

Disabled victims' experiences of criminal justice systems: A systematic literature review

September 2025

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Mx Vickery Stamp

Foreword by the Victims' Commissioner



My landmark 2023 Victim Survey revealed considerable victim dissatisfaction with criminal justice agencies, like the police and CPS, as well as a lack of confidence in the criminal justice system overall.

While dissatisfaction cut across all victim groups, my findings showed a particularly concerning trend emerging for disabled victims. Nearly half (45%) were dissatisfied with the police response to their crime. They were also less likely to report to the police again. This is of great concern to me, as evidence suggests that disabled victims are more likely to have crimes committed against them.

Through my survey, I heard from victims who felt patronised, infantilised and who were not provided reasonable adjustments by the police. Only a fifth of disabled victims were confident they could receive justice by reporting a crime. This is unacceptable. When police fail to provide necessary accommodations, they push victims away from the very system designed to protect them.

Who you are should not and must not dictate the treatment you receive as a victim, nor your chances at justice. The stark findings from my survey convinced me that a more thorough examination of the issues was required.

In March 2025, I commissioned Dr Leah Burch to conduct a systematic literature review that would collate the literature on disabled victims' experiences of the criminal justice system. This review would explore the barriers disabled victims' face when accessing or attempting to access the criminal justice system, including the police and court systems.

Dr Burch's review confirms that disabled victims' experiences with the criminal justice system are often a significant barrier to justice. Her review identifies several concerning findings, including:

- A lack of awareness, knowledge and training among criminal justice professionals about working with and supporting disabled victims;
- Failures to make adjustments for disabled victims across the criminal justice system;
- Criminal justice processes and practices presenting unique challenges for disabled victims of crime;
- Police dismissing and minimising crime against disabled people.

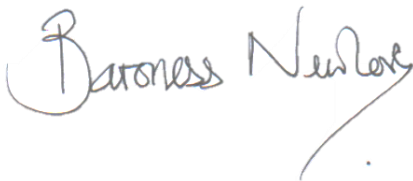
Formulated in consultation with leading disability campaigners at Stay Safe East and Disability Rights UK, Dr Burch makes further recommendations for research and practice. These include:

- Enhanced training for all criminal justice professionals on their responsibilities to disabled victims.
- Accessibility audits conducted by justice agencies at every stage of the criminal justice system.

I will be writing to the relevant agencies to urge them to implement these crucial measures. Disabled victims have been let down for too long. They deserve - and must receive - equal access to justice.

This new evidence also reinforces my previous call for disabled victims to be guaranteed access to independent specialist advocates, a recommendation I made in my 2023 Victim Survey. These specialists can improve outcomes and keep victims engaged by championing their rights throughout the justice process.

While this review primarily draws on UK research, the low number of studies on disabled victims in the UK necessitated the inclusion of international research, which is clearly flagged throughout. Above all, this highlights the need for further research to be undertaken in the UK to better understand disabled victims' experiences, across the entire criminal justice process, and for all crime types. This will be an important next step in building a more complete picture and informing targeted improvements to ensure disabled victims have full access to justice.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Baroness Newlove". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Baroness Newlove of Warrington
Victims' Commissioner for England and Wales

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Introduction

This systematic literature review has been conducted to collate existing literature on disabled victims of crime and their experiences of accessing criminal justice systems. The review has been funded by the Victims' Commissioner following previous research findings that disabled people have disproportionately negative experiences of the criminal justice system compared to other victimised groups (Murray et al., 2024). 15/09/2025 13:32:00 Thus, this review seeks to better understand some of the barriers experienced by disabled victims as well as highlight any areas of good practice that support better engagement throughout the criminal justice system. In turn, this review will make recommendations for areas of future research and for the development of practice. There are six recommendations presented in the conclusion as

Recommendations:

1. Training and professional development
2. Reasonable adjustments and flexibility
3. Accessibility audits
4. Attitudinal change
5. Multi-agency working
6. Addressing gaps in research and practice

demonstrated below.

The findings presented in this systematic review are organised thematically. First, barriers to accessing and engaging with the criminal justice system are reviewed, including barriers that are experienced both during interactions with police and within the court system. Following this, the review explores some of the ways in which police and other criminal justice professionals respond to disabled victims of crime. This section examines some of the attitudinal and procedural factors that may undermine credibility and contribute to disabled victims feeling dismissed and not taken seriously. Finally, the review considers some of the ways in which criminal justice professionals can work collaboratively with other support systems to improve outcomes for disabled victims within the criminal justice system.

Methods

The systematic review addresses the research question: How do disabled victims of crime experience criminal justice systems? The protocol for the review was not pre-registered but is available upon request. Searches were carried out in April 2025 of eight academic databases (Academic OneFile, Academic Search Complete, HeinOnline, JSTOR, Law Trove, PubMed, PsycARTICLES, SAGE Journals Online), four databases containing grey literature, and websites of relevant organisations. Targeted google searches were used to ensure key reports from outside the academic literature were not missed. Searches combined key terms for

disability, the criminal justice system and experiences (see table 1) and were optimised for each database.

Area	Key search terms (core terms highlighted in bold)
Disabled	disab*, impairment, impaired, deaf, blind, autis*, "learning difficulty", "learning difficulties", "special needs", "special educational needs", "mental illness", "chronic illness", "mental health condition", "long term condition" "long-term condition"
Criminal justice system	victim*, police, court, report*, crim*
Experiences	experience, perception, understanding, attitudes, views, encounter, interaction

Table 1 - Key search terms

Resulting studies were screened by two reviewers. Studies were included if they addressed experiences of any part of the criminal justice system for disabled victims with any impairment/condition and who were victims of any crime type. Studies were excluded where they only addressed victims' experiences of the crime itself or they only addressed disabled perpetrators. Studies published prior to 2015 and in a language other than English were excluded. Reviews, commentaries, editorials, opinion pieces, and legal judgements were also excluded.

Details of included studies were extracted into tables using predetermined headings. The data collected were: date of publication; study aims; country; study design; population and impairment type; area of criminal justice system; study outcomes; report type and peer-review status; and relevant findings. The outcome of interest for the review was experience of disabled victims', either by self-report or any other appropriate measure. Each included study was assessed for quality using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT). A narrative summary of findings is provided in the next section of this report and high-level summary is provided in Appendix 1.

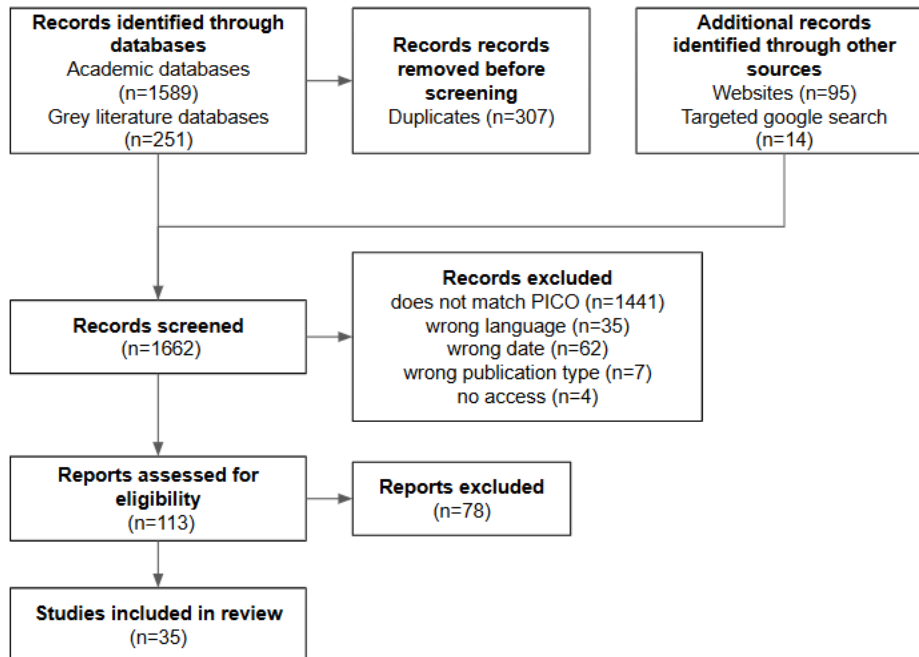


Figure 1 - PRISMA flow diagram, adapted from Page et al (2021)

Findings

Of the 1662 unique search records identified, 35 articles met the criteria for inclusion (see figure 1 for a full breakdown). Of these, 17 studies reported on experiences in England, 1 in Northern Ireland, 3 in the UK more widely, and 15 in countries outside the UK, including USA (5), Australia (3), Sweden (2), France (1), Netherlands (1), Norway (1), Iceland (1), and Czech Republic (1). (One study looked at more than one country). All studies focused on experiences with either the police, the court system or both. In total, 32 studies described experience with police while 9 discussed experiences with courts. The most commonly considered crime types were intimate partner violence, including domestic violence and sexual violence, and hate crime, which were each considered in 13 studies. The impairment types featured most frequently were learning disabilities (17 studies), mental health impairments (11), physical impairments (11), autism or autism spectrum disorder (10), and D/deafness (9). A full breakdown by crime and impairment type can be seen in figures 2 and 3, respectively.

