, Morris, 2022). Night-time economy areas and city-centre transport routes are key sites of hostility for LGBTQ+ people or those perceived to be.

Overall, local dynamics illustrate the importance of geographic, socio-economic, and the infrastructural context of the region. Gateshead channels risks via proximity to Newcastle, South Tyneside's isolation amplifies vulnerability, and Sunderland exhibits both risk and some community resilience, despite limited organisations. Future tailored interventions must account for these local specificities.

## **Regional and national comparisons:**

When compared with national patterns, the North East exhibits both similarities and divergences. In common with the wider UK, recorded homophobic and transphobic hate crimes have risen steeply over the last decade, though the degree to which this reflects improved recording or rising hostility remains contested. Under-reporting remains pervasive, and distrust in policing acts as a barrier to reporting (Stonewall, 2017).

Where the North East diverges is in structural context, seeing higher deprivation, lower LGBTQ+ population density, and uneven geographic distribution of support services create distinctive challenges. This mirrors other peripheral UK regions such as Wales and Northern Ireland (Williams and Robinson, 2004). Austerity-related cuts further exacerbate service gaps to tackle this (Clayton et al, 2016, Formby, 2017). **Gaps in research remain in the North East of England**, such as specific trans and non-binary research, post-2020 qualitative studies of the lived experiences of all LGBTQ+ people, rural and coastal focused studies, evaluations of interventions put into place, and studies focused on LGBTQ+ community spaces. These gaps limit the capacity of policy and practice to address real-world experiences effectively.



# Homophobic and Transphobic Hate Crime in the North East of England

## Conclusion:

This section of the report highlights that homophobic and transphobic hate crime in the North East of England is simultaneously rising, under-reported, and spatially uneven. The lived experience of hostility is shaped by urban-rural divides, local infrastructure, socio-economic context, and intersectional vulnerabilities. Tyne and Wear exemplifies these dynamics, with Gateshead, South Tyneside and Sunderland showing diverse patterns of risk, reporting, and community resilience. Third-sector organisations are crucial in filling gaps left by statutory provision but are limited by funding and third-party reporting mechanisms need further work. Addressing these challenges requires more victim-centred services, expanded rural (and city) outreach, more public centres for reporting hate crime, and deeper robust research. It is therefore timelier than ever, to produce the first survey exploring LGBTPhobia within Sunderland, South Tyneside, and Gateshead.





# Research Methodology





# Research Methodology

## Introduction:

This chapter outlines the methodology employed to investigate LGBTPhobia in Gateshead, South Tyneside, and Sunderland. The study used a quantitative method (with qualitative aspects) to capture both the measurable prevalence and the nature of LGBTPhobic incidents and feelings of safety in these areas of the region. The methodology was designed to support a robust, ethically sound, and contextually informed investigation that draws on existing literature highlighting the underreporting of hate crime and the complexities of LGBTQ+ identity in community and public life (Bachmann and Gooch, 2018, Clayton, Donovan and MacDonald, 2016, Pickles, 2019).

## Research design:

The online survey was hosted via Microsoft Forms, which ensures data security and allows for wide accessibility. The decision to use an online survey also reflected ethical concerns around anonymity and safety, particularly when dealing with marginalised populations who may fear reprisals or re-traumatisation (Formby, 2017, Galop, 2021).

The umbrella term 'LGBTPhobia' was used throughout the survey, which refers to the intolerance, discrimination, or exclusion, suffered by Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Non-Binary people, due to their sexual orientation or gender identity/expression. It allowed respondents to personalise the survey to their own experiences why they sat on the LGBTQ+ acronym.

## Research objectives:

The study was guided by the following research objectives:

1. To measure the frequency and types of LGBTPhobic incidents reported in the study area.
2. To explore participants' perceptions of safety in public and private spaces.
3. To examine levels of trust in institutional responses, particularly around hate crime reporting.
4. To identify barriers to reporting hate crimes and accessing support services.

These aims reflect concerns raised in both national and regional studies about increased anti-LGBTQ+ sentiment and lack of effective institutional responses (Home Office, 2022, Northumbria Police and Crime Commissioner, 2023, Morris, 2022).

