

# **ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR: CONCERNS OF MINORITY AND MARGINALISED LONDONERS<sup>1</sup>**

**By Andrew Millie\***

## **ABSTRACT**

*In the UK there is currently a lot of political and media attention on what has become known as anti-social behaviour (ASB). Concerns about ASB appear to be higher in deprived and/or urban areas. In particular, people living in London are more likely to suffer from ASB. There is undoubtedly real ASB in London; however, this article argues that people will have different expectations of urban living and use of public spaces, resulting in contested notions or tolerances of what is acceptable or anti-social behaviour. This has implications for people's acceptance of difference or 'otherness'. With this in mind, evidence is drawn from 10 focus groups with minority and marginalised Londoners. The article argues that our beliefs and expectations of urban living need to be challenged as this is what urban living is all about. Similarly, we should take on board the focus group participants' assertion that all can be anti-social - rather than focusing on certain groups that 'don't fit in' and entrenching their social exclusion.*

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## Introduction

Anti-social behaviour (henceforth ASB) currently has a lot of political capital in the UK and is the focus of the government's 'Together' campaign (Home Office, 2003) and 'Respect' agenda (Respect Task Force, 2006). Additionally, from 2005 all local Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs) were expected to have strategies to deal specifically with ASB. The focus for this article is people's perceptions and experiences of ASB. The article explores the views and experiences of minority and marginalised groups in London, drawing from a recent study conducted to inform a pan-London ASB strategy for 2005-2008 (Millie *et al.*, 2005a; GLA, 2004; 2005).

Before exploring people's views and experiences it is important first to consider what ASB actually means. In legislative terms, ASB is deemed to be behaviour that causes 'harassment, alarm or distress to one of more persons not of the same household' (Criminal Justice Act, 1998). Although this excludes domestic incidents, it is a vague definition that can include almost all other unwanted activity. The uncertainty over the precise meaning of ASB has been discussed elsewhere (e.g. Whitehead *et al.*, 2003; Harradine *et al.*, 2004; Millie *et al.*, 2005a; 2005b; Macdonald, 2006) and will not be repeated here in detail. However, in terms of theoretical heritage, understandings of ASB can be seen as informed by notions of 'conduct norms' (e.g. Sellin, 1938) and 'incivility' (e.g. Taylor, 1999). The defining feature that makes behaviour anti-social is its cumulative impact on individuals or groups (Millie *et al.*, 2005a); thus, behaviour that is annoying or offensive may become anti-social if this is repeated, especially if specifically targeted. In simple terms, ASB can be regarded as straddling both 'sub-criminal' and minor criminal behaviour - but excluding serious criminal activity. This is despite many ASB-targeted sanctions, especially Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs)<sup>2</sup>, also being used against very serious criminal behaviour indeed. For instance, following the Police Reform Act 2002, ASBOs can be applied post-criminal conviction. These have become known as criminal-ASBOs or CrASBOs, and blur the boundary between anti-social and criminal behaviour (see e.g. Macdonald, 2006). For our work on the London ASB strategy serious criminal behaviour was excluded, with ASB divided into three main forms: firstly 'interpersonal or malicious ASB' directed at individuals, groups or organizations; secondly 'environmental ASB', such as noise nuisance, graffiti or fly-tipping; and thirdly, 'ASB restricting access to public spaces', including intimidating behaviour by groups on the street, street drinking and open drug use (Millie *et al.*, 2005a).

According to the 2003/04 British Crime Survey (Wood, 2004) 61 per cent of the population in England and Wales claim *not* to suffer any bad effects from ASB. It seems ASB is not the huge problem affecting all communities that we are led to believe. However, concern about ASB appears to be higher in the capital than elsewhere. For instance, in a recent national survey of attitudes towards ASB (Millie *et al.*, 2005b) - conducted in England, Wales and Scotland - living in the London Government Office region was a predictor of 'rowdy teenagers on the street' or 'vandalism/graffiti' having a fairly or very big effect on quality of life. Similarly, in the 2003/04 British Crime Survey 25 per cent of London respondents perceived levels of 'disorder' to be high where they lived, compared to 17 per cent across England and Wales as a whole. Recent evidence suggests that concerns about ASB are spatially concentrated in deprived and/or urban areas and in town and city centre districts (Millie *et al.*, 2005b; Millie, in

press 2007a). And within the capital there seems to be a distinct inner-outer London split, with 32 per cent of inner-city Londoners perceiving disorder to be high, compared to 22 per cent of those living in outer-London (see Millie *et al.*, 2005a: 11). Moreover, while most Londoners appear to be content with where they live<sup>3</sup>, evidence from the 2002 London Household Survey (Millie *et al.*, 2005a: 16) suggests that residents that regard ASB as a serious problem are less likely to be satisfied with where they live.