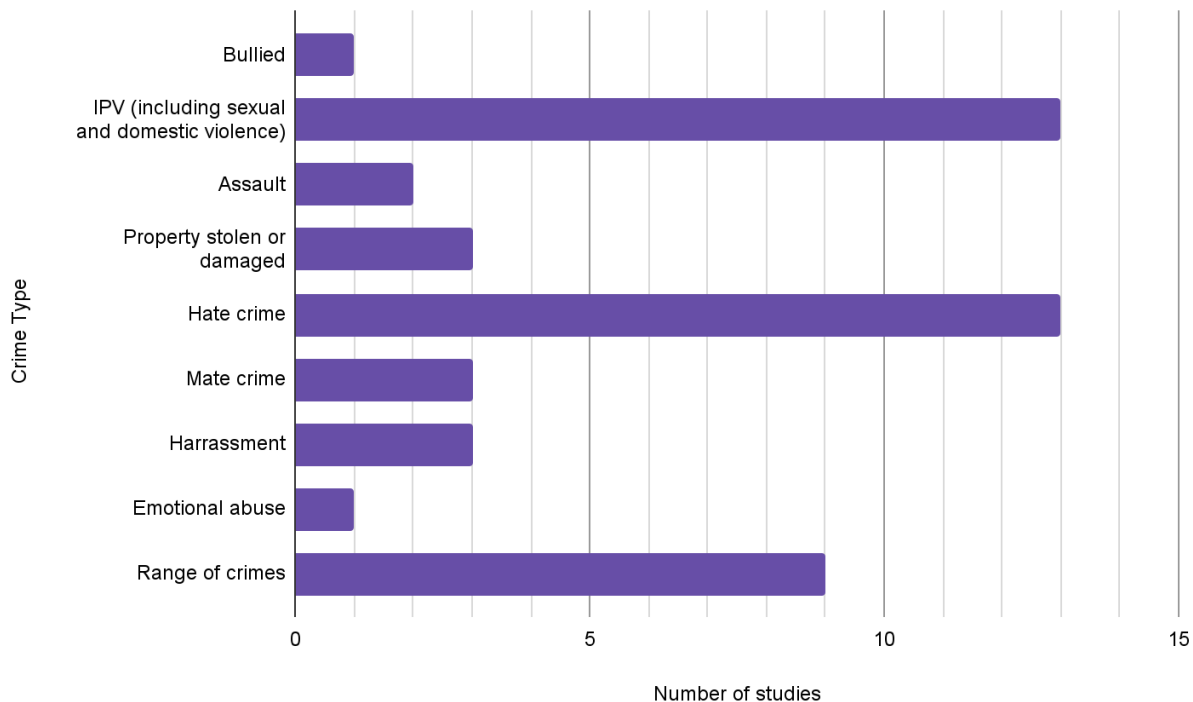


Figure 2 - Type of crime

Across all crime types, and impairment groups, the underreporting of crime against disabled people is well documented. Indeed, much of the reviewed literature recognised some of the challenges that contribute to a large proportion of crime against disabled people not being reported to, or recorded by, the police (Burch, 2020; Byrne et al., 2021; Cazalis et al., 2022; Dinisman and Moroz, 2020; Healy, 2018, 2020; Hollomotz et al., 2023; Murray et al., 2024; Powers and Hayes, 2024; Tyson, 2019; Walach and Petruželka, 2024; Wilkin, 2020). However,

due to the focus of this review on disabled victim’s experiences of the criminal justice system, reasons for under-reporting are not explored and many pieces of literature that only focused upon barriers to reporting were excluded during the screening process. Indeed, the following review considers the experiences of disabled victims who do access criminal justice support to report crimes against them.

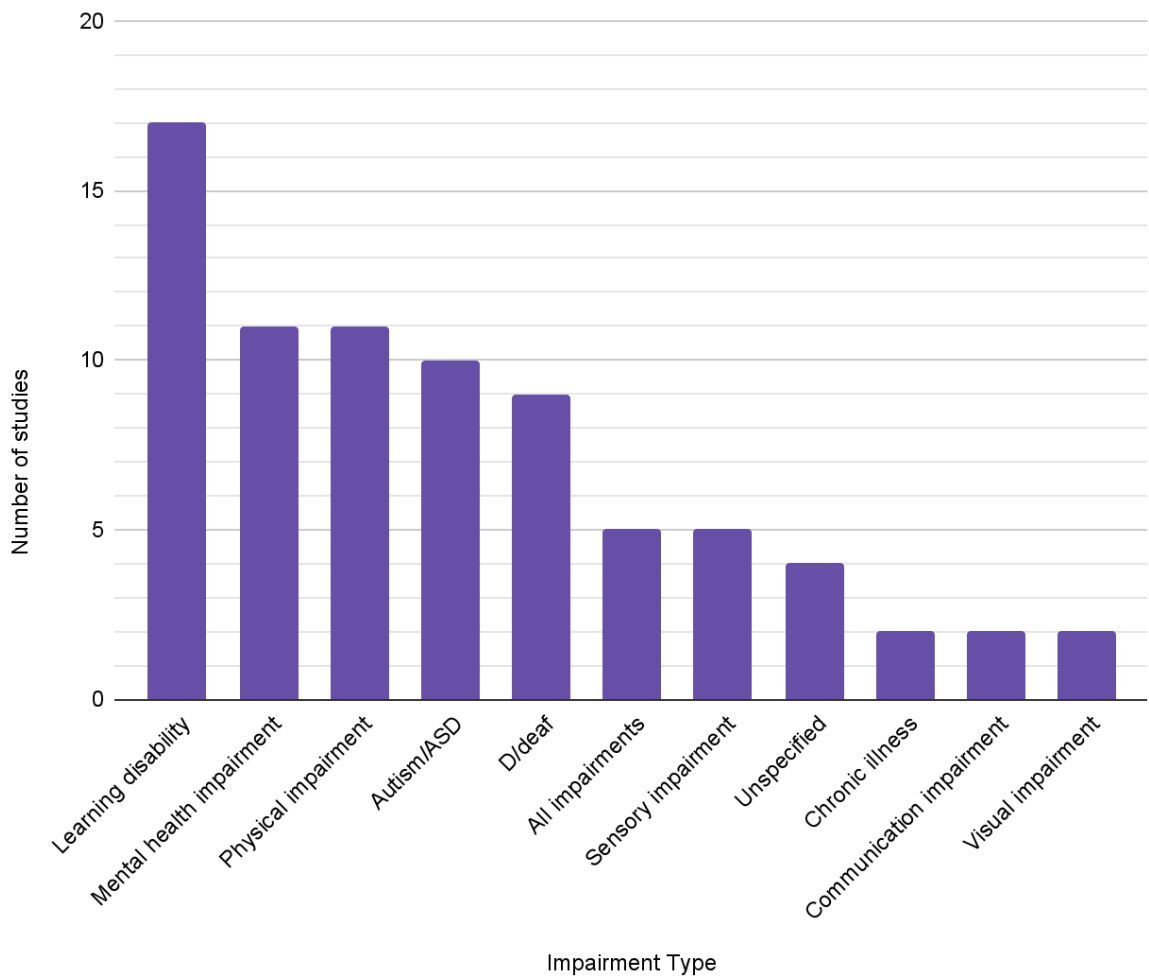


Figure 3 - Type of impairment

Barriers to Engaging with the Criminal Justice System

Summary Overview: Barriers to Accessing the Criminal Justice System

This section highlights that there is a significant **lack of training and awareness** among criminal justice professionals about working with disabled victims. The section first considers barriers within policing, including **inaccessible communication and information sharing methods** and **procedural barriers** relating to the ways in which disabled victims are expected to engage with processes such as outcome letters and evidence gathering. Next, the section identifies barriers within court. This includes a **lack of appropriate adjustments, delays in accessing appropriate support** such as intermediaries and translators, and processes that can make disabled victims feel **dismissed or not believed**.

