Written evidence submitted by Changing Faces

1. The UK’s disfigurement charity, Changing Faces is pleased to offer evidence to the Home Affairs Select Committee’s Inquiry on Hate Crime and its Violent Consequences.

2. We ask the Committee to consider very carefully the experiences of people with facial and body disfigurements who are vulnerable to hate crime and violence.

3. We have strong reservations, set out below, about how well the current system and prosecution works in practice.

Background

Who are people with disfigurements and what is their experience?

4. Changing Faces works with and for people with disfigurements from any cause. There are many causes for disfigurements some of which are present at birth but most are acquired during life. Disfigurement can affect anyone from any demographic group and at any time in life.

5. Although modern medicine and surgery is increasingly sophisticated, the reality is that it can rarely remove a disfigurement completely. And because the face is at the centre of every human being’s self-image and the social canvas on which they portray and share their personality and signal their moods and intentions, facial disfigurement can greatly affect a person’s self-worth and how others perceive them. Disfigurements to other parts of their body can also affect their self-image and how others react.

6. At least 1.3 million children, young people and adults in the UK are estimated to have significant disfigurements, including 569,000 with facial disfigurements, one in 111 in the population. They all have to live with a face or body that attracts intrusive attention and the stigma our culture associates with disfigurement. They report feeling self-conscious, isolated and friendless, facing teasing, ridicule and staring in public, low expectations in school, problems getting work, and stereotyping in the media because of the way they look.

7. We believe that children and adults with disfigurements are not treated fairly in Britain’s looks-obsessed culture. Their opportunities are restricted and their risk of low self-esteem and poor mental health is much higher than that of the general population.

8. How does the unfairness manifest itself in everyday life? According to our users and independent research, it comes in many forms:

9. **In public:** unfair treatment is apparent in many settings. People with disfigurements are much more vulnerable than others to be subject to intrusive questions, ridicule, staring, harassment and physical attack. A YouGov survey (‘Attitudes to Disability’, 16-20 October 2003) found that 85% of the British public thought that people with facial disfigurements were likely to be discriminated against. Result: many people avoid public situations and can become socially isolated and house-bound.

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10. **In the media:** people with unusual looks are rarely portrayed as ‘ordinary’ people on TV being instead either heroes, the subject of medical documentaries (often with stigmatising titles like ‘The Ugly Face of…’) or typecast as odd or villainous\(^2\). This perpetuates stereotyping and allows humour to be deemed acceptable when it is actually offensive. The lack of positive portrayals reinforces low expectations about people with disfigurements. *Result: people’s self-esteem and self-image can be very damaged and negative.*

11. **In commerce, films and retail:** disfigurements are still used as a lazy way of characterising villains and unpleasant people in retail offerings and the cinema. Recent examples include the ‘Glumps family’ in Moshi Monsters toys (the subject of an [*Early Day Motion in 2014*](http://www.thefirstday.org.uk/lawmaker.asp?id=9339)) and *The Lone Ranger* film with its accompanying Lego toy of ‘a ruthless outlaw whose terribly scarred face is a perfect reflection of the bottomless pit that passes for his soul’ – a description changed only after our intervention. *Result: people of all ages are vulnerable to out-dated stigma.*

12. **In school:** children are more likely to be bullied, subjected to name-calling and ostracised by their peers and teachers can under-estimate their potential. Despite our work in schools and with Ofsted, 90% of the children and young people who contact us say they have been bullied. Many schools still lack the expertise for preventing appearance-related bullying. *Result: under-achievement, unhappiness, isolation, self-exclusion and truanting; suicide and self-harm on occasion.*

13. **At work:** interview panels have been shown to discriminate against people who have unusual features\(^3\). A small survey conducted by Changing Faces in 2014 showed that 60% of unemployed respondents believed their appearance was the main reason they were out of work, whilst 50% felt colleagues treated them differently because of the way they looked and 30% experienced outright hostility and bullying. In addition, evidence from case study research suggests that many people who have disfigurements do not have the same opportunities in the workplace compared to people without disfigurements. At work and as consumers, there is also a greater chance that people will be harassed or poorly served: a survey by *Personnel Today* in 2007 found that more than eight out of 10 respondents in society believe it's acceptable to tease people with ginger hair, while more than 70% said that blonde hair, regional accents, baldness, dress sense and shortness were also fair game. Many companies know that their workforce does not reflect Britain’s diverse population and that staff need more sensitising to customers with unusual looks. *Result: unemployment, under-employment, low expectations and poor customer service.*

14. **Why does this happen?** Our analysis is that facial prejudice (which causes disfigurement discrimination) is deeply rooted in the public mind. In 2008, an [*independent study*](http://www.thehealingfoundation.org/thf2008/images08/media/WORDFullReport.pdf) of public attitudes commissioned by Changing Faces showed that whilst claiming not to treat people with facial disfigurements unfairly, nine out of 10 people found it very difficult to associate positive characteristics to them. They were seen as less attractive and could not expect as much from life, less likely to be successful and less easy to be with in social encounters.