## Sampling strategy:

### Target population:

The target population included individuals who identify as LGBTQ+, or as allies, and who live, work, study or frequently spend time in Gateshead, South Tyneside, or Sunderland. This demographic was chosen to align with the research focus and to reflect the diversity of the LGBTQ+ community as described in existing scholarship (Formby, 2017; Hines, 2010). An additional box for people living in an 'Other area of the North East' was also available to measure people living outside of these areas for future research and contrast of results.

### Sampling method:

Purposive sampling, supported by snowball sampling, was employed. Participants were recruited via:

- Local LGBTQ+ support organisations and online LGBTQ+ communities.
- Social media networks.
- Outreach workshops to 12 organisations.
- Pride Radio campaigns, stalls at Pride events and 5000 postcards distributed across the region.

# Research Methodology

This approach is consistent with other studies investigating hate crime and marginalisation where formal sampling frames are unavailable (Clayton, Donovan and MacDonald, 2016, Etikan, Musa and Alkassim, 2016).

## Sample size:

A total of 312 survey responses were received, of which 304 were valid and complete once hate responses were removed. While not statistically representative of the entire LGBTQ+ population of the North East of England, this sample is large enough to identify key trends and patterns. Please note that not all demographic categories are shown below, but enough is provided to give an overview of the respondents.

A breakdown of some of the sample, in percentages, can be found below:

Age	Percentage
Under 18	1.5%
18 - 24	8.3%
25 - 34	26%
35 - 44	22.1%
45 - 54	22.5%
55 - 64	12.7%
64 - 74	5.4%
75+	0.5%

Gender	Percentage
Male	40.2%
Female	38.2%
Intersex	0.5%
Non-Binary	7.8%
Prefer Not To Say or Gave Another Answer	13.3%

Sexuality	Percentage
Gay	30.7%
Lesbian	21.1%
Bisexual	27%
Pansexual	10.3%
Queer	6.9%
Asexual	1%
Prefer Not To Say	3%

Ethnicity	Percentage
White	87.7%
Other Ethnicity	12.3%

Refugee or Person Seeking Asylum	Percentage
Yes	2%
No	97%
Prefer Not To Say	1%



# Research Methodology

## Survey design:

The survey comprised 35 questions and was divided into four sections:

- Demographics – including gender identity, sexuality, age range, ethnicity, and location.
- Thoughts about LGBTPhobia – whether people felt that LGBTPhobia was increasing or decreasing.
- Perceptions of safety and experiences of LGBTPhobia – where people felt safe and their own experiences of LGBTPhobia, including reporting of hate crimes.
- Places of safety – where people felt safe and their reasons why.

Survey questions were informed by existing tools used in national research (Stonewall, 2017; Galop, 2021) and were piloted with Be Trans North East to ensure wording clarity and accessibility.

## Data collection procedure:

Data collection occurred between May and September 2025 via the online platform Microsoft Forms. Participants could complete the survey anonymously. A plain English version was used to maximise accessibility.

## Ethical considerations:

### Key ethical safeguards included:

- Informed consent: Participants were provided with an information sheet and required to confirm consent.
- Anonymity: No identifiable information was collected. IP tracking was disabled.
- Right to withdraw: Participants could exit at any time before submission.
- Provision of support: Support services were offered at the end of the survey.

These ethical practices are in line with standards set by the British Psychological Society (2021) and are particularly important given the psychological toll associated with discussing hate incidents (Valentine, 1998, Bhakta et al, 2021).

## Data analysis:

### Quantitative data:

The quantitative data was cleansed to uphold ethical research standards, as some responses were identified as promoting or inciting hate, and so were excluded from the dataset prior to analysis. The data was analysed to only ensure some intersectional findings of the survey questions, and so the data would benefit from a future deeper analysis using SPSS.

### Qualitative data:

Open-ended responses were analysed thematically using the six-step approach outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). This method was selected due to its flexibility and accessibility for use in applied social research. A total of four key themes were identified, with one emerging (smaller) but significant theme.

## Limitations:

- Self-selection bias may have led to overrepresentation of individuals with more extreme experiences.
- The online format may have excluded those with limited internet access or digital literacy.
- The survey was only available in English, potentially limiting participation by non-native speakers.

Nonetheless, these limitations are balanced by the richness of insights and alignment with similar research methodologies in this field (Chakraborti and Hardy, 2015, Formby, 2017).