Research suggests that when disabled victims of crime do report crime to the police, they are less likely to feel satisfied with the response (Murray et al., 2024; Wilkin, 2020). According to Murray et al., (2024), this dissatisfaction can arise due to a number of factors, such as impairment needs not being met, and appropriate reasonable adjustments not being put in place. The challenges experienced in meeting the needs of disabled victims of crime may reflect broader concerns about the limited experience and awareness of criminal justice professionals when working with disabled victims and lack of training opportunities (Beckene et al., 2020; Byrne et al., 2021; Inclusion London, 2021; Kuosmanen and Starke, 2015; Richardson et al., 2016; Spaan and Kaal, 2019; Tyson, 2019). As a result, professionals often lack knowledge and awareness about impairment needs, and the range of reasonable adjustments and special measures that could be put in place to support disabled people's engagement with the criminal justice system.

Lack of awareness and experience was recognised across different impairment groups. According to Bryne et al., (2021), criminal justice professionals report having limited experience working with D/deaf victims of crime and therefore report less confidence. Similarly, criminal justice professionals are perceived to lack knowledge and awareness about the most appropriate ways to communicate with people with learning disabilities who are reporting crime (Kuosmanen and Starke, 2015; Spaan and Kaal, 2019).¹ This issue is also recognised by police officers who report being less confident in their ability to meet the needs of people with learning disabilities and/or neurodivergent victims due to a lack of training opportunities (Richardson et al., 2016; Tyson, 2019). Not recognising support needs may be particularly problematic for victims with hidden impairments (Orchard, 2018) and/or poor mental health (Dinisman and Moroz, 2020) who may not be as easily identified by criminal justice professionals as those with visible impairments. The failure to implement appropriate support

¹ These studies are from outside of the UK.

can contribute to a high number of cases not being charged as well as a failure to meet the needs of disabled victims later in their criminal justice journeys.

Where criminal justice professionals do engage with training, they report feeling more confident when working with disabled victims (Tyson, 2019). Therefore, there is a significant need for more training amongst criminal justice professionals working across the criminal justice system to ensure that they feel confident in their ability to work effectively with disabled victims and facilitate equal access to criminal justice. Unfortunately, lack of training, awareness and experience contributes to many of the access issues that are discussed in the following section which considers some of the barriers experienced by disabled victims when interacting with police and the court system.

Barriers within Policing

Disabled victims of crime may experience a range of barriers when reporting their experiences to the police, or during the process of an investigation. This section explores these barriers thematically. First, those barriers relating to information and communication before moving to discuss procedural barriers. Where the barriers are specific to impairment groups this will be identified. While this section considers some of the organisational barriers that disabled victims may encounter, later sections of this review consider some of the attitudinal barriers that can prevent disabled victims' access to justice.

Information and Communication Barriers within Policing

Research recognises the urgent need for accessible and timely communication for all disabled victims of crime (Hollomotz et al., 2023; Inclusion London, 2022, 2021; Mastrocinque et al., 2017; Olsen and Kermit, 2015; Orchard, 2018). Communication barriers when reporting to the police can contribute to delays, cases being dropped, and disabled victims feeling like they have not been given equal access to justice. Indeed, lack of police training around best communication practices and a lack of appropriate communication support can delay disabled victims of crime being able to provide their formal statement to the police (Hollomotz et al., 2023; Inclusion London, 2023, 2021). Hollomotz et al., (2023) present a case whereby a disabled victim of sexual violence was delayed by three months due to the failure to identify a specialist intermediary to provide communication support. In addition to causing distress, this significant delay made it more difficult for the victim to provide a detailed account of the sexual violence, and a lack of evidence eventually meant that the case was dropped and not referred to the CPS.

For D/deaf victims, the communication methods available for victims to report a crime may present barriers. Indeed, the traditional process of calling a telephone operator may be inaccessible to those who are unable to hear through traditional means and respond

accordingly (Byrne et al., 2021). However, the alternative to this, which is typically a text-based system, may also be inaccessible as it assumes a high level of literacy that not all D/deaf victims will have (Byrne et al., 2021). As such, both the traditional and alternative mechanisms to reporting a crime may be inaccessible to some D/deaf victims. In addition, access to sign language interpreters when reporting to the police may not be immediately available, causing a delay in being able to make a formal report (Mastrocinque et al., 2017; Olsen and Kermit, 2015).² As a result, D/deaf victims of crime may need to rely on alternative methods of communication with police officers, such as using pen and paper to communicate key messages, or relying on family and friends to provide information on their behalf. Such methods of communication can result in a poor quality statement, which significantly reduces the chance of reports being further investigated or passed to the CPS (Mastrocinque et al., 2017; Olsen and Kermit, 2015).² In addition, having to rely on others to support communication may also present barriers where crimes are committed by friends and family members.

People with learning disabilities and/or neurodivergent victims of crime can encounter particular challenges accessing information due to communication barriers and a lack of flexibility in the way that information is provided. When dealing with reports of hate crime, police officers may use language that is not appropriate for people with learning disabilities (Tyson, 2019). The timing of communicating important information may also present challenges for those reporting sexual violence and/or domestic violence. According to Orchard (2018), being provided with too much information at one time can be overwhelming, and may not give victims enough time to process the importance of what they are being advised. Similarly, Hollomotz et al., (2023) report that providing neurodivergent victims of sexual violence too much information immediately following a report may be inaccessible and overwhelming. However, they also note that simply providing a booklet of information for neurodivergent victims to take away with them may also present challenges, as this does not provide victims with an opportunity to ask questions and discuss the information presented. It is important to therefore offer multiple ways of communicating information to disabled victims, and to check that this information has been appropriately received. This could be achieved by consulting regularly with disabled victim-survivors about preferred methods of communication and confirming that information has been understood.

Procedural Barriers within Policing

Once a report has been made to the police, the processes and practices that follow may present unique challenges for disabled victims of crime. For people with learning disabilities and/or neurodivergent victims, the need to fill in forms and provide statements may prevent continued engagement with the criminal justice system and contribute to high rates of victim withdrawal (Spaan and Kaal, 2019).³ In addition, the standard letters that are sent to victims of

² These studies are from outside of the UK.

³ This study is from outside of the UK.

crime about their case may be inappropriate and inaccessible (Spaan and Kaal, 2019).³ This may mean that some victims are not aware of their case outcome, or do not understand why particular decisions about their case have been made.

The need to gather evidence may also be difficult for some disabled victims of crime, such as being asked to capture footage of hate crimes taking place or being able to provide physical evidence. The failure to capture this evidence can mean that police are unwilling to continue with investigations (Wilkin, 2024). Williams and Jobe (2025) suggest that people with learning disabilities who report sexual violence may be disproportionately impacted by the legal duty of police officers to consider third party material which may need to be disclosed to the defence. This is because people with learning disabilities are likely to have a more extensive history of engagement with services and providers. While this can cause time delays, it can also serve to undermine victims with learning disabilities who may have records of negative encounters with services and providers which could be taken out of context and present victims as uncooperative (Williams and Jobe, 2025).

Despite these negative interactions with police, Tyson (2019) noted that there is a desire among police officers to provide more support to victims with learning disabilities. Similarly, Spaan and Kaal (2019) argue that some criminal justice professionals recognise that alternative provisions may be needed to enable people with learning disabilities to provide a reliable and robust witness statement.³ It is also important to note that some victims of crime do report positive encounters with the police. Indeed, Richardson et al., (2016) show that where police show a willingness to provide additional support, people with learning disabilities and/or neurodivergent victims of crime are more likely to feel a sense of justice. Addressing these barriers within policing can therefore be transformational for criminal justice outcomes as well as the ways in which disabled victims feel they have been treated within this process.

Barriers within Court

Far more crimes are reported to the police than those that result in a charge. As a result, fewer crimes reach the court system than are reported to the police. This discrepancy was reflected in the reviewed literature, where more research focused upon experiences of reporting crime to the police (32) than experiences of being at court (9). Despite there being fewer findings relating to this stage of the criminal justice system, there were nonetheless some important findings about disabled victims' experience of interacting with the court system including the failure to provide reasonable adjustments and some specific barriers limiting access for D/deaf victims and people with learning disabilities.