15. Unwitting prejudice allows and legitimates negativity, unfairness and low expectations towards people with disfigurements in the media and many other settings. There is

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some evidence that unfamiliarity is at the heart of such prejudice. When people have undertaken the same public attitude test after exposure to the Changing Faces website, the extent of the bias was somewhat reduced.

16. The negative beliefs include but are not limited to low expectations in terms of intelligence, ambitions, intimate relationships and social skills and presumed depression and anxiety. There also appears to be a widespread but erroneous belief that employing someone with a disfigurement, especially in a customer- or client-facing role will make people feel uncomfortable and therefore be bad for business. Research shows that people who have a disfigurement and good social skills are viewed more positively than people with good social skills whose appearance is in the normal range.4

**Current Hate Crime Inquiry**

17. People with unusual faces and bodies have long reported being recipients of negative attitudes – ‘facial prejudices’ – such as low expectations and stereotyping, and less-than-welcoming behaviours such as staring, ridicule and ostracism including hate crime – from those they meet. Some observers and academics have described these as unwitting.

18. A study in 2008 by Cog Research found that people in general had real difficulty associating positive characteristics with images of people with facial disfigurements but easily associated negative ones with them. 9 out of 10 people had a negative attitude towards people with facial disfigurements, counter to what they said in a conventional survey in which they denied they were ever unfair towards a person with a facial disfigurement – people with disfigurements were deemed as being less attractive, less likely to succeed, less socially skilled and less likely to lead happy lives. The scale of the bias against people with disfigurements in the UK survey was stronger than in other similar surveys conducted in the USA on other issues such as race, sexuality, age and gender. Interestingly, the bias was the same irrespective of age, gender, socio-economic or educational status.

19. Changing Faces recognises that other ‘non-disfigured’ people and institutions also need to be made aware and challenged to reject the offensive, outdated ways with which disfigurement is (still) thought, talked, written and taught about and portrayed in order to dispel the fear and the stigma that surrounds looking ‘different’.

20. Please see below a couple of examples of our challenges to facial prejudice in the public domain:

21. We successfully persuaded the BBC that comments made by Jeremy Clarkson that ridiculed people whose faces looked like Joseph Merrick, known as the Elephant Man, were unacceptable. He suggested that such people were ones whom he’d rather not meet at a party or anywhere else. The BBC Trust found the programme had gone beyond the BBC’s Editorial Guidelines and issued a formal apology, a warning bell to other programme makers.

22. We successfully challenged Lego to change the way it described the recent Lone Ranger film’s villain, Butch Cavendish, as “a ruthless outlaw whose terribly scarred face is a perfection reflection of the bottomless pit that passes for his soul”. Lego

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recognised that it was his actions not his face that made him a villain and replaced the description speedily.

23. Facial prejudice comes in many subtle forms. Sometimes it is in the form of low expectations such as when a teacher discourages a young person with a disfigurement from taking up acting as a career or suggests that a front-facing role in the media might not be appropriate. More usually, facial prejudice is demoralising rather than malicious and often promotes worn-out stereotyping such as linking people with scars to baddies and evil villains.

24. Instances of the use of disfigurement in the cinema, for example, range from the lightly-prejudicial make-up used to cast Bond villains like Blofeld to the deliberate use of names like Scar in the Lion King and the characterising of nasty villains with scarring such as in Nightmare on Elm Street (with Freddie Kruger) and Harvey Two-Face in the Batman movies.

25. Whether these instances can be strictly said to be ‘incitements to hate crime’ as it is currently understood is debatable. What cannot be disputed however is how very distressed, isolated and depressed people can become if they are on the receiving end of name-calling, ridicule and harassment – whether in the school playground, at work or in public places.

26. In 2013 Changing Faces ran a campaign called ‘Don’t call me Freakface’, aimed at persuading Mind Candy, the creators of the Moshi Monsters online game played by 70m children worldwide, to (a) stop using names like ‘Freakface’ which are common terms of abuse towards children with disfigurements and (b) stop using scars, spots and missing eyes to emphasize the evil nature of their bad characters – such a “a one-eyed blob of badness”.

27. Our view was that this company was – unwittingly perhaps – encouraging facial prejudices amongst young children and inciting them to ridicule children with unusual faces they may meet. Lucas Hayward, 17, said, “I was born with frontal-nasal craniofacial dysplasia. The day I started primary school, the name-calling started. ‘Pig nose, flat nose, elephant man and ugly’. It was relentless. The boys would punch me and stand on my head just because of the way I looked. Every kid I know is into Moshi Monsters and that’s why I’m supporting Changing Faces’ ‘Don’t call me Freakface’ campaign. These names are terms of abuse but children are getting the message from Moshi Monsters that it is ok to call someone this if they have scars, spots or a missing eye. Believe me, it’s not ok.”

