

# *An Acceptable Prejudice?*

Homophobic Violence and  
Harassment in Northern Ireland

Neil Jarman and Alex Tennant

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INSTITUTE for CONFLICT RESEARCH

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Institute for Conflict Research  
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## **Executive Summary**

The issue of homophobic harassment and violence has come to the fore over the past year with the police seeking assistance from within the gay community in relation to at least two murders in Belfast. But the issue is a much more widespread and varied subject than extremely violent assault. Homophobic harassment involves attacks on lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) men and women as well as on people perceived to be lesbian, gay, bisexual or simply different. It includes diverse forms of assault, verbal abuse and bullying. It takes place in people's homes, in the street, in the workplace, in schools and in social settings. Homophobic harassment can have a pernicious effect on the victim's sense of self, their confidence and their health.

Homophobic harassment has also been described as 'the last acceptable prejudice'.

The research programme on homophobic harassment and violence is part of a larger project on hate crime, which also includes studies of racist and sectarian harassment. The research has been funded by the Equality Directorate Research Branch of the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister.

The research project included four main elements: (i) a review of previous research on homophobic harassment in England, Scotland, Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland; (ii) an analysis of all homophobic incidents recorded by the PSNI from July 2000 to December 2002; (iii) a survey of the lesbian, gay and bisexual communities in Northern Ireland to determine their experiences of homophobic harassment and violence and (iv) a series of interviews with individuals working with LGB organisations and statutory agencies.

The literature review revealed that homophobic harassment was a significant problem throughout Britain and Ireland, but there had been little research on this specific issue among the lesbian, gay and bisexual population of Northern Ireland.

### **Police Data**

The PSNI have been recording data on homophobic incidents since July 2000. Over the past two and a half years they have recorded 120

incidents. However, after recording 42 incidents in the first 6 months, the figures declined in each of the following two years. 90% of the incidents were reported by men and 10% by women.

Verbal abuse occurred in 69% of cases recorded by the police, while 45% involved some form of physical assault. Many cases involved a combination of forms of abuse. In 33% of cases the victim reported that they had had previous experience of homophobic harassment.

Over half of all incidents (52%) have been recorded in Belfast, while a further 16% have been recorded in Derry Londonderry. Most incidents (68%) occurred in the street while 44% occurred in or near the victim's home. In 63% of the cases the perpetrator was a young male, in 58% of cases the perpetrator was described as an adult or a youth and in 64% of cases there was more than one perpetrator.

## **Survey**

The survey received responses from 186 people from all areas of Northern Ireland, 67% of these were male and 33% were female. The replies indicated that over 40% of respondents had no knowledge of the main organisations representing the lesbian, gay and bisexual population. This indicates that the survey was successful in accessing people outside the most active and engaged sections of the LGB community.

The research revealed that harassment and violence was a serious problem with 82% having experience of harassment and 55% having been subjected to homophobic violence. Males were more likely to have suffered both harassment and violence than females (85%-76% in the case of harassment and 61%-42% in the case of violence).

The percentage of people who had experienced violence and harassment was higher than indicated by comparable surveys in Great Britain and Ireland. Furthermore, many people reported repeated experiences of both harassment and violence.

The most common form of harassment was verbal abuse. This had been experienced by 71% of respondents. Other common experiences included being followed on foot (27%), subjected to graffiti (19%) and offensive phone calls (18%).

The most common forms of violence experienced were being the target of a missile (35%), subjected to assault (30%) or attempted assault (29%) and being spat at (18%).

The most common place to experience harassment and violence was in the street, but many people were also harassed outside or leaving an LGB social club or bar and in or near their home. The perpetrators were stereotypically young males in their late teens and twenties and in over 80% of cases the perpetrator was acting in consort with other young males.

Only 42% of those who experienced homophobic harassment had reported an incident to the police. A number of reasons were given to explain the reluctance to report such incidents. These included a belief that the police would not or could not help in any way, that the incident was too trivial, that the police were homophobic themselves or because people were reluctant to reveal their sexual orientation.