Failure to Provide Reasonable Adjustments within Court

Some of the reviewed literature recognised inconsistencies within the provision of reasonable adjustments for disabled victims at court. Victims with poor mental health report not having any provision put in place until they get to court because of the police failure to recognise their mental health issues (Dinisman and Moroz, 2020). This suggests that disabled victim-survivors with invisible impairments may experience particular challenges in having their needs identified.

Inconsistency of support provision was also reported for disabled women more generally who found that reasonable adjustments are not consistently accommodated across different courts (Orchard, 2018). For example, measures such as a screen or video link are not always effectively put in place. They also recognise that courtrooms may be physically inaccessible for some disabled women, and provide examples such as lifts being out of order or only having stair access to particular areas of the courtroom (Orchard, 2018). As it will be noted later in this review, having access to external support such as the Rights Protection Officers (RPOs) available in Iceland can alleviate some of these barriers before victims arrive at court (Gjecaj et al., 2024).⁴ Ensuring that all disabled victim-survivors have access to reasonable adjustments is essential to providing fair access to justice.

People with Learning Disabilities: Barriers within Court

Beckene et al., (2020) report on some of the barriers experienced by people with learning disabilities, including appropriate support not being put in place to support victims and their families while in court. This research recognised the unfamiliarity of court processes and language for people with learning disabilities, and that the failure to offer specific support to make this more accessible could make victims feel unsupported. Kuosmanen and Starke (2015) similarly recognise that while victims with a learning disability may be provided with alternative means of communication that do not rely on coherent spoken narratives while engaging with the police, this is less likely to be available during court.⁵ The lack of appropriate support and adjustments can contribute to people with learning disabilities feeling retraumatized by the process of being questioned in court, particularly if they believe that questions from the defence are an attempt to undermine their testimony (Beckene et al., 2020). As a result, victims and their families wanted judges to intervene with some of this questioning and felt that an intermediary or advocate would have provided them essential support to navigate court procedures (Beckene et al., 2020). Feeling 'on trial' was similarly reported by disabled women testifying in sexual violence and/or domestic violence cases who felt that defence attorneys were using their memory issues as a reason to present their account as unreliable (Orchard, 2018).

⁴ This study is from outside of the UK.

⁵ This study is from outside of the UK.

D/deaf victims: Barriers within Court

Difficulties in accessing interpreters for D/deaf victims at court can create specific barriers to accessing appropriate support and delays in setting court dates (Byrne et al., 2021). Even where interpreters are available, the reliability of translation for D/deaf victims may be limited by interpreter familiarity with legal jargon (Olsen and Kermit, 2015).⁶ As such, D/deaf victims of crime may experience barriers both in accessing and engaging with court processes.

While there is less literature that focuses on disabled victims' experiences of engaging with the court system, existing research does suggest that these victims may experience particular types of organisational and physical barriers. In the following section, responses to disabled victims across the criminal justice system are considered, and key attitudinal and procedural barriers are identified that impact disabled victims' opportunities to access fair criminal justice outcomes.

⁶ This study is from outside of the UK.

Responding to Disabled Victims

Section Overview: Responding to Disabled Victims

The following section explores some of the barriers that are presented due to the ways in which criminal justice professionals respond to disabled victims. This includes slow responses that **minimise the significance** of crime against disabled people and the failure to act efficiently. Next, this section examines some of the negative assumptions and perceptions that may deny disabled victims' **credibility** or result in **alternative approaches** to the criminal justice system being pursued. Finally, this section explores the value attributed to multi-agency working, whereby **collaboration across agencies** can ensure better access to criminal justice for disabled people.

Attitudinal Barriers

The previous sections have outlined some of the organisational and procedural barriers experienced by disabled victims when engaging with the criminal justice system. This section explores some of the challenges experienced by disabled victims due to the ways in which criminal justice professionals respond to them and the attitudinal barriers that can contribute to disabled victims being dismissed, not taken seriously, and not given equal access to criminal justice.

Minimising Crime Against Disabled Victims

Across different types of crime and impairment groups, multiple pieces of research identified that the police response to disabled people who report crime is slow and ineffective (Healy, 2018; Hollomotz et al., 2023; Inclusion London, 2021; Koffer Miller et al., 2022; Macdonald, 2015; Tyson, 2019). Neurodivergent victims reporting a range of crimes including interpersonal violence, assault, property damage and/or theft felt that police responded slowly to their initial report (Koffer Miller et al., 2022).⁷ Similarly, victims of hate crime report that police are slow in responding to their reports and do not provide the level of support that they expect (Tyson, 2019). Once the report has been made, police may be unresponsive to follow-up calls to check the progress of a report (Inclusion London, 2021). This means disabled victims who do report crime to the police may experience further time delays in the investigation of crime, and the way in which this is communicated to them. This is supported by Hollomotz et al., (2023) who note that many of the disabled victims of sexual violence who took part in their project did not know the outcome of their case but had presumed that it had been dropped due to lack of communication.

⁷ This study is from outside of the UK.

Police responses to reports of crime may also differ according to impairment type. According to Macdonald (2015), the police are less likely to investigate a hate crime if the victim has a learning disability. Indeed, of the 78 disabled people who participated in the research, just 16.3% of reported cases of hate crime against people with a learning disability were investigated, compared to 30.4% for those against victims with a physical impairment.

The above literature indicates that many disabled victims of crime are not satisfied with the police response to them. This is further supported by research that suggests many disabled victims of crime feel like the police response to them is cavalier and that the crimes committed against them are minimised and dismissed (Admire and Ramirez, 2021; Burch, 2020; Healy, 2018, 2020; Inclusion London, 2021; Macdonald et al., 2025). This was particularly reported by victims of disability hate crime, who felt that police fail to take these incidents seriously and recognise them as crimes motivated by hostility (Healy, 2018, 2020; Inclusion London, 2021; Macdonald et al., 2025, 2023). This is particularly the case where hate incidents occur within local neighbourhoods and within the parameters of disabled people's homes (Burch, 2020).

According to Spaan and Kaal (2019), some police believe that people with learning disabilities and/or neurodivergent victims contact the police unnecessarily when police involvement is not required.⁸ The assumption that disabled people who report crimes are not in need of police support may explain the issues raised above relating to slow and ineffective responses. Indeed, some research suggests that disabled victims of crime are made to feel like a nuisance (Inclusion London, 2021; McCulloch et al., 2021; McGowan and Elliott, 2019; Steele, 2017; Williams and Jobe, 2025). Prior encounters with the police can contribute to such perceptions. Indeed, Steele (2017) suggests that women offenders who are also victims of sexual violence may be construed as dishonest, a drain on resources and a nuisance.⁹ Within this research, Steele (2017) analyses case notes relating to one female offender who, despite a significant number of encounters as a victim, routinely had their experiences of crime reduced to attention seeking behaviour rather than a crime that needed to be responded to. These findings are supported by Williams and Jobe (2025) and McCulloch et al., (2021) who argue that disabled women, and in particular neurodivergent women and/or with learning disabilities may be more likely to be perceived as unreliable and a nuisance. McGowan and Elliott (2019) report similar findings that disabled women may be perceived as a 'pain' and 'well known' by police.¹⁰ Disabled people's organisations and hate crime advocates share similar concerns that disabled people who are seen to be 'repeat callers' to the police are perceived as wasting police time (Inclusion London, 2021).

⁸ This study is from outside of the UK.

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The failure to effectively and efficiently respond to violence shares a symbolic message that such crimes are acceptable. Admire and Ramirez (2021) reveal in their analysis of deposition transcripts for D/deaf refugees seeking asylum, that the failure of police to recognise the seriousness of crime can normalise violence against D/deaf communities.¹¹ Such normalisation of violence can be detrimental to police recognition of trauma. Indeed, Burch (2020) and Inclusion London (2021) argue that police do not recognise the trauma of being a victim of repeated hostility and therefore, do not respond in an appropriate way. Similarly, (Healy, 2018) points out that the immediate responses of call handlers may be inappropriate when responding to a victim of repeated hostility, due to the failure to recognise these incidents within a wider pattern of violence. Dismissal of crime, and a failure to recognise the significance of being a victim, can also serve to normalise violence against disabled people which may lead to secondary victimisation for disabled victims who assume that the police do not care about them (Healy, 2018). This can decrease already low levels of trust in the police and can prevent disabled victims from accessing criminal justice support in the future.