Of course, these patterns will in part reflect the higher crime rates in London (and especially within certain parts of London). According to figures for 2005/06 (McCreith *et al.*, 2006), London has the highest rate of recorded crime of all regions of England and Wales at 134 per 1,000 population, compared to 103 per 1,000 for all regions. However, people's concern about ASB is not just a reflection of higher crime; it will also be influenced by other factors, including the size and diversity of London's population, the high levels of deprivation in neighbourhoods adjoining areas of great wealth, and the large number of visitors to the city. While there is undoubtedly real ASB occurring every day in London, all these factors create a situation where people with different expectations of urban living use the same public spaces, resulting in contested notions or tolerances of what is acceptable or anti-social behaviour (Millie, forthcoming). This has obvious implications for people's acceptance of difference or 'otherness' (e.g. Crawford, 1999; Cook, 2006); as Nick Cohen has commented in *The Observer* newspaper (2005):

... contrary to what the government imagined, antisocial behaviour orders aren't only catching the usual suspects. A curtain-twitching, vindictive nation is demanding that they should be used against all who don't fit in.

This view could be over-stepping it, but maybe not by much. With this in mind this article considers the views and experiences of minority and marginalised Londoners, including groups often regarded as 'different'. A team from the Institute for Criminal Policy Research at King's College London was commissioned by a range of London agencies to work on the London ASB Strategy (GLA, 2005). In order to provide context to this strategy original research was commissioned by the Government Office for London, Greater London Assembly and the Housing Corporation (Millie *et al.*, 2005a). As part of this a series of focus groups was organised with people whose views and experiences are not easily identified in standard household surveys. It was thought that these may be groups that suffer most from ASB, either because of where they live, or because they are particularly targeted (they also may be accused of behaving anti-socially). Such groups have stereotypically been labelled as 'hard to reach' (e.g. Jones and Newburn, 2001; Garland *et al.*, 2006), and there is always a danger of rounding up the usual suspects of perceived 'vulnerability' (Millie in press, 2007b). However, the range of locations and variety of groups hopefully avoided - as much as was possible - this pitfall.

## Methodology

The focus groups were held in a variety of localities across inner- and outer-London boroughs and each lasted approximately one hour. All groups were recorded and transcribed, and then analysed for key themes. Participants were recruited via informal and formal contacts. For instance, a focus group with gay and lesbian housing association tenants was recruited via a specialist housing association. A focus group with Kurdish men was recruited via a Kurdish community centre (a translator known to the group was used in this instance). A total of 90 people participated in the ten groups listed in Table 1.

**Table 1. Composition of 10 focus groups**

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Number</b>
Group 1. Bangladeshi women	Inner London, North	11
Group 2. Black African men	Outer London, South	9
Group 3. Black women; housing association tenants	Inner London, North	5
Group 4. Gay and lesbian housing association tenants	Various North London boroughs	5
Group 5. Kurdish men	Various North London boroughs	9
Group 6. Men and women with mental health and substance misuse problems; housing association tenants	Various north London boroughs	13
Group 7. Men and women with physical disabilities; housing association tenants	Outer London, East	12
Group 8. Older men and women aged over 70 in local authority sheltered housing	Outer London, West	7
Group 9. Young men aged 16-18; unemployed and out of education	Inner London, North	9
Group 10. Young women aged 16-18; unemployed and out of education	Inner London, North	10
<b>Total</b>		<b>90</b>

The sessions focused on a simple set of questions: What is ASB; who commits ASB; what causes ASB; and what should be done about it? As the study was qualitative in nature, the views expressed by the participants could not be said to be representative; however, the issues that emerged do illustrate some specific concerns of Londoners with respect to ASB.

**Views on behaviour that is anti-social**

As noted, legislation only gives a vague indication of what makes people’s behaviour anti-social. Politicians and civil servants have been equally unable to pin down the defining features of ASB, as Tony Blair (2003) has stated:

ASB is for many the number one item of concern right on their doorstep - the graffiti, vandalism, dumped cars, drug dealers in the street, abuse from truanting school-age children.