Homophobic harassment generated a wide range of emotions including fear, anger and depression. Many people felt unsafe in public places as a result, only 27% said they felt safe on the street at night and 48% said they did not feel safe in a non-LGB bar.

Many people also adopted strategies to avoid being targeted for harassment, these included: avoiding holding hands in public (69%), avoiding leaving an LGB venue alone (44%) and avoiding appearing like a lesbian, gay or bisexual (36%).

## **Interviews**

The interviews covered many of the issues raised by the police data and by the survey but they also introduced a number of other topics. These included:

- a sense that there was a growing number of homophobic incidents in which a serious level of violence were being used;
- a level of fatalism that harassment was a fact of life for LGB people;
- an ongoing concern about police activity in relation to cottaging and cruising, primarily in areas outside of Belfast and Derry Londonderry;
- a need to improve recognition of homophobia and LGB issues within the police service;
- a need to address homophobic bullying in schools;
- and recognition of the need for a wider campaign to raise awareness of issues related to homophobia and other issues related to sexual orientation.

## **Recommendations**

The report makes a number of recommendations for further action. These include:

- 1 There should be a general campaign to raise awareness around themes of homophobia and homophobic violence. This might include the creation of a Task Force to develop a wider range of policy recommendations on LGB issues.
- 2 The NIO has recently consulted on the introduction of legislation in relation to racist and sectarian harassment. We recommend that they should include homophobic harassment as a category within any hate crime legislation.
- 3 The PSNI should extend the current systems for reporting and recording homophobic incidents and improve the amount of information on homophobic incidents. We recommend that they produce an annual review of homophobic harassment as part of a wider review of hate crime.
- 4 There is a need for an increased awareness of homophobia among police officers, local authorities and others within the statutory sector. This should take the form of training programmes that need to be developed in consultation and conjunction with LGB organisations
- 5 The issue of homophobic bullying should be raised within and through the education system. This should include schools, F & HE colleges and within institutions providing teacher training. Schools should also be required to record cases of homophobic bullying.
- 6 The LGB groups should work in conjunction with relevant bodies to develop a strategy to raise awareness of personal safety issues within the LGB communities.
- 7 There is a need for increased resourcing for LGB organisations and LGB issues if attempts to counter homophobia are to have any impact.

# 1. Introduction

There have been some dramatic changes within the lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) population in Northern Ireland in recent years and particularly over the period of the peace process. LGB people are now much more visible, there is a growing sense of community and of diversity within that community, there are more LGB clubs, bars and LGB-friendly social venues, there are annual Pride parades and festivals in Belfast and Derry Londonderry, and there are a growing number of organisations representing and supporting LGB individuals. This growing visibility is also reflected in the presence of a growing body of literature documenting the experiences of the LGB communities and the attempts to define distinct and separate identities and to carve out distinctive physical, social and sexual spaces within the wider changing and developing political context (Conrad 1999; Kitchin 2002; Kitchin and Lysaght 2002, 2003; Quinn 2000).

As the public presence and visibility has grown larger so too has the public diversity of the LGB identities, with a wider range of voices being heard and a broader range of issues increasingly demand attention. This is also beginning to be reflected in writings and publications which have highlighted social, legal and other issues of social concern to the communities (Birkett 1998, NIHRC 2001; Quierly 2002; Rainbow Project 1999; Toner and McIlrath 2000; White 1998).

The higher profile of LGB people largely relates to those living in the two main cities, and there is still little in the way of a public profile for LGB people outside of Belfast and Derry Londonderry, although there are emergent support networks in places such as Strabane and Dundalk. However, LGB people living in rural areas can feel particularly isolated and vulnerable, with few local facilities offering anything in the way of support, advice or resources. Although some anecdotal evidence suggests there is some degree of greater acceptance and toleration of openly out people in some smaller towns, many people living in rural areas are forced to live socially and sexually discreet lives and to travel to Belfast, Derry Londonderry or even Dublin and further afield to publicly engage with the wider LGB communities.

