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Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

# Mate Crime

## What is Mate Crime?

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

## What Do We know?

Mate crime involves additional and complex issues to understand which sometimes resonate with cases of domestic abuse. The perpetrator is likely to be perceived as a close friend, a carer or a family member and will use this relationship for exploitation.

'Tuesday Friends' – A typical story is a young person with Asperger's who had, what he called, his 'Tuesday Friends', the day when his benefits arrived. A particular group of people would turn up at his flat, 'help' him to the cashpoint and then to the pub where they 'helped' him spend his money.

A person experiencing mate crime can sometimes be unaware of any hidden motives. People with a learning disability, learning difficulties or mental health conditions may have less control and ability to develop and maintain friendships and this can lead to an acceptance of unequal relationships. The relationship is likely to be of some

duration and, if unchecked, may lead to a pattern of repeat and worsening abuse.

## The murder of Gemma Hayter (2010)

Gemma had suffered mate crime regularly over some time. She was found dead on a disused railway embankment. She was 27. She had been forced to drink urine from a beer can, beaten with a mop and stripped before being left for dead by people she regarded as her 'friends'.

Gemma had learning difficulties, but was not known to specialist health and social care services. Gemma herself was reluctant to access services. There were questions about her capacity but it was felt that she was able to decide on what help she wanted.

The Serious Case Review found no evidence that her death could have been predicted or prevented. However, opportunities were missed to get a clearer picture of her situation and to have provided support that might have made her less likely to fall into the company of those people. No single agency had the whole picture. None of the agencies involved knew the details of her relationship with the five killers. There had been a lack of information sharing.

## What are the features of Mate Crime?

There are features of mate crime which can provide significant challenges to recognise and provide support for victims:



- Social isolation: targeted individuals often lack the support network that many people take for granted and the level of social isolation in which some people live, at the margins of society.
- Lack of support from agencies: people who are targeted are often those who do not meet the criteria for a high level of services.
- Fear of reporting: when victims do recognise that something is wrong, they may be too afraid to report it.
- Use of threats to control victims: threats are a common feature of hate crimes across the board, but seem to play a particularly strong role in cases of mate crime, where the perpetrators want to control the victim.
- Accusations of sexual misconduct: accusations of a sexual nature are a very common feature of mate crime and are often used by perpetrators to justify an escalation in violence.
- Lack of recognition of requests for help: when victims do try to get help, agencies often fail to act on their reports.

## What are the signs?

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

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

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

- Unexplained injuries
- Bills not being paid/sudden loss of assets
- Weight loss
- Isolation from usual contacts
- Withdrawal from services
- Changes in behaviour or mood
- Changes in friends or noticeable forms of control

## What should be done?

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

Mate crimes require a greater multi-agency response and many cases can be complex in nature. It is extremely difficult for a person to come forwards and agencies across Wales need to be aware of the signs and potential impacts. This can be due to a fear of not being believed; not recognising the abuse as a crime; fear of repercussions; or being afraid to report a perceived friend or family member in many cases.

## Watch Disability Wales and MENCAP Cymru explain mate crime and the impacts.

### Further Information

ARC, 'Safety Net: Friend or Fake? An Easy Read Guidance Booklet about Hate Crime and Mate Crime', available at [www.arcsafety.net](http://www.arcsafety.net)

EHRC (2010): Hidden in Plain Sight: Inquiry into disability-related harassment <http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/legal-and-policy/inquiries-and-assessments/inquiry-into-disability-related-harassment/hidden-in-plain-sight-the-inquiry-final-report/>

Quarmby, Katherine (2011): Scapegoat: How we are failing disabled people, London: Portobello.

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