Beyond the observation that ASB is *not* a major concern for most people (see above), Blair has included a wide range of criminal and non-criminal, or ‘sub-criminal’ behaviour within the remit of ASB. Unsurprisingly, the respondents in this study also cited a wide range of problems when asked what behaviours can be regarded as anti-social. Table 2 lists the main examples given, with the number of focus groups where each particular behaviour was mentioned. Behaviours are listed by the three categories outlined above, namely interpersonal/malicious ASB, environmental ASB and ASB restricting access to public spaces. While most behaviours fitted these three categories, the respondents also included some more minor irritations to daily life, such as rudeness, bad manners and swearing.

**Table 2. Examples of ASB cited in the 10 focus groups (and the number of focus groups where mentioned)**

Interpersonal /malicious ASB	No.	Environmental ASB	No.	ASB restricting access to public spaces	No.	ASB as rudeness /bad manners	No.
Racism/racist behaviour	4	Graffiti	4	Gangs of kids /young people congregating	4	Rudeness	2
Neighbour problems	2	Litter	3	Drug taking	4	Rude bus drivers /Rows with bus drivers	2
Police use of 'stop and search'	1	Vandalism	3	Drinking /Drinking in the street	3	Bad manners /ignorance	1
Verbal abuse against homeless people	1	Noisy neighbours	2	Inconsiderate parking /parking on pavements	3	Public nuisance	1
Anti-gay verbal abuse	1	People dumping rubbish	2	Drug dealing	2	Rowdy /abusive behaviour	1
Verbal abuse generally	1	Authorities not collecting rubbish	1	Mopeds on estate	2	Spitting	1
Violence and intimidation within the gay community	1	Bonfires late at night	1	Public drinking and violence	2	Swearing	1
		Car fires	1	Aggressive begging	1		
		Cars scratched with keys	1	Alcoholics on buses	1		

Damage to phone boxes	1	Children with bikes on pavement	1
Dog mess	1		
Kids throwing stones	1		
Noise pollution	1		
Urinating in the street	1		
		<b>Other</b>	<b>No.</b>
		Fast driving	1
		Trespass	1

The first thing that is apparent from Table 2 is that no single type of behaviour was mentioned by all the groups, perhaps indicating that what is regarded as anti-social may be specific to the experiences of certain groups. Also, some of the respondents had very broad understandings of ASB; but this 'broadness' tended to extend in a downward direction towards more minor incivilities such as rudeness or swearing, rather than up to more serious criminal activity. Some criminal activity was included, but this was limited to types of criminal damage, racial and homophobic abuse and drug use and dealing. (In a recent national survey two-fifths of respondents included mugging and burglary as activity that is anti-social – see Millie *et al.*, 2005b.) For this group of minority and marginalised Londoners the types of behaviour most often regarded as ASB were as follows:

- racist behaviour; graffiti; young people congregating; drug taking (mentioned in four focus groups each); and
- litter; vandalism; street drinking; inconsiderate parking (mentioned in three focus groups each).

Some of these will be problems specific to particular minority or marginalised groups; others may simply reflect concerns of urban living, or more particularly, living in London.

#### *Interpersonal/malicious ASB*

Many focus group participants described incidents of prejudice, or intolerance of difference, as ASB. For instance, participants in the Black and minority ethnic focus groups noted personal experiences of racist comments or abuse. Some Muslim participants talked in terms of anti-Muslim attitudes - particularly following the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 - and a fear of what people might say or do:

It was getting better, but after 11<sup>th</sup> September it's actually got worse. A lot of people you know, they don't wear [head]scarves when they go outside. Before they used to. Because of the fear of other people, they're going to attack them or something like that, or they might comment on their scarf. (Group 1, Female #6)

Other concerns reflected exposure to racist verbal insults; as one Kurdish man observed: 'People say 'stop speaking Turkish', 'get out of the country'' (Group 5, Male #1). However he added that this does not happen often. The participants were clear that people of all ages can be guilty of racist behaviour. Some spoke about the 'ignorance'

underlying ASB that can be directed at minority groups. One participant in the gay and lesbian focus group noted:

[It] is just like bad manners, just the way that people pass comment, ignorance ... I know I'm a queer, they know I'm a queer, tell me something I don't know ... I get shouted at every five minutes [although] I don't think it's as bad as it was ten years ago. (Group 4, Male #3)