It is important to recognise that the dismissal of crimes against disabled people can not only prevent access to criminal justice, but can contribute to the violence escalating (Macdonald et al., 2023; McGowan and Elliott, 2019). According to Doherty (2017), practices that dismiss or minimise crimes against disabled people may reflect a lack of police understanding of the types of crimes that disabled people are at risk of experiencing, such as mate crime. Mate crime often targets people with learning disabilities and involves a process of ‘befriending’ to gain trust, often resulting in financial, physical, or sexual exploitation. Doherty (2017) suggests that police may struggle to recognise mate crime in particular, due to the assumed presence of ‘friendship.’ Better understanding of the nuances of crime against disabled people is therefore essential to ensure that police respond to disabled people in a thorough, time efficient and sensitive manner. Part of this work is about transforming the ways in which criminal justice professionals perceive disability and disabled people by providing a supportive space for particular assumptions and stereotypes to be challenged. Such provision would also address some of the assumptions discussed in the following section that serve to undermine the credibility of disabled victims of crime.

Denying Credibility of Disabled Victims

A significant finding across crime type and impairment type related to issues around the credibility of disabled victims, with a number of studies reporting that disabled people are often not believed by the police when they report a crime (Burch, 2020; Cazalis et al., 2022; Kuosmanen and Starke, 2015; McCulloch et al., 2021; Spaan and Kaal, 2019; Steele, 2017; Wilkin, 2024; Williams and Jobe, 2025). Research suggests that people with learning disabilities who report interpersonal violence to the police feel discounted and not believed

¹¹ This study is from outside of the UK.

(Burch, 2020; Williams and Jobe, 2025). Similarly, Cazalis et al., (2022) suggest that over half of the 225 neurodivergent women who completed their survey reported not being believed by police when they reported interpersonal violence.¹² This is also the case for victims of hate crime (Wilkin, 2024). Interestingly, following interviews with police officers, Spaan and Kaal (2019) note that the feeling of not being believed may be a reflection of people with learning disabilities and/or neurodivergent victims not understanding why questions are asked by police in particular ways.¹³ Such a finding suggests that it is the processes and systems that police must follow, as opposed to their attitudes, that may cause disabled people to feel like they have not been believed. Whether it is a result of police attitudes or procedural structures, not being believed can have significant impacts on disabled victims. On the contrary, when disabled victims feel they have been believed, this can make them feel validated (Hollomotz et al., 2023; McCulloch et al., 2021; Orchard, 2018).

The credibility of disabled victims may be questioned due to the systems and procedures embedded within the criminal justice system which ultimately anticipate a particular type of victim. Indeed, Kuosmanen and Starke (2015) suggest that the requirement for victims to produce a coherent and detailed statement to the police may disadvantage people with learning disabilities.¹⁴ As Spaan and Kaal (2019) suggest, this requirement may mean that victims with a learning disability are asked to make several statements or may have their cases dropped due to a lack of evidence.¹⁵ These responses may send a message to people with learning disabilities that they are not perceived to be credible victims within the standards of the criminal justice system. Similarly, Williams and Jobe (2025) cite that some disabled people who have particular communication styles, demeanour and issues with memory are more likely to have their credibility challenged. Such findings suggest that the way in which disabled people are able to communicate and present themselves may impact how credible they are assumed to be. This is supported by Spaan and Kaal (2019) who suggest that people with learning disabilities are less likely to be taken seriously as credible victims by police and court systems if they present 'insensible behaviours' while reporting and by Williams and Jobe (2025) who argue that normative assumptions about the 'correct' response to trauma may marginalise people with learning disabilities and/or neurodivergent victims who do not align to such assumptions.

This section has examined criminal justice responses to disabled victims as slow, as failing to recognise the significance of events, and as undermining victim credibility. These attitudinal barriers are based upon negative perceptions of disability and of normative assumptions about *who* a victim is. Such responses can contribute to the perception and practice that crime

¹² This study is from outside of the UK.

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¹⁴ This study is from outside of the UK.

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against disabled people is not a criminal justice issue, which is explored in the following section.

Unsuitable Alternatives to Criminal Justice Approaches

While there are many reasons that disabled people report their experiences to the police, one likely motivation relates to the desire for criminal justice. However, as has been demonstrated throughout this review, disabled people experience a range of barriers that prevent criminal justice from being achieved. One particular barrier relates to an understanding of crime against disabled people as a safeguarding issue, or one that belongs outside of the remit of policing (Hollomotz et al., 2023; McCulloch et al., 2021; Orchard, 2018). Some research suggests that victims of hate and mate crime are likely to be advised that incidents do not meet the criminal threshold to be considered a police matter, and may instead be advised to contact medical and/or social care as an alternative route to support (Inclusion London, 2023; Wilkin, 2024). Within the case of mate crime, Doherty (2017) suggests that safeguarding is more likely to be pursued by police due to perceptions of vulnerability. Thus, while crimes against disabled people should be reported to the criminal justice system, the presence of disability may mean that this access is denied. Indeed, Spaan and Kaal (2019) describe the experience of parents of a person with a learning disability who had been a victim of sexual violence. When the parents tried to report this to police, they were advised that the case did not belong in the criminal justice system due to the presence of learning disability (Spaan and Kaal, 2019).¹⁶ While it is important that safeguarding is provided to disabled victims of crime, this should be considered as complementary to criminal justice support and not an alternative. Effective multiagency working may strengthen the potential of criminal justice services to provide routes to both criminal justice and safeguarding processes, as will be explored in the final section.

Collaboration across Agencies

Across some of the studies, the importance of collaboration across agencies was highlighted as improving disabled people's access to and engagement with the criminal justice system (Gjecaj et al., 2024; Hollomotz et al., 2023; Inclusion London, 2023; Namatovu and Ineland, 2024; Spaan and Kaal, 2019). For example, Namatovu and Ineland (2024) suggest that collaboration between the police and women's shelters can help to facilitate more direct access to criminal justice support for disabled victims of interpersonal violence.¹⁷ In England and Wales, advocates can provide support for people with learning disabilities to stay engaged with the criminal justice system (Inclusion London, 2023). Similarly, in Iceland, Rights Protection Officers (RPOs) provide essential support for the protection of the rights of D/deaf and disabled people. In the context of disabled victims in Iceland, RPOs can support best communication practice among police officers, as well as ensure D/deaf and disabled victims

¹⁶ This study is from outside of the UK.

¹⁷ This study is from outside of the UK.

have access to procedural and reasonable adjustments while at court (Gjecaj et al., 2024).¹⁸ While external support organisations can offer essential support for disabled victims, (Spaan and Kaal (2019) caution that such organisations may not have the capacity to support all disabled victims while engaging with police and court systems.¹⁹ Thus, while this support can provide an important mechanism for support for disabled victims, resourcing may limit the extent to which this is available.

Research also suggests that police can play an important role in facilitating access to external support organisations for disabled victims of sexual violence such as healthcare services (Namatovu and Ineland, 2024) and sexual violence support services (Hollomotz et al., 2023). While appropriate referrals to victim support services can validate disabled victims' experiences and help them to feel believed, there is a lack of specialist sexual violence support services that can effectively meet the needs of disabled victims (Hollomotz et al., 2023).

Conclusion and Recommendations

This review has considered disabled people's experiences of accessing the criminal justice system as victims of crime. In support of the earlier findings from Murray et al., (2024), the review suggests that disabled people are disproportionately negatively impacted by their engagement with the criminal justice system, and are more likely to report dissatisfaction with how they are treated and their criminal justice outcomes. In this final section, some of these key findings are discussed and recommendations for practice and/or future research are suggested. These recommendations have also been informed following consultation with Disability Rights UK and Stay Safe East.

Training with Criminal Justice Professionals

Recommendation 1: Training and professional development

There is a need for more training with all professionals working across the criminal justice system about their role and responsibilities in meeting the needs of disabled victims. Such training and awareness building should be developed in collaboration with disabled people and disabled people's organisations. This engagement will help to ensure that it is appropriately focused on solutions that will enable criminal justice professionals to address disabling barriers and feel more confident in their ability to support disabled victims of crime.

Experiences of disabled people and perceptions of criminal justice professionals both recognise that a lack of training contributes to little confidence, awareness and understanding of disability among police officers and criminal justice professionals. This can create significant

¹⁸ This study is from outside of the UK.