*I feel very strongly that many schools and educational organisations are inherently homophobic. I am very sceptical of the police's attitude towards homophobic attacks. This comes from my own knowledge as I have family members who are members of the PSNI. Northern Ireland is very conservative. Homophobia is seen as a permissible prejudice in Northern Ireland and is not taken seriously. Large numbers of gay and lesbian people emigrate to other countries because of the high level of homophobia in this country (Male 21-30, BT63).*

The increasing public presence has brought with it a greater vulnerability to attacks and other expressions of hostility. The police have been recording incidents of homophobic harassment since July 2000 and although they have made attempts to build constructive and sympathetic working relationships with the LGB organisations many people are still reluctant to report cases of assault and abuse to them. Anecdotal evidence within the communities reveals that homophobic harassment is a significant problem for many people, while the persistence of such attacks was highlighted by media coverage of the murders in Belfast of Ian Flanagan in September 2002 and Aaron McCauley in December 2002.

One of the negative impacts of the increased visibility of LGB people has been that it has made them easier to target by groups and individuals who regard 'queer bashing' as acceptable behaviour against what they might regard as a 'pariah community'. This attitude is made more problematic in part because the higher profile of LGB population and issues has not been matched by a greater level of institutional and legal support or by more demonstrative public condemnation of such attacks.

Homophobia and discrimination against LGB people is still regarded as 'normal' and justifiable by many in Northern Ireland, for many it is still a 'respectable and acceptable prejudice'. There are still laws and regulations that treat LGB people in Northern Ireland differently from heterosexual people and from LGB people in the rest of the United Kingdom (NIHRC 2001). Section 75 (1) of the Northern Ireland Act is important because it requires public authorities to have due regard to promote equality of opportunity between persons of different sexual orientation and is thus an advance on the situation in the rest of the United Kingdom. However Section 75 (2) does not require them to promote good relations among people of different sexual orientation. Furthermore, although the Equality Commission does not yet have significant responsibility for issues related to sexual orientation, the EU Framework Convention, which comes into force in December 2003

includes sexual orientation as a ground for non-discrimination in employment. The legal distinctions added to personal experiences mean that many assert that homophobia is still effectively tolerated and all too rarely challenged within many workplaces, schools and other institutional settings.

*While by no means a 'saved Christian' – I do attend my local church on an infrequent basis. I feel angry – or should I say disappointed maybe – by the apparent homophobia dressed up as criticism/condemnation. Combating the insidious homophobia in the churches in NI would be a very good start! (Male 51-60, BT52).*

The perceived widespread homophobia throughout Northern Irish society means that it is still difficult for many people to come out as lesbian, gay and bisexual, while for those who do it can create problems among erstwhile friends, work colleagues and even family members. A number of people recounted the hostility they received from close family members when they came out and in some cases this has led to people being physically attacked and ostracised from their family and forced to leave the family home.

*Something has to be done about educating young adults about gay people and how it's not their choice what their sexuality is. More awareness for public would be great (Female 16-20, BT48).*

This widespread hostility and the lack of understanding of the difficulties caused by homophobia can and does create problems of physical and mental health, lack of self-confidence, social isolation, alcohol and drug abuse, and this in turn can lead to attempts at self-harm, suicide and engaging in high risk activities (Rainbow Project 1999; Toner and McIlrath 2000; White 1998). This in turn emphasises the increasing need for a more diverse range of support agencies and services and has also fed the need for a variety of forms of safe spaces - whether these be in private houses, clubs and bars or other forms of social centres - where people can be open and supported in their identity.

There is thus something of a growing polarisation in relation to LGB people, communities, organisations and issues in Northern Ireland. On one hand there are growing visible public communities with an emerging commercial and voluntary infrastructure to support their social and leisure needs. On the other hand there is a perceived increase in hostility and violence against LGB individuals and organisations, of continued tolerance of such hostility and of more generalised

discrimination in the workplace, in schools and colleges and in some social environments. Both such developments have led to a growing need for stronger institutional action to respond to the still relatively unchallenged levels of homophobia.

This report is part of a wider research project supported by the Equality Directorate Research Branch at the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister looking at forms of hate crime or 'representative violence' in Northern Ireland. By representative violence we mean attacks on, or harassment of, people simply because they are different or are perceived to be different. Within this category the most visible and widely reported forms of hate crime are racist, homophobic and sectarian attacks. Of these three categories of violence, homophobic hostility is the least well documented and analysed. This report goes some way to redressing this imbalance by focusing on the scale, form and nature of homophobic harassment in Northern Ireland.

