

ACTIVITY 1:

Open the interactive exercise at www.irr.org.uk/black_history_resource/Community_Safety.

Supplementary question:

'Community safety' is a phrase that is often used by agencies like the police, and local authorities, but what does it mean? In pairs discuss what you think the words 'community' and 'safety' mean and write a definition. Then think about how they combine. Are there any tensions between 'community' and 'safety'? What do you think 'community safety' should mean? Find out what your local authority and local police force's websites say about 'community safety' – do their ideas match up with what you think 'community safety' should be?

ACTIVITY 2:

➔ Document 1: 'Victims of racial attack and injustice' by The Steering Committee of Asian Organisations Against Racism (1978)

1. What did the Virk brothers do when they were attacked?
2. In what other ways could they have reacted?
3. Do people have the right to use violence to defend themselves? Divide into pairs and write a list of when you think it would be okay to defend yourself with violence and when it would not.
4. As a group, discuss how this 'self-defence' is different from being part of a gang or being a 'vigilante'?
5. The organisation that wrote Document 1 believed the Virk Brothers had been unfairly treated a number of times. Write down three ways in which you think they might have been treated unfairly and who by.

VICTIMS OF RACIAL ATTACK AND INJUSTICE



AT STAKE - THE RIGHT OF ASIAN PEOPLE TO DEFEND THEMSELVES

On 19 July 1978, Judge Michael Argyle of the Old Bailey sentenced:
JOGINDER SINGH VIRK (24) to 7 years imprisonment;
MOHINDER SINGH VIRK (27) to 3 years;
BALVINDER SINGH VIRK (21) to 2 years;
SUKHVINDER SINGH VIRK (18: a student) to 3 months.

THEIR CRIME?

- a) Not to tolerate racial abuses, insults and physical assaults in front of their house by the racist white youths
- b) To fight back in self-defence
- c) To seek police protection
- d) And above all to have a black skin

WHAT HAPPENED?

* They were repairing their car in front of their home when a gang of 5 white youths shouted racial abuses and attacked them. They had to defend themselves. They called the police for their protection.

* The police let the attackers go free.

* The defenders were arrested, charged with causing grievous bodily harm and they were refused bail for two days.

* They were treated as confirmed criminals and made to report at the police station every day for 18 months. Their passports were also taken.

* A student of 16, charged only with threatening behaviour to a policeman's witness, was not spared from reporting daily.

* In the racial fight no Asians were called as witnesses despite the fact that some people knew something about the incident.

The dreadful agony of the Virks does not end with the police.

* The Judge found them guilty on the evidence of police witnesses.

* He did not allow the defence counsel to develop the argument that the whole basis of the fight was racial hatred on the part of the white youths.

* He gave sentences surpassing the limits advised by the Advisory Council to the Home Secretary on the Penal Code.

* No Asians were included on the jury.

* The atmosphere was kept hostile to the Virks throughout the trial.

WHY ARE WE CONCERNED?

Because:

a) The old maxim that an Englishman's home is his castle is no longer true as far as the Asians are concerned.

b) The police and the courts seem to be telling the Asian community that it is just normal for the white racists to shout racial abuses at them and that they must not feel offended. (Racist Kingsley Read was praised by Judge McKinnon for doing exactly that, Relf, Lewes, Coles, Jones cases prove the same thing).

c) If Asians are injured or murdered, the assailants either are declared to be untraceable or the charges dropped against them for lack of so-called sufficient evidence.

d) Even if the culprits are arrested, tried and found guilty of conspiring, causing grievous bodily harm or brutally murdering, very mild sentences are given to them: e.g. the murderers of Gurdip Singh Chagar - Southall in 1976 - jailed for only three years; and Kevin Harrison who pleaded guilty to wounding Mr. Ranger (coloured) with intent to cause grievous bodily harm, without any provocation, was given 6 months jail sentence suspended for 2 years (Stafford Crown Court, July 1978).

e) Organised attacks on Asians' life and property are treated as unnoticeable incidents and virtually no arrests are made (attacks on Asians of Brick Lane and Asian workers of a Brewery in Bow).

WHAT WE ASK FOR

1. Release the Virks (they only exercised their freedom to defend themselves).
2. Racist attackers must be apprehended and punished severely in all cases.
3. The true spirit of the Race Relations Act must be shown in action.
4. The attitudes of the police and the courts must be changed by training their officers how to function in a multi-racial and multi-cultural society.
5. Racist organisations, individuals and literature to be given no legal protection.
6. Stop unscrupulous politicians from making racist speeches.
7. Stop making immigration and race an election issue.
8. Abolish unemployment and increase public services.

Issued by: The Steering Committee of Asian Organisations Against Racism

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES:

1. The document was created by an Asian committee that believed the Virk Brothers were attacked and sent to prison because they were Asian. Use the internet to find out who might be the victims of 'hate crimes' in our society. Discuss the range of groups who might be victimised and write down why you think those groups might be picked on. The following websites might help you:
Independent Race and Refugee News (www.irr.org.uk)
Home Office (www.homeoffice.gov.uk/crime-victims/reducing-crime/hate-crime/).
2. Imagine you are one of the Virk brothers. Write a letter to your local Member of Parliament from prison telling him/her about your case and suggesting how he/she could intervene to help you.
3. Who keeps us safe, in our homes, our schools, our communities and in our countries? How do they do it? Divide into small groups and fill in the table on the next page. A couple of ideas have already been filled in to help you get started.

STRUGGLES FOR JUSTICE: COMMUNITY SAFETY

| Who keeps us safe and how do they do it? | Who? | How? |
|--|-----------|--|
| Family | Parent(s) | |
| School | | |
| Community | | |
| Country | | Laws against murder and violent attack |