# Results



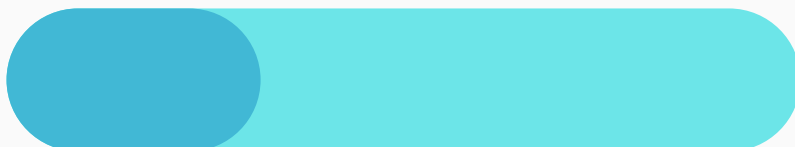


# Key Findings at a Glance



56.4%

Of all LGBTQ+ people surveyed in the North East **have experienced LGBTphobia in the past 12 months**



32%

Of all LGBTQ+ people surveyed perceive that the **general climate for LGBTQ+ people is worsening** in the North East region (compared to 28% of LGBTQ+ people who think this is worsening across the rest of the UK)



**Over a quarter (26%) of LGBTQ+ people in the North East felt unsafe** because of who they are, compared to only 20% of LGBTQ+ people in the region who felt safe



**In public spaces in the North East, over a third (31%) of LGBTQ+ people felt unsafe**, versus only 18% of LGBTQ+ people in the region who felt safe overall

*"Given the current 'nationalistic' climate I feel we are slipping back into the 1980s with LGBTQ+ people an 'easy target' to ostracise and blame and fear"*

**SURVEY RESPONDENT**

# Key Findings at a Glance

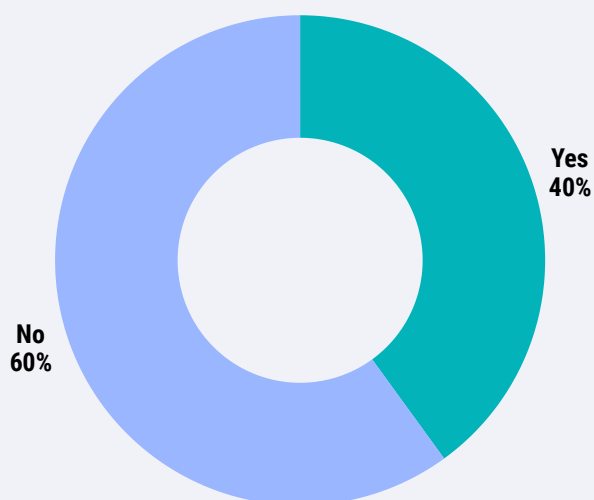


**Of LGBTQ+ people would feel safe to report a hate crime.** However, the favoured methods used to report hate crimes varies between age groups, and so mixed approaches to doing this would be recommended

**54% of LGBTQ+ people in the North East of England felt confident to report a hate crime**



**60% of LGBTQ+ people did not know how to report LGBTPhobia outside of police mechanisms**



*"The rise of right wing views have moved from social media into the public domain. More "anti" views - not just against LGBTQ people but against all minorities, and people with refugee/asylum status. While as a 40+ year old I've had limited experiences of direct homophobia towards me, I'm sad to report that in the past 4/5/6months I've witnesses a handful of incidents such as people saying 'ewww' to me (at work), a group of men on the gay scene talking in a homophobic way while stood outside a gay bar, and overhearing transphobia on a bus"*

**(SURVEY RESPONDENT)**



# Quantitative Results

## Summary of the results:

The research reveals that over half of respondents (56.4%) experienced LGBTphobia in the past year, with public spaces and online environments being felt to be the most unsafe contexts. Perceptions of safety are consistently low, and most respondents believe the climate of LGBTphobia is worsening. Confidence in reporting remains limited, with respondents showing a preference for anonymous or online channels rather than engagement with the police.

The qualitative testimonies, alongside the survey data, illustrate the lived realities behind the statistics, with many respondents describing fear, avoidance behaviours, and a deep mistrust of authorities. Certain groups reported particular vulnerabilities, including disabled people, ethnic minorities, and younger LGBTQ+ individuals. In addition, tensions around trans inclusion emerged as a dividing issue within the community itself. Taken together, the findings depict a community navigating hostility in both public and private life, with perceived or actual, limited institutional support.