The report draws upon four primary sources of information in documenting this issue. The first source of information is a review of the main surveys of homophobic harassment carried out in England, Scotland and Ireland in recent years and a review of experiences of harassment drawn from research on the LGB population in Northern Ireland. These results are summarised in Section 2. The second source is information on homophobic incidents that have been recorded by the police since they began differentiating them from other crimes and incidents in July 2000. Section 3 offers a detailed analysis of 120 incidents from across Northern Ireland recorded between July 2000 and December 2002.

The third body of data is drawn from the findings of a survey of homophobic harassment within the LGB communities carried out between October 2002 and January 2003. This survey received 186 responses, which although small compared with many surveys of a general nature, is of a reasonable size in comparison with other attempts to survey the LGB communities. Section 4 provides a review of the methodology employed in designing and developing the questionnaire, while Section 5 presents an analysis of the results. Section 6 is based upon a series of interviews with members of the LGB communities, people working with LGB organisations in Belfast and Derry Londonderry and with police officers and others working with the LGB organisations. This section summarises the main issues raised in these interviews and discussions.

## 2. Homophobic Harassment: An Overview

Physical and verbal attacks on individuals because they are, or are perceived to be gay, lesbian or bisexual has gradually come to be recognised as a serious and significant problem for members of the LGB communities, and at the same time homophobia has become acknowledged as a serious problem within society. Much of this recognition has been due to the work done within the LGB communities in researching and documenting the issue of verbal and physical abuse and other forms of harassment, prejudice and discrimination.

The first part of this section reviews a number of recent studies of homophobic harassment and violence in England and Scotland. It summarises the scale and frequency of the harassment and highlights some of the key issues in relation to location or age differentials. It also indicates the percentage of people who have been prepared to report such incidents to the police and reviews some of the reasons that have been given to explain the reluctance to make reports. This is followed by a review of the research in Northern Ireland, which provides some indications of the scale and nature of homophobic harassment here.

### Research in England and Scotland

The most extensive attempt to quantify the experience of homophobic violence, harassment and abuse was carried out by Stonewall in 1996 (Mason and Palmer 1996). This survey of 4,216 lesbian, gay and bisexual men and women throughout the United Kingdom revealed that 32% of those responding had experienced homophobic violence in the last 5 years, with young people, under 18, being the most vulnerable. The research indicated that homophobic attacks were liable to occur in a wide variety of locations: 27% of attacks occurred in the street, 21% in or near a club, 15% at or near home, 13% in or near a public toilet, 8% at work, school or college, 4% on public transport and 12% elsewhere.

The published report, entitled *Queer Bashing*, looked in some detail at the experiences of young people because they 'stood out as particularly vulnerable to homophobic violence and harassment' (p54). It noted that 48% had experienced a violent attack (as opposed to 32% overall) and 61% of young people reported that they had also been harassed (as opposed to 32% overall). Furthermore, 39% of the attacks involved four or more attackers (as opposed to 9% overall). The research also revealed

that 40% of violent incidents against the under 18s took place at school, and in 50% of cases the perpetrators were fellow students. There was thus both a need to recognise the scale and significance of homophobic bullying and a need to develop an anti-bullying strategy that focused specifically on homophobia.

The Stonewall survey revealed that only 31% of those who had been attacked had reported their experiences to the police, with those who had suffered higher levels of violence being more likely to report and young men being less likely to report. Among the reasons given for not reporting were previous bad experiences of the police, perceived indifference by police officers, concern about how the complaint would be dealt with and a concern that reporting a homophobic incident would mean coming out to the police. However, the report noted that attitudes within and approaches by the police towards homophobic violence were changing, and more police forces were taking positive steps to respond to homophobia within their ranks, and developing more positive and effective responses to the issue.