¹⁹ This study is from outside of the UK.

barriers for disabled victims of crime when they do seek to access criminal justice support, particularly in relation to the provision of reasonable adjustments (Inclusion London, 2021). Indeed, research suggests that many criminal justice professionals lack a clear understanding of how to meet the communication needs of D/deaf and disabled victims of crime (Kuosmanen and Starke, 2015; Spaan and Kaal, 2019).²⁰ This includes use of language that is not accessible (Tyson, 2019), being provided important information in inaccessible formats and at inappropriate times (Hollomotz et al., 2023; Orchard, 2018; Spaan and Kaal, 2019), or not being provided with sufficient communication support, such as interpreters and intermediaries (Beckene et al., 2020; Hollomotz et al., 2023; Mastrocinque et al., 2017; Olsen and Kermit, 2015). As a result, many disabled victims of crime do not receive appropriate levels of support that will facilitate successful engagement with the criminal justice system.

Recommendation 2: Reasonable adjustments and flexibility

Reasonable adjustments must be more consistently identified and implemented for all disabled victims and this should be monitored annually across both policing and court processes. Meeting reasonable adjustments could be achieved by conducting short needs assessments with all disabled victims from the onset of their engagement with the criminal justice system. This could help to explore how to embed greater flexibility within the ways in which victims are expected to engage with criminal justice procedures, such as making a statement, would help to ensure that these systems do not disproportionately discriminate against disabled victims. Making such provisions are fundamental to ensuring disabled victims feel a sense of fairness in relation to how they are treated in addition to the criminal justice outcomes that they achieve.

Recommendation 3: Accessibility audits

Criminal justice agencies should consider a process of mapping disabled victims' journeys through the criminal justice system and carrying out accessibility audits at each stage of the process. Both mapping and accessibility audits will help to identify specific barriers at each stage of the process and enable agencies to consider solutions that are context-specific. This will help agencies to develop organisational strategies that will improve the criminal justice outcomes for disabled victims that are appropriate to their own specific context.

Meeting Reasonable Adjustments

Some of the barriers experienced by disabled victims are procedural and physical. Such barriers, such as lack of physical access to criminal justice spaces (Orchard, 2018), or the procedural requirements to provide a consistent and coherent statement to the police

²⁰ These studies are from outside of the UK.

(Kuosmanen and Starke, 2015; Spaan and Kaal, 2019; Williams and Jobe, 2025), can prevent access to criminal justice for disabled victims. These procedural barriers in particular can contribute to disabled victims not being believed and having their credibility questioned (McCulloch et al., 2021; Spaan and Kaal, 2019; Steele, 2017; Williams and Jobe, 2025). This can have detrimental impacts on whether disabled victims feel they have been treated fairly within the criminal justice system and to their likelihood of seeking criminal justice support in the future (Beckene et al., 2020).

Addressing Attitudinal Barriers among Police

Recommendation 4: Attitudinal change

Attitudinal barriers can contribute significantly to feelings of injustice among disabled victims. There is a need for cultural shifts in the ways in which disabled victims are perceived and subsequently treated by the police in addition to developing awareness of the unique types of crimes and incidents that disproportionately target disabled people.

The dismissal or minimising of crime against disabled people was another important theme across the literature. This research suggests that crimes against disabled people are likely to be dismissed or reduced to anti-social behaviour (Burch, 2020; Healy, 2018, 2020; Macdonald et al., 2025, 2023), or likely to be responded to poorly and slowly by police officers once reported (Koffer Miller et al., 2022; Tyson, 2019). Where disabled people do routinely report crimes against them to the police, research suggests that they may be perceived as nuisance callers (Inclusion London, 2021; McCulloch et al., 2021; McGowan and Elliott, 2019; Williams and Jobe, 2025), or seen to be accessing criminal justice support in error (Inclusion London, 2023; Wilkin, 2024). This is a significant area of concern given the wider literature that suggests that disabled people are more likely to be victims of repeat crimes that may begin as anti-social in nature and escalate to more 'serious' offences (Macdonald et al., 2023; McGowan and Elliott, 2019). The failure across the criminal justice system to recognise the impacts of such incidents and crimes can contribute to the widespread normalisation of violence against disabled people (Burch, 2020). On the contrary, disabled victims who feel that their reports have been believed and taken seriously by the police are more likely to feel a sense of justice and validation (Hollomotz et al., 2023; McCulloch et al., 2021; Orchard, 2018).

Working Collaboratively

Recommendation 5: Multi-agency working

Research demonstrates that collaborative work between criminal justice professionals and support services can facilitate better access to the criminal justice system and prevent some of the barriers identified throughout this review. However, this collaborative work is not consistent. There is a need to improve the ways in which criminal justice professionals, such as police officers, can work with support services to ensure timely access to the adjustments that are essential to improving disabled victims' criminal justice outcomes.

While much of this review has identified areas of poor practice that contribute to disabled people's negative experiences of criminal justice support, research has also supported the value of multiagency working between criminal justice agencies and relevant support services. Notably, access to Rights Protection Officers (RPOs) in Iceland for disabled victims can help to facilitate appropriate communication practices, timely access to reasonable adjustments, and greater levels of trust in the justice system (Gjecaj et al., 2024).²¹ In other countries, such external support may be offered by appropriate advocates or intermediaries. This recognition should provide a platform for developing more collaborative ways of bringing experts and professionals together with disabled people to consider the challenges and opportunities for improving experiences of the criminal justice system.

Evidence Gaps

Recommendation: Addressing gaps in research and practice

There is an opportunity for more research to be conducted with criminal justice professionals and disabled victims to address the noted evidence gaps. This work should focus upon identifying the types of support mechanisms that do support accessible ways of working together and sharing these with relevant practitioners and professionals. Collaborative research and practice should also consider more widely, the range of crimes that disabled victims encounter and the experiences of disabled victims at court.

There are some notable gaps in the evidence that has been reviewed for this report. The majority of the research reviewed focused upon experiences of disabled victims with the police. While this is likely to reflect that there is a lower chance of reports of crime against disabled people reaching court, more research is needed to better understand the experiences of disabled victims at court. There is also a disproportionate representation of literature

²¹ This study is from outside of the UK.

focused on certain types of crime: namely, hate crime and interpersonal violence such as sexual violence and domestic abuse. While a small proportion of the research did not specify a particular type of crime, or reported to explore a range of crime types, there is a need to explore disabled victims' experiences of reporting other crimes. Finally, a significant proportion of the literature focused on negative experiences within the criminal justice system. While it is essential that research continues to identify and raise awareness of the barriers experienced by disabled people, there is a need to develop greater awareness of what works well. Such work is solution-focused and will help to share examples of good practice with a focus upon how these can be implemented more widely.

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Appendix

Appendix 1 – High level summary of included literature and key findings, grouped by stage of the criminal justice system

Studies of victims' experiences of court systems						
Author(s) & date	Country	Crime Type(s)	Type of impairment	Sample size/population	Method	Key findings
Olsen and Kermit (2017)	Norway	Range of crimes	D/deaf	7 deaf people 7 criminal law professionals (judges, prosecutors, police officers and lawyers) 8 sign language interpreters	Semi-structured interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No access to formal interpreter when reporting to the police; victims have to communicate using other methods - Lack of interpreter can lead to poor quality first statement
Beckene, Forrester-Jones, and Murphy (2020)	UK	IPV*	Learning disability	4 women with intellectual impairments who had reported sexual abuse 4 carers	Interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Participants felt they were 'being caught out' by leading or inappropriate questioning, leading to trauma and anxiety - Judges' understanding of learning disability varied; juries' understanding of learning disability was poor - Victims and carers lacked understanding of police procedures and language used in court; desired more support with this - Need for greater psychological support and advocate in court, and greater support after case - Experiences resulted in feelings of injustice
Bryne, Brent, and Michael (2021)	Northern Ireland	Range of crimes	D/deaf	35 legal professionals (police, prison, solicitors, judiciary, barristers, tribunal members)	Focus groups and interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Legal professionals reported limited experience with Deaf people - Some reasonable adjustments include sign language interpreter standing in court, though practice with interpreters is inconsistent - Court reporting presents difficulties due to reliance on a text-based system that requires high levels of literacy - Availability of interpreters led cases to be delayed until interpreters available