## Experiences of LGBTPhobia:

When asked whether they had experienced LGBTphobia in the past 12 months, 56.4% of respondents said yes, while 43.6% said no. This means that the majority of LGBTQ+ people in the region had encountered hostility, stigma, or discrimination within a single year. The contexts in which this occurred were varied. For younger respondents, rejection often came from family environments, where coming out led to tension or exclusion. For those aged 35–54, the workplace and study environments were most frequently identified, reflecting the intersection between career development and discrimination. Public spaces were the most universally referenced setting, particularly among older respondents (45–64), who described transport and streets as unsafe. Incidents were also reported in community groups, including faith-based spaces and voluntary organisations. Perhaps most troubling were accounts of harassment in LGBTQ-specific venues, undermining assumptions of safety within community environments.

The role of the internet was also prominent. Online LGBTphobia was reported widely, with younger respondents (18–34) disproportionately affected. Facebook, Twitter (X), Instagram, and TikTok were all cited as sites of harassment, with several respondents noting that online hostility “spilled over” into offline life, sometimes escalating into physical threats.

## Perceptions of the climate of LGBTphobia in the UK and the North East of England:

Respondents were asked to rate whether the climate of LGBTphobia was improving or worsening. Across all contexts, more people from the sample believed things were deteriorating, rather than improving.

At the national level, 28% said the climate was worsening, while just 20% believed it was improving. The North East region was viewed even more negatively, with 32% selecting worsening and only 18% improving. When broken down by setting, public spaces were consistently rated the most hostile. 35% of respondents said the climate was worsening in public spaces, compared with only 15% who believed it was improving. By contrast, workplaces and study environments fared slightly better: 23% reported improvement, although 22% still reported deterioration, and more than half said nothing had changed. Older respondents (45–64) were most pessimistic, often contrasting the present climate with earlier periods of activism and perceived progress. Younger respondents (18–34), while noting high levels of online abuse, were slightly more likely to identify positive change in workplaces and study contexts.

# Quantitative Results

Disabled respondents were consistently negative about local and public environments, reporting that the climate was worsening rather than improving.

## Perceptions of safety:

Safety was assessed across six different contexts, and the results revealed widespread ambivalence but also significant insecurity. Nationally, 21% said they felt unsafe, compared to 22% who felt safe and 57% who reported neutrality. In the North East, the figures skewed more negatively, with 26% unsafe and only 20% safe.

By setting, public spaces were most concerning: 31% felt unsafe and only 18% felt safe. Work and study environments were the most positive, with 29% reporting safety, though neutrality remained high at 52%. Social and leisure spaces reflected a similar trend, with 23% feeling unsafe and 19% feeling safe, suggesting limited confidence in environments meant for recreation.

Disabled respondents were the least confident across all environments, reporting consistently lower feelings of safety. Ethnic minority respondents described compounded fears of racism and LGBTphobia. Younger respondents highlighted safety concerns in social and online contexts, while older respondents emphasised safety on transport and in public streets.

## Reporting LGBTphobia:

Awareness of reporting pathways outside of the police was limited, with just 40% of respondents aware, compared to 60% unaware. Confidence in reporting was similarly low, with just over half saying they would feel confident, and slightly more saying they would feel safe (54% and 59% respectively).

When asked how they would prefer to report instances of LGBTphobia, most favoured anonymous or online methods. A centralised website was chosen by 45% of respondents, compared to 30% who preferred the police non-emergency number (101), 15% who preferred third-party organisations, and fewer than 10% who wanted face-to-face or phone reporting.

Demographically, younger respondents were more likely to favour online systems, reflecting both their digital engagement and mistrust of traditional institutions. Older respondents leaned more toward 101, though with limited confidence. Disabled respondents reported the least confidence across all options, reflecting barriers of accessibility and trust.

*"I would not feel comfortable reporting LGBTQ hate crimes to anywhere other than an LGBTQ organisation, as I do not feel that it would be taken seriously. I would not report 90% of what I witness or experience as I feel that no legitimate investigation or follow-up would be carried out"*

(SURVEY RESPONDENT)

# LGBTQ+ Views about LGBTPhobia

"Society is becoming way less safe for anyone who isn't straight, particularly for trans and gender non conforming people. As a cis woman, I'm even nervous to use women's toilets now because of the weaponisation and demonisation going on - they've been made to feel like less safe spaces for everyone now"

"Rise of populist parties and Anti LGBTQ+ and Anti EDI Agenda is divisive and creates a negative and unsafe feel for the people from those communities. We do not want special treatment, we want fair treatment, but our community is being demonised for short term political gain"