28. At the charity we received anecdotes of children being incited to acts of hostility towards others both because the names chosen give children ammunition with which to ridicule and bully.

29. Please see the stories on the petition (ow.ly/r1qZm) and “My son has faced despicable acts of abusive behaviour from ignorant people including being spat on, physically assaulted and parodied. He has a slight facial palsy on one side. He should be able to live his life without his physical differences being seen as something negative. I’m appalled by Mind Candy’s ignorant and discriminatory behaviour. This would not be allowed if they were portraying an ethnic, cultural or racial stereotype.”

“My son has Sturge Weber Syndrome and has a large port wine stain birthmark on one half of his face, because of this he quite often gets called names in particular characters in films that have facial disfigurements i.e., Harvey Twoface from Batman.
Having popular characters called horrible names like freak face is disgraceful and hurtful to people that live everyday with a facial disfigurement."

“My 18mth old beautiful daughter has a dark red port wine stain birthmark covering three quarters of her face - this is something she has to live with for the rest of her life - she didn’t choose to be with this difference and I hope she will grow up a strong confident young woman but negative images in the media and toys called freakface will not help children like my little girl with the challenges they have to face at school making friends and coping with bullying. You are giving bullies ideas - you are putting words into their mouths and giving them the message that it is ok to use names like freakface to describe someone who has scars or other facial differences.”

30. These insinuations do nothing to enable children with scarred skin (after burns, for example) or only one eye (after cancer, for example) to be included and respected by their peers. They are worn-out stereotypes that your company should realise are totally unacceptable in the 21st Century… even if they were used in the past.

31. Prosecution of these types of crime to our knowledge have to date been very limited and conversations with the Met confirm this. However two such examples include the following:

32. The woman who was taunted in the pub - According to a Daily Mail article (19.3.11): “A drunken mother who attacked a disfigured girl in a bar in an 'appalling' disability hate crime sobbed as she was jailed yesterday. On a night out in Oldham, Rachel Rooney taunted and attacked 23-year-old Chantelle Richardson, who rarely leaves the house because of her deformity and could die if struck. Miss Richardson's condition severely disfigures her face leaving her vulnerable to stroke, or worse if hit on the nose, and she is required to wear a balloon-like device under her skin.” Read more: http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1367482/Drunk-mother-jailed-attacked-disfigured-woman-Oldham-pub.html#ixzz2r1wtAA2w

33. The Worker scarred by cancer wins £7k payout after insult from colleague - “A SECURITY guard whose face has been scarred for life by skin cancer has won a £7,000 payout after being dubbed "Silicon Valley" by a work colleague. Keith Deaville, above, suffered daily taunts from a work-mate at Etruria's Royal Mail call centre over a plastic mask he wore following surgery.” Read more http://bit.ly/qYHXD6

34. Many do not report harassment is because they do not recognise themselves as falling into the category of ‘disabled’, it is concerning that the definition of a disabled person seems to exclude people with disfigurements.

35. Furthermore agencies including enforcement and government are often not aware themselves that disfigurement is covered.

36. The lack of specific reference to disfigurement in data collection systems prevents the recognition of this recognised in recent conversations held by Changing Faces with the Government Equalities Office and the Equality and Human Rights Commission.

37. We wish the legislation to be strengthened, as a result of what people experience, and prosecutions to be stepped up so that aggravation on the basis of hostility, and stirring up hatred on grounds of disability is strongly and reasonably covered.

38. Changing Faces also urges that, for the purposes of the criminal legislation that the Homes Affairs Select Committee is considering, the definition of disability should be even broader than that under the Equality Act 2010. This would then ensure that
people with disfigurements are properly protected from the risk of being ridiculed and harassed because of the way they look.

Summary

1. We believe that it is clear that people with disfigurements are vulnerable to hate crime and violence and that the current system and prosecution is not protecting them satisfactorily. Individuals and agencies’ lack of knowledge about how their rights are protected. People who have been victims of crime do not report. In addition there is ineffective implementation by inspectorate and ombudsman

2. This is clearly inadequate leading to many people with disfigurements in the UK being exposed to unacceptable and harmful behaviour.

Recommendations

3. Changing Faces proposes the following:

   a) People with disfigurements need to be understood as being vulnerable to hate crime.
   b) This would enable individuals to seek legal protection and redress.
   c) Law enforcers, inspectorate and ombudsman need to be appropriately aware to log and inspect potential hate crimes
   d) Funding should be allocated to develop and deliver a multi-agency awareness campaign to inform people of their rights.
   e) Training packages should be developed for criminal justice system workers and frontline staff in community-based organisations to raise awareness of harassment on the basis of visible difference.
   f) Specific data on disfigurement should be collected to assist with understanding and representing this marginalised vulnerable community.

Changing Faces would be pleased to present oral evidence should this be helpful to the Select Committee. A number of champions and former clients, all with lived experience of disfigurement, would also be willing to contribute to the Inquiry.

For further information, please contact Henrietta Spalding, Head of Advocacy, Changing Faces