*Intimate partner violence including sexual and domestic violence

Studies of victims' experiences of police and court systems						
Author(s) & date	Country	Crime Type(s)	Type of impairment	Sample size/population	Method	Key findings
Orchard (2018)	USA; England	IPV*	All impairments	7 disabled women reporting domestic violence to CJS	Interviews using narrative inquiry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Court system has little flexibility to accommodate adjustments, e.g. lack of help where courtroom was physically inaccessible - Reasonable adjustments not mentioned to some participants; for others some measures were allowed - For 'hidden' impairments, special measures were more difficult to navigate; some needs couldn't be addressed by standard special measures - Some victims were treated inappropriately by legal professionals, not recognised as a disabled person, or made out as unreliable due to memory issues. - Victims felt like they were on trial instead of the perpetrator; overall lack of support navigating CJS
Spaan and Kaal (2018)	Netherlands	Range of crimes	Learning disability	35 CJS professionals 10 experts on mild intellectual disabilities (including 1 person with mild intellectual disability)	Interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Expectation that victims with LD coherently tell their story can make reporting more difficult; may result in need for subsequent statements or case being dropped for lack of evidence - Barriers were experienced within CJS including standard written communication, time limits on responding to letters and following processes such as form filling or victim impact statements. - People with LD sometimes turned away when reporting sexual violence as perceived as not belonging in CJS; police record of prior encounters could lead to person being seen as incoherent - Professionals lack understanding of the needs of people with LD; leads to communication issues, unsuitable solutions and people with LD feeling disbelieved - External support organisations do not have enough capacity to provide adequate support
Dinisman and Moroz (2019)	England	Range of crimes	Mental health condition	14 victims with poor mental health 14 practitioners	Interviews (victims and practitioners) Secondary analysis of Crime Survey for	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Victims want to be taken seriously by CJS and to be given information clearly - Victims want to feel safe and relaxed when giving evidence in court, and to be able to access enhanced entitlements - Victims with mental health problems may not be identified

Studies of victims' experiences of police and court systems						
Author(s) & date	Country	Crime Type(s)	Type of impairment	Sample size/population	Method	Key findings
					England and Wales Workshop with service providers	until they get to court, limiting the support received - Provision of special measures is insufficient
Kuosmanen and Starke (2024)	Sweden	Range of crimes	Learning disability	21 professionals (working for police, public prosecutor's office, social services, and rehabilitation services) working with people with learning disability engaged in sex work	Individual, paired and group interviews	- Victims with LD are not perceived as credible witnesses; barriers within the reporting process around need for coherent and detailed oral narrative contribute to this - Alternatives to spoken narratives may be available when reporting crime, but not at court. - Lack of professional knowledge and awareness of LD means some communication changes are not implemented. - Advocates are important to support engagement of people with LD across CJS.
Murray, Welland and Story (2024)	England	Range of crimes	Not specified	3,048 individuals who had been a victim of crime since Jan 2020 (22% of which were disabled)	Online survey	- Disabled victims report higher levels of dissatisfaction with the police, and police not taking account of their needs. - Some disabled victims felt infantilised by police - Some disabled victims struggled to get police to make basic reasonable adjustments - Disabled victims were more likely to lack confidence in the CJS, (including in effectiveness and fairness of CJS); only 20% were confident that they could receive justice by reporting a crime - Disabled victims reported being less likely to report crime again than non-disabled
Gjecaj et al (2024)	Iceland	IPV*	All impairments	16 disabled women 15 legal professionals 5 experts	Semi structured interviews Document analysis of Icelandic legislation Field observations	- Rights Protection Officers (RPOs) offer support during police interactions and during court process - RPOs support police with best communication practice, accessible sensory environment and reasonable accommodations - RPOs support disabled person to request procedural and reasonable accommodations in court; can also help access other services - RPOs can advise lawyers, prosecutors and judges on communication methods and

Studies of victims' experiences of police and court systems						
Author(s) & date	Country	Crime Type(s)	Type of impairment	Sample size/population	Method	Key findings
						needs of the disabled person - Disabled women who worked with RPOs found support helpful and have high levels of trust; not all women knew about RPOs

*Intimate partner violence including sexual and domestic violence

Studies of victims' experiences of police systems						
Author(s) & date	Country	Crime Type(s)	Type of impairment	Sample size/population	Method	Key findings
Macdonald (2015)	England	Hate crime	Mental health condition; physical impairment; learning disability	78 disabled people who have reported hate crime (49 with learning difficulty, 23 with physical impairment and 6 with mental health conditions)	Analysis of routine data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - People with physical impairments are more likely to report hate crime to local city council; people with LD are more likely to report directly to police - Police are less likely to investigate a hate crime if the victim has LD than other impairments - People with LD are less likely to receive victim support; people with mental health problems are most likely to receive victim support
Mastrocinque et al (2015)	USA	IPV**	D/deaf	14 Deaf victims of IPV	Interviews (in ASL)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No access to formal interpreter when reporting to the police; victims have to communicate in writing using pen and paper - Deaf people adopt creative strategies to navigate CJS, such as setting up texting with police or asking family members to call the police
Richardson et al. (2016)	England	Hate crime	Autism**; learning disability	255 people with learning disability and their carers 24 people with learning disability 459 police officers and support staff	Postal survey (people with LD and carers) Semi-structured interview (people with LD) Survey (police officers and support staff)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Some found police were unsympathetic, unkind and ineffective; others reported police were understanding and tried to help - Majority of police reported having no training on working with people with LD/autism - Police did not have training on how disability may impact responses during questioning - Police confidence in detecting whether an incident is hate related was higher where they had prior experience working with people with LD/autism
Admire and Ramirez (2017)	USA	Range of crimes	D/deaf	60 Deaf asylum seekers	Secondary analysis of legal deposition transcripts Deaf asylum seekers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Some crimes against Deaf people within research took place in the USA; others took place in their home country. - Police were dismissive of crime against Deaf people - Failure of police to intervene normalises violence against Deaf people
Doherty (2017)	England	Mate crime***	All impairments	12 stakeholders	Interviews with stakeholders Survey of police forces Case study of police records	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mate crime is not well understood by people working in the CJS; understanding is inconsistent across forces - Assumption of 'friendship' can make it more difficult for police to recognise a crime has taken place - Police culture was recognised as a reason for lack of police action - Safeguarding processes are

Studies of victims' experiences of police systems						
Author(s) & date	Country	Crime Type(s)	Type of impairment	Sample size/population	Method	Key findings
						pursued instead of criminal justice processes
Steele (2017)	Australia	IPV*	Learning disability; mental health condition	Disabled women who are victims of sexual violence and also offenders	Case study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Women offenders who are then victims are constructed by police as dishonest, a drain on resources and a nuisance - 110 police contact events as a victim were recorded, but there was no evidence investigations being pursued or charges made - Case notes demonstrate police failure to recognise the victim; instead police to focus on lack of evidence and perceived lack of credibility - Victims perceived as less credible due to amount of past reports, particularly where these relate to mental health/associated behaviour perceived as attention seeking - Clear links between mental health and disbelief of reports; reports of sexual violence were dismissed and attributed to attention seeking behaviour
Healy (2018)	England	Hate crime	Chronic illness; learning disability; physical impairment; sensory impairment	83 disabled people (questionnaire) 48 disabled people (focus groups) 12 victims of disability hate crime 15 informants	Online questionnaire (disabled people) Focus groups (disabled people) Interviews (victims of disability hate crime and informants)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Victims who report receive unsuitable, insufficient, inappropriate and inadequate responses from police, creating secondary victimisation - Victims assume that police are to blame for unfavourable charging decisions, not CPS - Poor police experiences make disabled people think that police don't care, particularly multiple reports with lack of response - Call handler responses can be limited, failing to meet disabled people's needs and recognise distress - Confusion exists around recognising hate crime as anti-social behaviour; victims feel this ignores their perception and the impact of hate crime
McGowan and Elliott (2019)	Australia	Emotional abuse; Harassment; IPV*; Property stolen or damaged	Unspecified	5 disabled women who had experienced crimes perpetrated by neighbours and community members	Interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Police laughed at one victim when reporting sexual assault - One victim's case resulted in a conviction and positive experience with CJS - One victim stated they were perceived as a 'pain' and 'well known' by the police; police made undermining comments about the victim to hospital staff while she was