"The in a feeling of general unease in a lot of public areas now. Politics seem to be leaning more to the far right despite a left to middle government. The lack of police presence and a growing level of visible drug use, outdoor drinking and a lack of care for public places around where I live makes me feel uncomfortable to be myself"

"I feel safe at work but not in public - I used to but the haters are getting more confident"

"The climate is getting worse over social media where people can spread hateful views behind a screen, but I personally haven't found it to be as worse in person, although the atmosphere is now more hostile than in previous years"

"When out socially we are always mindful of our surroundings and we never set out to raise or draw attention but it would be nice to be able to sit in a restaurant holding hands or walk outside without always feeling on our guard"

"My work think I'm straight as I genuinely believe it would effect my employment if they knew otherwise. Transphobic and homophobic comments have been made in public by my managers"  
(Survey Respondent)

"Children are using homophobic language towards adults openly in the day"

"My work place in the Royal Navy is incredibly LGBT friendly. I worry about the wider world and that LGBTphobia is becoming more widespread and vocal. Also worry about the court cases against the police and now the civil service seeking to silence LGBT people in public services and wonder when that will expand to the military"

"Things were getting better but I'm now scared to go to events, long shopping trips or on nights out. My friend has also been attacked for being "a poof lover" for being friends with someone gay on multiple occasions. Homophobic slurs are just a daily occurrence"

(Individual Survey Responses)



# LGBTQ+ Views about Reporting

"I would feel nervous to report this face to face and, while it's the right thing to do, I would be very nervous about the response I received. I don't trust the police force and it's hard to know who is going to be supportive or cause further harm"

"I do feel comfortable and safe reporting, but often I think it's a waste of time. Nothing gets done and I don't bother"

"I was victim of racism too in Newcastle. If you are LGBTQIA person and people of colours then they attack you more"

"I would be nervous doing it face to face, over the phone or online would be my preferred method"

"I find being anonymous helpful"

"Would it make a difference? I don't think people listen. And you just become a statistic"

"Anonymous reporting would be better. People in the LGBT community generally fear the police due to past negative experiences, so even if the police can help, they are unlikely to take up this offer and instead suffer in silence"

"I've not faced LGBTphobia in the last 12 months as I removed any sign I'm gay or support the LGBT because of previous incidents in the past 3 years. Its just safer if people don't know"

"Probably whatever is the quickest way to report it at the time of it happening, an app would be good and public awareness that it exists and how to use it"

"I have heard prejudiced language in from my work colleagues although, my workplace itself promotes a very positive, inclusive atmosphere"

"I have confidence in Northumbria Police, that they take LGBTQ+ hate crime seriously and will handle any reporting sensitively"

"It isn't just about creating a safe space to report, it is about creating an environment of action. I am confident to report but not confident anything will be done by certain organisations and authorities so won't report to it to them"

"I would like to be able to do more about hate crime, especially online. I have faced negative comments for defending LGBTQ+ people online. I still use X but now when I report hate speech, particularly against LGBTQ+ people nothing is actioned"

(Individual Survey Responses)

# Qualitative Results

## Qualitative themes and respondents' voices:

The qualitative testimonies provide insight into how LGBTphobia is experienced in everyday life in the North East. Respondents described strategies of avoidance, fear, and frustration with institutions, illustrating the “everyday insecurities” that Macdonald et al. (2021) argue define LGBTQ+ lives. The following sections present the four main themes (and one small but significant theme) identified in the data, also supported by both the survey’s quantitative results and existing literature.

### 1) Safety in spaces (32.4% of qualitative responses):

Safety was the most prominent theme. Quantitatively, 31% of respondents felt unsafe in public spaces, compared with just 18% who felt safe. Testimonies from the qualitative findings revealed how insecurity permeates daily life, whether in streets, transport, leisure venues, or even LGBTQ+ spaces. These findings mirror Valentine’s (1998) work on restricted mobility and Pickles’ (2019) evidence of hostility in nightlife spaces in the North East. Demographics revealed older respondents who emphasised danger in transport and streets, disabled respondents reported consistently low safety, and ethnic minority respondents described compounded fears of racism and LGBTphobia.