Another United Kingdom wide survey was carried out by the National Advisory Group / Policing Lesbian and Gay Communities (NAG) in 1999. This survey of 2,656 LGB respondents revealed that 66% had been the victim of a homophobic incident at some time. 38% of the sample had been subject to this experience within the previous year and 16% of these had been physically assaulted, 20% had been threatened and 52% verbally abused (Wake et al 1999).

The survey findings, published as *Breaking the Chain of Hate*, also reveal that less than 18% of people who had experienced a homophobic incident in the previous year had reported it to the police. People were most likely to report damage to property, blackmail, rape and physical assault to the police and least likely to report verbal abuse. Furthermore, people who were out about their sexuality were more likely to report than those who were not. Reasons for not reporting an incident included: the incident was not considered serious enough, a belief that the police would not do anything, an expectation or experience of police homophobia, and a fear that others would find out they were gay as a result.

Two surveys carried out in Scotland reveal similar findings. A survey of gay men in Edinburgh (Morrison and MacKay 2000) revealed that 57% of respondents had experienced some form of harassment and 18% had

experienced some form of violence within the previous twelve months. A broader survey of LGB (and transgender) people across Scotland, published as *first out* (Beyond Barriers 2003), revealed that 68% of respondents had been verbally abused at some time and 23% had been physically assaulted. In Edinburgh 37% of those who had experienced violence had reported it to the police, while the Beyond Barriers survey indicated that 17% of those who experienced verbal or physical assault had made a report to the police.

A survey by GALOP (1998) focused specifically on the experiences of young people under the age of 25 living in London. This survey asked young lesbian, gay and bisexual people about their experiences of verbal, physical and sexual abuse (although this was not defined specifically as homophobic abuse). 83% of respondents reported experiencing verbal abuse, 47% had experienced physical abuse and 41% had experienced sexual abuse. For young people school and public places were the locations where they most frequently experienced both physical and verbal abuse.

Only 19% of young people had reported their experiences of harassment or violence to the police. The most common reason given for not reporting to the police was fear that the police would trivialise their experiences, while others cited a distrust of the police, a fear of reporting the incident or a belief that it was not appropriate.

### **Homophobia in Ireland**

There has been little published research on homophobia in the Republic of Ireland. The one substantial study of the lesbian and gay community carried out by the Gay and Lesbian Equality Network and Nexus Research (1995) involved a widespread survey of the experiences and needs of one hundred and fifty nine men and women, largely from Cork and Dublin. This research revealed that 41% of respondents had been threatened with violence because they were assumed to be gay or lesbian, 35% had been chased or followed and 25% of respondents had experienced violent assaults because of their sexual orientation, with 9% having been wounded or assaulted with a weapon. Furthermore 79% had experience of being verbally harassed and 84% knew someone personally who had been physically or verbally harassed and 81% said that fear of harassment had affected their behaviour in some way (GLEN and Nexus 1995: 78-80).

A more recent study carried out by a member of the Garda Síochána also noted high levels of harassment, with 79% of respondents having been either physically or verbally assaulted (McGowan 1999). This research also revealed that only about one in three people reported such assaults to the Gardai and only about one in nine reported verbal assaults. The main reasons for not reporting such attacks were fear of the Gardai response, fear of reprisals, a belief that the incident was not serious enough and fear of exposure of their sexual orientation.

A recent report by the Equality Authority noted these local findings and also the evidence from a number of European surveys which demonstrated that levels of violence against LGB people was up to three times higher than was experienced by the population as a whole (Equality Authority 2002). This report revealed that 25% of respondents in European studies had experienced violent assaults because of their sexual orientation. The report also noted the lack of research on homophobic harassment in Ireland and specifically the lack of information in relation to violence against lesbians who it argues are likely to be doubly at risk because of their gender and their sexual orientation.

### **Homophobia in Northern Ireland**

The first survey to quantify the scale of harassment within the LGB community in Northern Ireland was that UK wide survey published by Stonewall in 1996. This revealed that 39% of LGB respondents in the Ulster television area had experienced homophobic violence, while 36% reported experiencing homophobic harassment and 67% had been verbally abused (Mason and Palmer 1996:106). The experience of violence within the LGB community was, along with the Grampian and Granada television regions, the highest level in the UK, although experience of verbal harassment was the joint lowest reported.