While this participant did not think it was 'as bad as it was 10 years ago', another man in the same group observed, 'I get it all the time up and down this road, it's an ongoing thing. I can't wait to move' (Group 4, Male #2). People's prejudice and intolerance was also seen as a problem by the former homeless. Participants in this group argued that, although people may assume that beggars and rough sleepers are responsible for a lot of ASB, the homeless are in fact more likely to be victims, for instance:

From the minute you're homeless you get anti-social behaviour from 'the suits'. Often when they're walking past we get abuse, we get spat on. (Group 6, Male #4)

That said, others in the same group accepted that some beggars - especially what they termed 'aggressive beggars' - can be guilty of ASB:

It works both ways, like you can say you've been begging on the street and people come past and give it 'a bit'. But then those people can say that they've walked down the street and they've been verbally abused by people that are drinking, you know what I mean. So you can't really say that one set of people is [worse]. (Group 6, Male #6)

#### *Environmental ASB*

Along with ASB as a reflection of interpersonal ignorance and intolerance, a lack of respect for the environment was also recognised as ASB. The importance of living in a clean local environment was stressed and is illustrated by the following exchange that took place in the focus group of Kurdish men (Group 5):

- |         |                                                                                                                  |
|---------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Male #1 | Where I live it's an old area and the buildings are old, broken and damaged.                                     |
| Male #2 | London deserves to get the reward for being the dirtiest city.                                                   |
| Male #3 | I live in Dalston [an area of London] and it's really dirty and there's always dirt on the floor.                |
| Male #4 | Some people haven't got the culture of throwing the rubbish in the bin. So some haven't adapted their culture... |

All in this group were recent immigrants to the capital (and this is hardly the most positive first impression). Some participants commented that environmental ASB can stem, in part, from the failure of the relevant agencies to do their jobs properly, or to promote responsible behaviour in others. In the focus group for Black women in housing association accommodation (Group 3) complaints were about refuse removal:

The estate has become a dumping ground for people around 'cause we have bigger bins [than elsewhere]. (Female #1)

The bin-men do not collect rubbish that is not put into bins, or put the bins back in their original place. As a result rubbish is left about. (Female #2)

That said, some respondents were aware that people had to take responsibility for their own anti-social behaviour; as one respondent put it, 'People don't take pride in where they live. You can't leave it to your landlord to do everything'. (Group 3, Female #3). Regarding graffiti in particular, most participants had little sympathy for self-styled graffiti artists and taggers. One participant commented on the perceived futility of the local authority cleaning walls of graffiti:

The graffiti, especially in my flats, I feel sorry for the council because every time they paint it, the next day it's all back on the walls again. (Group 10, Female #1)

Environmental ASB was not seen to be limited to the physical environment and noisy neighbours was a particular problem for some. However, it was recognised that a certain level of noise is an unavoidable feature of urban life – and that it only becomes ASB when there is a lack of consideration for others.

#### *ASB restricting access to public spaces*

The type of ASB cited that could be regarded as restricting access to public spaces ranged from groups of young people 'hanging about', through to inconsiderate parking on pavements. The obstruction of pavements - however this is done - was a particular concern for participants in the older person focus group and the group of people with physical disabilities; for instance:

...Now all these people [in the sheltered accommodation] have to use the pavement when they go shopping. And you've either got children obstructing on one side haven't you, they leave rubbish outside ... the bus parking half on the pavement so they haven't got room to pass, [and] there's usually two lorries. (Group 8, Female #2)

When they [young people] are on their bikes they leave them in the doorway of the shops. They just throw them in the doorway of the shops. (Group 7, Female #3)

The ASB that takes these forms is likely to reflect a lack of foresight about how certain behaviours can affect others, rather than being any kind of malicious intent. Any action to deal with ASB would have to reflect this. In some of the focus groups, the issue of public use and dealing of drugs came to the fore.

Within this area I've seen people who are freely dealing and taking and they can easily just smoke it in front of people ... but nothing's really done. Because of this you can't really take your children and family for a walk because you don't want them to come across this. (Group 5, Male #1)



The risk of children coming across drugs paraphernalia left lying around was noted in one group, while others were concerned about the unpredictable behaviour of those who are using drugs. Public drunkenness – usually at night, and around pubs and clubs – was also described as ASB. For some, fear of drunken violence clearly has an impact on where they go and what they do (see Bromley *et al.*, 2000; Mawby and Simmonds, 2004), as illustrated in the following exchange from the gay and lesbian group:

- Female #1      They're seventeen to eighteen, onto twenty - even sixteen - and when you see them they look kind of thuggish ... I've seen it happen so many times and you think 'why is this going on?'
- Male #1        And they always walk in groups.
- Male #2        When coming from a club we travel in groups ... at the end of the day we have to look after each other.
- Male #1        But really, at the end of the day, should we have to live like that?

