

'They just started kicking me'

A recent report found that homeless people are 13 times more likely to be the victims of violent crimes than the general public.

More than half interviewed in a survey said they had suffered a violent attack from a member of the public.

Ray Wilson, 45, has been homeless for 10 years, and has suffered violence more than once.

One attack happened while he was drifting off in his sleeping bag, he said.

"These three lads had gathered round and they had started kicking me.

"I was lying down in my sleeping bag and I was the perfect target. They just saw it as a prank. They were lads and they were all quite drunk.

" Then he suddenly punched me. He has a ring on one of his fingers and he cut me close to my left eye. There was blood everywhere "

Ray Wilson

Rough sleeper and crime victim "They all wore boots and no doubt if they wanted me they could have done some serious damage.

"I had drifted off, but once you feel someone's boot you wake up pretty quickly. But they just kicked me for several minutes and then went off."

Mr Wilson chose sleeping rough as a lifestyle, saying he felt having a job or owning a home was pointless.

'Leech'

On another occasion, he says, he was sitting down going through his rucksack, when a man came along and started yelling insults.

Mr Wilson said: "He just started calling me a leech on society and saying 'why didn't I get a real job?'"

"Then he suddenly punched me. He has a ring on one of his fingers and he cut me close to my left eye. There was blood everywhere."

Mr Wilson treated himself and did not report the attack to police. He said: "There is no point. If the police know that you are a rough sleeper they think you have asked for it."

So why are the homeless so much more likely to suffer violence?

Professor Paul Rock, co-author of the report which uncovered the statistics, says part of it is simply that the homeless are seen as "legitimate targets", and people of not much worth.

" People who are spoiling for a fight, abuse them for fun "

Professor Paul Rock

He said: "They don't have the elementary physical protection that the rest of us have, such as four walls. They are exposed and vulnerable.

"They also tend to be out in the open, in city centres when binge drinkers are out. The homeless are regarded as being of no worth at all and so people who have got very drunk pick on them."

He added: "The homeless are seen as legitimate targets because they are not regarded as people of any great account. People who are spoiling for a fight abuse them for fun."

Mr Elie Godsi, consultant clinical psychologist, said Britain's competitive society had made people more aggressive and less tolerant.

'Fearful'

He said there was a "hierarchy of violence" which worked its way down to the least vulnerable in society.

He added: "It is all part of the spin culture, where you just judge people on their appearance rather than the substance.

"You see a bum lying in a doorway in his sleeping bag. You don't think about the background, the reason why they are there."

And it seems the psychological impact of the violence may linger longer than the physical scars for the homeless victims.

Professor Rock added: "Our study revealed them as a group of people who were unusually fearful."

Story from BBC NEWS:

http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/uk_news/4102833.stm