#### Respondents said:

- “I would never hold hands with my partner in public here – it feels like asking for trouble.”
- “On buses and trains I get stared at, whispered about, and sometimes shouted at.”
- “Supermarkets are the worst. People make comments under their breath, and you feel watched the whole time.”
- “I’ve had abuse shouted at me when leaving my house – it makes even my own street feel unsafe.”
- “I don’t go to certain pubs anymore. Everyone knows if you’re queer and it doesn’t feel safe.”
- “Even at Pride events I feel anxious, because hostility often appears there too.”
- “I only go out with friends – I would never go out alone at night here.”
- “Public toilets are terrifying; I avoid them unless I have no choice.”

### 2) Distrust in authorities (25% of qualitative respondents):

A quarter of respondents described negative experiences with authorities. Only 40% knew how to report LGBTphobia outside the police mechanisms, and fewer than half felt safe doing so. Testimonies highlighted dismissive treatment, misgendering, and ridicule. These accounts reinforce Chakraborti and Hardy’s (2015) argument that institutional rhetoric often masks poor practice, and echo Stonewall’s (2017) finding that most LGBTQ+ victims of hate crime do not report. Demographics responses noted that disabled respondents were least confident, trans and non-binary respondents frequently described misgendering, and younger respondents preferred anonymous online systems.

#### Respondents said:

- “Nothing gets done and I don’t bother reporting. It feels like a waste of time.”
- “I was misgendered when I tried to report something before – it put me off ever trying again.”
- “Even within services meant to protect us, there are staff who hold prejudiced views.”
- “I know people who have reported and been laughed at – why would I go through that?”
- “It feels like institutions are ticking boxes rather than protecting us.”
- “Reporting makes you feel more vulnerable – like you’ve put a target on your back.”
- “When I raised issues at work, I was told to ‘not make a fuss.’”
- “You feel like you have to prove you were attacked before anyone listens.”

# Qualitative Results

## 3) Worsening climate (17.2% of qualitative respondents)

Across contexts, 28–35% of respondents said the climate of LGBTPhobia was worsening, compared to only 15–23% who saw improvement. Respondents linked this deterioration to hostile media, divisive politics, and emboldened prejudice. This aligns with Perry's (2001) thesis on scapegoating during economic and social stress, and with Bachmann and Gooch's (2018) evidence of entrenched stigma, particularly towards trans and non-binary people. Demographic data showed that older respondents were most likely to describe regression of the climate, disabled respondents were disproportionately negative about the climate in local and public settings, and minority ethnic respondents highlighted compounded hostility as part of a wider climate of racism and LGBTPhobia.

### Respondents said:

- "I hear more slurs and casual comments now than I did ten years ago – it feels like we're moving backwards."
- "Discrimination and prejudice seem to be getting worse, especially since the pandemic."
- "The media has fuelled so much negativity. I notice attitudes hardening as a result."
- "Events last year made me feel like community cohesion has broken down and hostility is normalised."
- "People feel emboldened now – they say out loud what they might have kept private before."
- "I feel like progress has stalled, and instead there's a backlash against LGBT rights."
- "The political climate has made things worse – our lives are debated like entertainment."
- "I worry for young people – it feels like their future is less safe than mine was."

## 4) Online Abuse (17.2% of qualitative respondents)

Although the survey did not explicitly measure online safety, it emerged strongly in open responses. Younger respondents (16–34) were especially affected, describing persistent harassment on social media and dating platforms. These findings align with Bhakta, et al. (2021), who documented the crossover between online hostility and offline harms. Demographic data noted that younger respondents were disproportionately affected, trans respondents described high levels of targeting, and minority ethnic LGBTQ+ respondents reported compounded racism and LGBTphobia in online spaces.

### Respondents said:

- "It often begins in online spaces but then spills over into the physical world."
- "Even local community Facebook pages are full of negative comments if anything LGBT-related is posted."
- "Instagram and TikTok are constant sources of ridicule for anyone who looks even slightly different."
- "I've been subjected to torrents of abuse online – it's relentless."
- "I've blocked countless people on Twitter because of harassment. It doesn't stop."
- "When I spoke about LGBT rights online, people started threatening me in real life."
- "Even dating apps are hostile – I've been insulted and threatened there too."
- "The abuse is constant; you can't escape it because it follows you everywhere online."