*ASB as rudeness, lack of consideration*

As noted, some respondents had a broad understanding of ASB, including some forms of behaviour that could be regarded as minor incivilities rather than anti-social behaviours. One participant in the focus group with Black African men described the British in general as, 'very unfriendly; they hide behind newspapers' (Group 2, Male #1). It was also observed that Londoners can tend to avoid getting involved in other people's lives, thus making ASB more likely: 'People will not interfere when ASB takes place, because they see it as, 'it's not my problem' (Group 07, Male #1). Rudeness and lack of concern for others can take the form of foul and abusive language. As the following participant observed:

The kids round here, and [when] they use mobile phones, they swear the most abusive words and they don't care one iota who's listening to them. And the young girls are worse than the boys. (Group 8, Male #1)

The use of bad language can evidently cause genuine upset for some people, whether this is intentional or otherwise. And it is not just the language of young people that has this effect. The focus group participants also did not make a distinction between the rudeness of members of the public and that of public workers. An example mentioned in a couple of the groups was the rudeness of bus drivers, or people having rows with bus drivers. For an account of the casualness of incivility and criminal action on London's public transport see Mackenzie (2005). From the current study, the rudeness of bus drivers is illustrated in the following exchange from Group 1 (Bangladeshi women):

- Female #1      There should be more trained bus drivers, they're not trained enough
- Female #2      And they're rude
- Female #1      I think bus driver complaints are becoming common now.

### Who commits ASB?

The focus groups were selected largely on the basis of their ‘otherness’ or ‘difference’ (groups that may suffer disproportionately from ASB or may be accused of behaving anti-socially). And some did cite examples where they had been particularly targeted (such as racist or homophobic abuse) or have suffered disproportionately because of their personal situation (such as cars parked on pavements blocking access for disabled or elderly people). In terms of who commits ASB, it is often assumed that most perpetrators are young people (see Squires and Stephen, 2005). However - as the above exchange illustrates - the focus group participants recognised that young people do not have the monopoly on such behaviour. As one participant observed, ‘Because we don’t understand [the] younger generation, we assume they’re getting up to no good’ (Group 3, Woman #1). There was general agreement that *everyone* is capable of being anti-social, be it bus drivers or passengers, aggressive beggars or ‘the suits’. As a member of the Kurdish group observed; ‘You see anti-social behaviour everywhere, like at bus stops, on buses, within banks. You see things like that happening, rows, arguments, disputes’ (Group 5, Male #1). Many participants took the view that the defining quality of ASB is not the age of the perpetrator; rather, it is more to do with a lack of respect or consideration for other people’s enjoyment of public places - and all people could be capable of this. This may result in behaviour that is deliberately or unintentionally anti-social. One participant put it more succinctly: ‘it’s all ‘me’ these days’ (Group 3, Woman #2). In talking about young people’s ASB, one respondent in the disabled persons’ focus group commented:

The word ‘respect’ is no longer in the dictionary. It means nothing. If people have respect for one another then they’ve got respect for everybody around them (Group 7, Female #2).

‘Respect’ has become the political byword for action against ASB in the UK, being the latest label for governmental action (see [www.respect.gov.uk](http://www.respect.gov.uk)). However, like ASB, it is loosely defined. Tony Blair in the forward to the ‘Respect Action Plan’, (2006: 1) regards ‘respect’ as the following:

What lies at the heart of this [anti-social] behaviour is a lack of respect for values that almost everyone in this country shares – consideration for others, a recognition that we all have responsibilities as well as rights, civility and good manners.