Studies of victims' experiences of police systems						
Author(s) & date	Country	Crime Type(s)	Type of impairment	Sample size/population	Method	Key findings
						<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - being treated - Police inaction and lack of concern or minimisation causes incidents to escalate - Victims felt they were cast as vulnerable and 'crazy' by police
Tyson (2019)	England	Hate crime	Learning disability	38 people with learning disability 10 police officers	Observations of policing and police officers Semi-structured interviews (police officers) Focus groups (people with LD)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Police recognise that they lack sufficient training on disability hate crime; there is a desire to do more to support victims - Disabled people perceive police as intimidating and not friendly - Police failing to act as expected when disabled victims do report which decreases trust - Barriers experienced include long waits at police, failure to use language people with LD understand and assumptions about capacity to report via 999 - Mixed levels of confidence among officers in engaging with victims of disability hate crime
Burch (2020)	England	Hate crime	Autism**; communication impairment; learning disability; mental health condition; physical impairment	71 disabled victims of hate crime	Interviews and workshops	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Some experiences a lack of police action with multiple reports of hate targeting the home being dismissed - Incidents were recorded as anti-social behaviour rather than disability hate crime - Police did not recognise trauma resulting from multiple incidents - Victims reported feeling not believed and not listened to when reporting sexual violence to the police - Victims who had tried to report to police had felt intimidated by officers
Healy (2020)	England	Hate crime	All impairments	12 disabled victims of hate crime	Narrative interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Police response to reporting repeated hostility and anti-social behaviour was poor - Victims felt their experiences were minimised by the police - Police suggested to victims that CPS would not pursue the case
McCulloch et al (2020)	Australia	IPV*	Learning disability; mental health condition; physical impairment; sensory impairment	36 disabled women who experienced and reported violence	Interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Some women recounted not being believed by police, being perceived as a nuisance by police, and not being listened to. - Where victims were listened to, this provided a sense of validation.
Wilkin (2020)	England	Hate crime	All impairments	56 witness and victims of disability hate crime on public	Interviews and focus groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Very few participants tried to report experiences to the police - Of participants who reported experiences to police, only 8% felt

Studies of victims' experiences of police systems						
Author(s) & date	Country	Crime Type(s)	Type of impairment	Sample size/population	Method	Key findings
				transport 14 public transport staff		satisfied with the response.
Holden and Conner (2021)	UK	Hate crime	Unspecified	Disabled victims of hate crime	Case studies (from Deaf and Disabled People's Organisations)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Disabled victims may wait longer to give their statement due to lack of police trained to meet communication needs - Police lack knowledge of how to work with disabled victims and make reasonable adjustments - DDPOs don't think that police believe disabled victims; police may be quick to dismiss incidents before investigating them further - Police don't understand the significance of experiencing a disability hate crime; these may be miscategorized as anti-social behaviour - Police officers can be unresponsive to follow up calls to check on progress of the report; may perceive repeat callers as wasting police time
Macdonald, Donovan and Clayton (2021)	England	Hate crime	Unspecified	50 disabled victims of hate crime	Analysis of case notes' from advocates meetings with clients	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There was a lack of response by police to repeated reports of hostility and anti-social behaviour - In some cases, hate incidents escalated after reporting
Miller et al (2021)	USA	Assault; Bullied; IPV*; Property stolen or damaged	Autism**	3902 autistic individuals/ caregivers of autistic individuals who had interacted with CJS	Survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There was a lack of police response to all crime types - Participants had mostly negative perceptions of police due to their own experiences - 8% of participants had positive feelings about the justice system due to previous interactions
Cazalis et al (2022)	France	IPV*	Autism**	225 autistic women	Questionnaire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Two thirds of women did not report their experiences of sexual violence - For those who reported sexual violence, 75% of cases did not lead to legal action - Nearly half of the women were not believed about their experience
Inclusion London (2022)	England	Harassment; hate crime; hate crime	Autism**; chronic illness; D/deaf; learning disability; mental health condition; physical impairment; sensory	Disabled victims of hate crime	Analysis of 79 case files relating to disability hate crime	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Police sometimes encouraged perpetrators to file counterclaims against victims - Police interviews did not take into account the victims' support needs

Studies of victims' experiences of police systems						
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			impairment			
Inclusion London (2023)	England	Harassment; hate crime; mate crime	Autism**; D/deaf; learning disability; mental health condition; physical impairment; sensory impairment	Disabled victims of hate crime	Analysis of 343 cases involving disability hate crime	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use of a one size fits all approach creates barriers for disabled victims - Victims experienced delays in providing a statement due to lack of access to officers trained in working with disabled victims - Victims had to fight for reasonable adjustments to be put in place - Victims were sometimes advised that reports do not meet the threshold to be considered a police matter - Advocates have an important role in pushing cases to progress
Hollomotz, Burch and Bashall (2023)	UK	IPV*	Autism**; communication impairment; D/deaf; learning disability; physical impairment; visual impairment	39 disabled victim-survivors of sexual violence	Semi-structured interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Disabled women and non-binary respondents experienced victim blaming when reporting to the police - Delays in being referred to an ISVA can make the process more isolating and can prevent disabled victims from engaging with CJS - Appropriate referrals from the police to victim support services can help to validate a victims experience and make them feel believed - Police sometimes make assumptions about capability if an individual is perceived by the police as high-functioning - Communication was sometimes poor; many disabled victims had no knowledge about progress of case but assumed it had been dropped, other were aware case was dropped and some withdrew from the criminal justice process
Namatovu and Ineland (2024)	Sweden	IPV*	D/deaf; mental health condition; physical impairment	11 disabled women with experience of IPV 28 IPV service providers	Interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Collaboration between police and women's shelters can facilitate access to CJS - Police can facilitate access to other services such as healthcare.
Powers and Hayes (2024)	USA	Assault; IPV*; Property stolen or damaged	D/deaf; learning disability; physical impairment; visual impairment	Disabled victims of crime	Secondary analysis of National Crime Victimization Surveys	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Over half of the incidents were not reported to the police. - Of those incidents which were reported, more were reported to the police by victims than by third-party reporting centres - Incidents involving victims with 'cognitive disabilities' were less likely to be reported - Deaf/blind victims constituted the highest percentage of incidents reported to the police (34%)

Studies of victims' experiences of police systems						
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						followed by people with physical disabilities (32%)
Walach and Petruželka (2024)	Czech Republic	Hate crime; range of crimes	Learning disability	335 NGOs and social service providers	Online survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Organisations focused on LD reported that people with LD report crime less frequently to the police - Organisations focused on LD reported a higher prevalence of experiences with violence and disablist hate crime
Wilkin (2024)	England	Hate crime	Autism**; learning disability; mental health condition; physical impairment	31 disabled people who had reported disability hate crime	Interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Participants reported not being believed by police when reporting disability - Participants reported issues with being able to provide evidence requested by police; police were unwilling to continue without this evidence - Police suggested that victims should access medical/social care instead of CJS - Police blamed victims for 'bringing hostility on to themselves' due to their own behaviour - Some victims made formal complaints about the police response; this did not lead to a charge
Macdonald Clayton and Donovan (2025)	England	Range of crimes	Autism**; mental health condition; physical impairment; sensory impairment	Disabled people who have experienced hate within and around their home	Analysis of 204 case notes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Police failed to act on multiple reports of incidents - Police cited a lack of evidence or evidence being dismissed as a reason for their lack of action - Incidents were misinterpreted as neighbourhood disputes by police; this led to a less urgent response - There was evidence of 'institutional neglect and disablist policing' in some cases; officers referring to a victim as 'thick' and 'stupid'
Williams and Jobe (2025)	England	IPV*	Autism**; learning disability	4 people with learning disability who reported sexual violence 14 professionals working with people with LD/autism going through the CJS	Semi-structured interviews Review of 4 case files	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - People with LDs felt they had been discounted and not believed by police and other professionals - Professionals recognised that people with LDs would not be seen as credible witnesses; cases were less likely to be investigated by CPS as a result - For people with LD, 'blunt' manner may reduce others perception of the emotional impact of incident; reinforces exclusionary assumptions about the correct response to trauma - Use of intermediaries was inconsistent; where available, the

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						intermediary could support the police to be more inclusive; where not, was felt that this would have helped communication - Police are bound to disclose third party material that may undermine prosecution; for people with LD/autism can be extensive materials, causing delays and increase likelihood that information is used to undermine victim

*Intimate partner violence including sexual and domestic violence

** Autism/autism spectrum disorder

*** Mate crime primarily targets people with learning disabilities and involves a process of 'befriending' to gain trust, often resulting in financial, physical, or sexual exploitation