## 5) Anti-Trans Climate (smaller but significant theme)

While smaller in scale, this theme is significant. Respondents described hostility within LGBTQ+ spaces, particularly around lesbian identity and women-only venues. This mirrors findings from Bachmann and Gooch (2018), who documented heightened stigma against trans communities, and Formby (2017), who noted deepening divisions within LGBTQ+ networks. Demographic data noted that older lesbian respondents most often raised concerns about women-only spaces and trans respondents described exclusion, even within LGBTQ+ venues.

# Qualitative Results

## **A significant number of trans and non-binary respondents said:**

- “Transphobia - and the confidence to be a transphobic jerk out loud - is increasing, supported by public figures. Inevitably, this apparent allowance will reverse all progress.”
- “The pull back of trans rights has left me feeling unsafe outside my home.”
- “Given the recent ruling by the supreme court transphobia is rife, and it seems to be everywhere you go. There's no break from it. This makes me deeply worried and uncomfortable.”
- “I feel safe as I am a trans guy who is accepted in my community. I 'pass' thankfully so I don't feel threatened.”
- “Since the Supreme Court ruling people have felt more emboldened to be transphobic.”

## **A small, but significant sample, of lesbians said:**

- “Older lesbians are physically threatened and told we no longer have a right to women-only spaces unless we admit male-bodied people.”
- “I feel most unsafe in the LGBTQ community, where I've been shouted down for expressing my views.”
- “Discussions about trans rights dominate everything, leaving other LGBT issues ignored.”
- “I've lost friends because of my views on this issue – the community feels fractured.”
- “What should feel like a safe space often feels hostile because of these arguments.”

## **Conclusion:**

The qualitative evidence deepens and contextualises the quantitative data. The 31% who feel unsafe in public spaces are represented in accounts of harassment in supermarkets, on public transport, and in local streets. The lower confidence in reporting mechanisms is explained by testimonies of dismissal and ridicule. The number of people who believe the climate is worsening are reflected in stories of backlash, hostile media, and emboldened prejudice. Alongside this, younger people's higher exposure to LGBTphobia is illuminated by their descriptions of constant online abuse, while the anti-trans theme shows deepening fractures within the community itself.

The findings of this survey reveal a concerning picture of LGBTQ+ life in the North East of England. A majority of respondents reported experiencing LGBTphobia in the past year, with public spaces, online environments, and even LGBTQ+ venues described as unsafe. Perceptions of the climate of LGBTphobia are overwhelmingly negative, with many believing conditions are worsening nationally and locally. Safety ratings were consistently low, particularly in public spaces, while confidence in authorities and reporting mechanisms was strikingly limited.

Furthermore, vulnerabilities were unevenly distributed, as disabled respondents reported the lowest safety levels and trust in institutions, minority ethnic respondents described intersecting racism and LGBTphobia; younger people highlighted online hostility, while older people emphasised risks in public transport and community settings. Qualitative evidence vividly illustrated these statistics, offering detailed accounts of avoidance, fear, and mistrust. Importantly, divisions around trans inclusion also emerged, suggesting that insecurity for LGBTQ+ individuals stems not only from external hostility but also from fractures within the community - with trans and non-binary people feeling especially at risk. Overall, while legislative protections exist regarding hate crime and equalities, the lived reality for many LGBTQ+ people in the North East remains defined by insecurity, stigma, and limited confidence in institutional support.



# Conclusion and Recommendations





# Conclusion and Recommendations

## Overall conclusion:

This study reveals that LGBTQ+ people in the North East of England face significant and persistent challenges around safety, inclusion, and institutional trust. Quantitative evidence demonstrated that more than half of respondents (56.4%) experienced LGBTphobia in the past year, with public spaces and online platforms consistently perceived as unsafe. Perceptions of the climate across the UK and the North East were largely negative, with between 28% and 35% of respondents stating conditions are worsening compared to just 15–23% who reported improvement. Confidence in authorities was weak, seeing only 40% of respondents being aware of reporting pathways beyond the police, and only slightly more than half who felt safe to report.

Qualitative testimonies illustrated how these insecurities shape everyday life. Some respondents described harassment in public transport, ridicule from institutions, and hostility within LGBTQ+ venues. Younger participants highlighted relentless online abuse, while disabled and minority ethnic respondents reported compounded risks of discrimination. Older respondents frequently reflected on the contrast between today's hostile environment and earlier eras of activism and solidarity, where it was felt that progress was happening. A smaller but significant body of responses revealed tensions around trans inclusion, underscoring how insecurity arises from both external hostility and internal community divisions.