This viewpoint owes a lot to the sociological notion of ‘conduct norms’ (e.g. Sellin, 1938). If this is what ‘respect’ is all about, then the evidence from this study is that *all* groups, and not just the usual suspects, are capable of breaking these ‘values’. However, I would add that - rather than ‘almost everyone’ sharing the same values - there is a lot of variety within people’s conceptions of responsibility, civility and good manners. As those generally perceived as behaving anti-socially are also very much part of any community (Burney, 2005), should their views also be taken on board? Or should common values be decided by the majority? Unfortunately there is a risk of going with the view of the most vocal and of missing the views of groups already socially excluded. As MacLeod and Ward (2004) have observed, certain ‘nuisance’ groups are already labelled as anti-social and excluded from public spaces simply because they

apparently impinge on the rights of the majority. Rogers and Coaffee (2005: 321-322) have expressed this in terms of a desire to reclaim public spaces from undesirables, as a form of 'revanchism':

... the impact of new 'revanchist' urbanism on minority groups such as buskers, street entertainers, leafleters, beggars, skateboarders and the homeless ... [suggests] tensions between the 'moving on', 'displacement' and 'dispersal' of legitimate, it un-aesthetic, users from public spaces.

By focusing on those that 'don't fit in' there is a danger that, as one respondent put it, 'Anti-social behaviour becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy' (Group 2, Male #2). One of the focus groups (Group 9) was with men aged 16-18 who were out of work and out of education - precisely the type of young people who are often perceived as a problem. When asked if they could understand why their behaviour may be seen as problematic, the response was:

- Male #1        But how can it be irritating? We're not causing [trouble], you know what I'm saying. Have you ever sat in for an afternoon? You can't handle it man.
- Male #2        Even sitting outside just on the street corner doing nothing is better than sitting in the house.

That said, Tony Blair may have been onto something in calling for 'a recognition that we all have responsibilities as well as rights'. Current interest in ASB may be influenced by the popularity of a 'rights culture' – that it is my right to behave how I like, and for others to behave how I would expect them (Millie, in press 2007a). Contemporary Western urban living is strongly influenced by the individualism that comes with a highly developed, market-led, consumer culture; and this individualism has fuelled the notion of personal rights. According the Thrift (2005: 134), who takes a somewhat Freudian view, a level of mistrust of others, or 'dislike' in urban living, is inevitable:

...a certain amount of dislike of one's fellow citizens is, given the social-cum-biological-cum-technological make-up of human beings, inescapable; the ubiquity of aggression is an inescapable by-product of living in cities.

However, there is evidence also that in many districts - including in London - a neighbourly or cosmopolitan outlook exists, adapting to allow for difference and diversity. This might foster greater tolerance and acceptance of alternative - otherwise seen as anti-social - uses of community spaces (e.g. Mean and Tims, 2005; Thrift, 2005; Amin, 2006). It is an area that could benefit from further research.

### Why do people commit ASB?

When asked for reasons why people commit ASB, many simply talked about youth problems – despite earlier assertions that everyone is capable of being anti-social. The most frequently cited causes for youth ASB were boredom and poor parental influence on children and young people. As one participant commented, ‘we blame the kids but they’ve got nowhere else to play’ (Group 8, Male #1). Another commented on youth ASB: ‘It’s because the parents don’t give two hoots what they’re up to, that’s why’ (Group 7, Female #5). The young participants agreed that there is little for them to do locally, and called for more youth clubs catering for their age group (16-18), and better employment training. A consequence of poor provision of youth services, they argued, is bored teenagers on the streets that may then get into trouble of various kinds: ‘The kids ... are obviously going to get up to mischief in the area because they’re getting bored of doing the same old things’ (Group 10, Female #1). However, the young people were quick to point out that they are also likely to be victims of ASB:

Sometimes like, when I like go out and come in late in the evening, or something like that, there’s some kids out there. They sometimes throw stuff out there when you’re walking by. (Group 10 Female #2)

The young unemployed men aged 16-18 (Group 9) also believed that they were more likely to be - and unfairly - targeted by police enforcement, especially through stop-and-search powers, as illustrated in the following exchange:

- |         |                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|---------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Male #7 | A bunch of toffs on the corner wearing their - like ‘get me’ - their posh garbs and all that. They’re not going to get pulled over. Whereas if there’s people ‘bopping’ tracksuit bottoms and shit |
| Male #8 | and hoods                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| Male #9 | and baseball caps                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Male #7 | You know what I’m saying, they’re getting pulled over straight away.                                                                                                                               |
| Male #6 | And therefore the toffs have probably got more illegal stuff on them than we have. They’ve probably got an ounce of Charlie...                                                                     |

A further cause of ASB was, for some participants, the housing allocation policies of local authorities. It has been noted elsewhere (Millie *et al.*, 2005b: 3) that some housing policies have allowed ‘large concentrations of poor, socially excluded families’, which have often exacerbated concerns of ASB. An example from the current study was given in the focus group with people aged over 70 (Group 8). A social housing development had recently been built next to their sheltered accommodation, in order to provide affordable homes to young families. In the eyes of some of the group, this had been the cause of ASB problems:

- |           |                                                                                                      |
|-----------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Female #2 | Unfortunately it doesn’t work mixing elderly people with youngsters.                                 |
| Male #1   | They’re all trouble families.                                                                        |
| Male #2   | The trouble is they’ll build houses anywhere there’s a spare piece of land these days.               |
| Male #1   | It’s just sad that they were lovely properties and they were given to people who don’t respect them. |

The trouble is that so-called 'problem families' have to go somewhere (see Burney, 2000). Such concerns were exacerbated by the residents' fear of retaliation if they made complaints to the authorities. A sense of powerlessness to do anything about ASB - for fear of what might be said or done in return - was a common theme, and confirms other recent findings (see Millie *et al.*, 2005b). For instance:

With neighbours as well, if you complain to them, yeah, the next day you might see them dumping rubbish in your [garden]. (Group 1, Female #6)

Because now the situation is really bad. The kids will remember your face and you'll be in trouble. If we go across the road and talk to the boys, they'll remember for next time. (Group 7, Male #2)

That said, a few were willing to intervene, claiming that the perpetrators are just bullies; 'If you don't do anything about it they're just going to carry on' (Group 7, Male #1).

### **What can be done about ASB?**

It was generally recognised that, while enforcement action against the perpetrators of ASB is important, it is better to prevent ASB from occurring in the first place (again supporting recent research findings - Millie *et al.*, 2005b). The need for respect was highlighted; however, respondents were aware that teaching or persuading people to show more respect is not an easy task. Some pointed towards work with parents, so that they can pass on values of respect, tolerance and consideration to their children. Other early intervention work with the very young - for example, through schools - was highlighted; and the danger if this was not achieved, as the following 16-18 year old females (Group 10) observed:

- Female #4      We have seen, like, the younger ones, like five year old and seven year olds, starting to follow the older one's footsteps, copying them, start smoking and everything.
- Female #1      You see seven and eight year olds going around nicking mopeds. They're seven and eight!

The need for preventive work with the current generation of teenagers and young adults was stressed. It was also pointed out that key agencies had responsibilities beyond any recognised ASB-focused activities. For instance, it is important that agency staff are civil in all their dealings with the general public (as demonstrated in the earlier bus driver example), since rudeness is not only anti-social in itself, it can provoke ASB in others. Also, housing authorities should consider the ASB implications of all their policies, and local authorities and housing associations should play their full part in ensuring that streets and estates are kept clean and free of litter.

Most of the focus group participants saw enforcement as a significant element of local work to tackle ASB, with some enthusiasm about the use of ASBOs (although this came with some caveats): 'But would they follow it? That's the main thing isn't it, would they follow it? Because you need to keep a tab on that person' (Group 1, Female #2). Issues around the displacement of problems and the inappropriate or disproportionate use of enforcement against certain minority groups were also recognised. A member of the focus group with people with mental health and substance misuse problems articulated this problem as follows:

The fact of the matter is, if you look at the crime being committed, is that, you know, junkies aren't smashing shop doorways in, it's pissed-up suits who are doing that. And where's the anti-social behaviour orders for those people? The fact of the matter is they're not going to hand out those anti-social behaviour orders for those people because they don't want to alienate them (Group 6, Male #2).

The complaint is that disproportionate enforcement targeting certain groups can have the effect of entrenching their social exclusion.

In terms of who is responsible for tackling ASB, as noted earlier, some thought that people needed to take responsibility for their own actions. That said, the participants also generally pointed towards the police, local authorities and other relevant agencies.

There were calls for partnership work on ASB, which would include local residents as well as statutory agencies. However, including residents without excluding certain minority or marginalised groups will not be simple. The role of the police was seen as key, and there was general enthusiasm for a more visible police presence. The recent introduction of Police Community Support Officers<sup>4</sup> in many areas was also generally welcomed.