Taken together, the findings confirm national evidence of rising LGBTphobia (Stonewall, 2017, Home Office, 2022) and extend existing regional studies which have documented mistrust in police responses (Pickles, 2019), fragile third-sector services (Clayton et al, 2016), and uneven safety across the North East (Morris, 2022). They also echo Perry's (2001) argument that socio-economic deprivation often fosters the scapegoating of minorities, highlighting how the North East's economic and social inequalities intensify LGBTQ+ vulnerability. What emerges is a picture of "everyday insecurities" (Macdonald et al., 2021), where safety is neither assured nor evenly distributed, and where legal protections fail to translate into lived equality.

## Recommendations:

Drawing on the survey data, respondents' voices, and the wider literature, the following recommendations are proposed:

### 1. Strengthen reporting pathways:

- Develop a centralised, anonymous online reporting system for LGBTphobia, in line with respondents' preferences (Stonewall, 2017, Galop, 2021).
- Expand third-party reporting centres across both urban and rural areas, learning from the Arch model (Clayton et al., 2016). Additional ways, beyond the police mechanisms, are needed to report hate crimes.
- Deliver awareness campaigns to improve knowledge of existing police liaison roles and Safe Reporting Centres (Pickles, 2019).

### 2. Improve policing and institutional responses:

- Strengthen mandatory LGBTQ+ inclusion and anti-bias training for frontline staff, particularly police officers (Miles-Johnson, 2015).
- Establish clear accountability frameworks to ensure liaison roles move beyond symbolism to deliver real cultural change.
- Build deeper community-police partnerships, with priority given to trans, disabled, and ethnic minority LGBTQ+ groups.

# Conclusion and Recommendations

## 3. Expand support services and community spaces:

- Secure sustainable regional funding for LGBTQ+ third-sector organisations, reducing reliance on precarious charity models (Formby, 2017).
- Invest in an LGBTQ+ community centre based in the North East, reflecting the 95% of respondents who expressed a need for such spaces from previous research (Dalton, 2025).
- Strengthen rural and coastal outreach services for LGBTQ+ populations, tackling the geographical unevenness of safety (Valentine, 1998; Hines, 2010).

## 4. Address online abuse:

- Police to collaborate deeper with social media platforms to counter online harassment (Bhakta et al., 2021), as well as work with regional LGBTQ+ organisations who have specific online groups and presence.
- Provide digital resilience workshops for young LGBTQ+ people, who are disproportionately targeted online.
- Integrate anti-bullying and online safety programmes in schools, colleges, and youth services with explicit LGBTQ+ inclusion.

## 5. Tackle structural inequalities and intersectional risks:

- Recognise and address the compounded vulnerabilities faced by disabled and minority ethnic LGBTQ+ people (Formby, 2017, Macdonald et al, 2021).
- Embed intersectionality in local authority and policing policies to ensure overlapping experiences of discrimination are fully acknowledged.
- Commission further research into rural, coastal, and socio-economically deprived communities in the North East, addressing current evidence gaps and how this impacts LGBTQ+ populations (Williams and Robinson, 2004).

## 6. Foster inclusive community dialogue:

- Support further opportunities for LGBTQ+ people and allies to come together to discuss hate crime and prejudice in the North East of England.
- Support initiatives that create dialogue within the LGBTQ+ community, addressing divisions around trans inclusion while maintaining a focus on collective safety.
- Promote intergenerational projects that connect younger LGBTQ+ people (disproportionately targeted online) with older activists (who recall earlier solidarity), building community resilience across generations.

## Final reflection:

The findings of this report demonstrate that while legislative protections have advanced, LGBTQ+ people in the North East continue to experience widespread insecurity, compounded by structural disadvantage and fragile institutional responses. To build a safer and more inclusive future, urgent action is needed, such as investment in reporting mechanisms, stronger institutional accountability, expanded community infrastructure, and interventions that address both external hostility and internal divisions. Without these, the inequalities documented here will persist, leaving LGBTQ+ individuals to navigate unsafe spaces and worsening climates with insufficient protection.

Further study needs to look at reporting pathways and how we can work with partner organisations to facilitate this. Gateshead VCSE has agreed to undertake a detailed study of LGBTPhobia and effective ways of reporting hate crime in the Borough of Gateshead, to ascertain more detailed data.



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