## Conclusions

The 'minority and marginalised' people included in this study all had experienced ASB in some form. However, there was no single type of behaviour mentioned by all groups, perhaps indicating that what is regarded as anti-social may be specific to certain groups', or even to certain individual's, experiences. The types of ASB cited included interpersonal and malicious ASB, environmental ASB and ASB restricting access to public spaces. The participants also tended to include more minor incivilities - or irritations to daily urban living - as ASB, such as general rudeness, bad manners and swearing. It was generally recognised that *all* could be anti-social, be it beggars or 'the suits', bus drivers or passengers. Despite common media and political emphasis, young people were not regarded as the only perpetrators (although when asked to talk about possible reasons for ASB, many participants focused on youth problems). The defining feature of ASB was thought to be a person's lack of consideration for others, or a lack of 'respect', rather than their age. This may involve malicious intent, but is just as likely to reflect a lack of foresight that certain behaviours can have a detrimental effect on others. Action to deal with ASB needs to recognise this.

That said, some participants had experienced ASB specifically targeted at them as a minority or marginalised person. For instance, some Bangladeshi women had received abuse for being Muslim. Similarly, those who had been homeless had received abuse from 'the suits', and asked; 'where's the anti-social behaviour orders for those people?' (Group 6, Male #2). Some young men regarded disproportionate attention from the police - in the form of stop-and-search tactics - as anti-social. It is this (perceived or actual) disproportionate attention that was a concern for some in the focus groups. And, as noted, by focusing on those that 'don't fit in', there is a danger that ASB could become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Rogers and Coaffee (2005) may be onto something in seeing this as a desire to reclaim public spaces from undesirables, as a form of 'revanchism'. They ask the question, 'whose quality of life is enhanced, and at whose expense?' (2005: 321).

In the urban design literature (e.g. CABE, 2005) there is increasing awareness that urban living - and public spaces in particular - should not necessarily be 'risk-averse'. While some people's behaviour is certainly anti-social, our beliefs and expectations of urban living need to be challenged as this is what urban living is all about; we need also to recognise that others have different, maybe contested, perceptions of what is acceptable or anti-social behaviour. We should take on board the focus group participants' assertion that *all* can be anti-social - rather than focusing on certain minority and marginalised groups and entrenching their social exclusion. The participants saw a role for enforcement - including the use of ASBOs - but this would have to be seen to be fair. If ASB by 'aggressive beggars' is being tackled, then so too must the ASB of city workers out getting drunk on a Friday night. In common with other findings (e.g. Millie *et al.*, 2005b), the participants saw also a need for prevention alongside enforcement action against ASB.

While it was recognised that perpetrators need to take responsibility for their own actions, the participants saw a role for the police, local authority and other key agencies. And these agencies need to lead by example - be it via, for example, good manners training for bus drivers, or effective and speedy litter and refuse removal. If the



participants were right, then other work to address young people's boredom, and to improve parenting, may be needed; also, work to address people's sense of powerlessness to intervene in instances of ASB. This last point may be key in engendering the sort of informal social control (e.g. Taylor, 1997) and collective efficacy (Sampson and Raudenbush, 1999) that could help to limit ASB. There is, however, the observation made by one of the participants, that Londoners can tend to avoid getting involved in other people's lives, thus making ASB more likely. This hints at much wider problems associated with the individualism of urban living and, unfortunately, there are no easy answers to this. In her classic text on urban living, Jane Jacobs (1961) observed the following:

The bedrock attribute of a successful city district is that a person must feel personally safe and secure on the street among all these strangers. He must not feel automatically menaced by them. A city district that fails in this respect also does badly in other ways and lays up trouble for itself, and for its city at large, mountain on mountain of trouble (1961: 30).

In tackling ASB in urban areas, this must be true for the majority; but, equally, for minority and marginalised groups.

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<sup>2</sup> ASBOs - as introduced in the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 - are the most widely used and recognised civil enforcement remedy for tackling ASB. Perpetrators aged 10 or above can receive ASBOs, a breach of which can result in a prison sentence for adults (see Justices' Clerks' Society, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> The 2003 Annual London Survey (ALS) found that 78 per cent of Londoners were fairly/very satisfied with where they lived, compared to 14 per cent fairly/very dissatisfied (see Millie *et al.*, 2005: 11).

<sup>4</sup> Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) were introduced with the Police Reform Act 2002. They are uniformed staff working for the police. Their main role is in public reassurance, to be a visible presence on the street. They have limited powers, such as issuing certain fixed penalty notices or confiscating alcohol (see e.g. Hearnden, 2004; Johnston, 2006).