There has been limited but growing research on the lesbian, gay and bisexual communities in Northern Ireland. Some recent academic writing has begun to raise the profile of LGB issues in Northern Ireland and has touched briefly on the significance of violence and harassment towards the communities (Conrad 1999; Kitchin 2002; Kitchin and Lysaght 2002, 2003; Quinn 2000). The Rainbow Project has carried out a number of pieces of work on the gay and male bisexual community, including pieces on the 'psychosocial implications of being gay on suicide attempts' (White 1998); on drug use (Rainbow Project 1999) and on counselling needs (Toner and McIlrath 2000). The Northern Ireland

Human Rights Commission published a report on the rights of lesbians, gays and bisexuals (NIHRC 2001) and more recently a report was published on the needs of lesbians and bisexual women (Quiry 2002). A number of these reports include some information related to homophobic harassment, and they indicate that forms of harassment are a significant problem.

The study of attempted suicide was based on a survey of 122 gay and bisexual men in Northern Ireland. It found that 32% of respondents had attempted suicide at one time, while over half reported having had suicidal thoughts. The survey also found that over half of the respondents had been bullied at school, with more than 64% of those who had attempted suicide reporting experience of being bullied. The research also revealed that over 25% of respondents had been sexually assaulted, while nearly half of those who had attempted suicide had also been sexually assaulted (White 1998).

The research into the counselling needs of gay men involved a survey of 163 men, largely from the Belfast area (Toner and McIlrath 2000). The survey revealed that 29% of respondents had been physically abused, 24% had been sexually abused and 48% had been emotionally abused. For many, the abuse took place over a period of years, rather than being a one-off incident: 62% of those who had been emotionally abused said that this had continued over a period of years or from a range of sources.

The form of abuse tended to vary with the perpetrators of the abuse. Physical abuse was most likely to be perpetrated by strangers (38%), while the perpetrators of sexual abuse were most often adult non-relatives (40%). Emotional abuse was mostly perpetrated by peers and fellow pupils or students (61%). While the survey did not specifically ask whether the abuse was perceived to be homophobic, the levels of abuse were considerably higher than those generally experienced by the heterosexual population in Northern Ireland (Toner and McIlrath 2000:32).

A more recent publication, *A Mighty Silence*, focused on the needs of lesbians and bisexual women in Northern Ireland (Quiry 2002). This largely qualitative research, carried out by the Lesbian Advocacy Services Initiative (LASI), involved interviews with over 160 lesbian/gay women including interviews with nine groups and organisations. The research explored women's experience of discrimination because of their sexual orientation and found that 'women were either so closeted that their work colleagues and families were not aware of their sexual orientation

or that they had minimised the discrimination they had experienced'. Of those lesbians who were 'out' at work, 46% reported that they had experienced discrimination in the workplace, 'ranging from severe harassment to ostracism and isolation' (Quiry 2002:3).

Around 20% of those interviewed had experienced some form of violent assaults. None of these women had reported their experiences to the police. A number of interviewees also reported incidents where gay women had had to move house because of prolonged intimidation. The level of violence within the lesbian community was broadly comparable with the earlier study carried out by GLEN and Nexus in Ireland.

## **Conclusions**

The findings from the different surveys are not directly comparable either because they ask different questions or ask questions about similar incidents but over different time frames ('ever' as opposed to 'in the past year'). However, it is worth highlighting some broad findings.

- Experiences of some form of homophobic harassment are widespread within the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. Between 57% and 83% of respondents have some experience of this kind.
- Many people have also had experience of physical assault – with figures of around 16-18% of people subject to physical violence in the past year to around 32% having such an experience at some time.
- Young people generally reported greater experience of violence and abuse than older people.
- The findings from Stonewall and Edinburgh indicate that around one third of people had reported incidents to the police, although the other surveys reported much lower figures with around 17-19% making a report to the police.
- Many people cited similar reasons for not reporting a homophobic incident to the police. These included: the incident was not serious enough; fear or perception of police homophobia; belief that the police would not do anything; fear of being outed as gay, lesbian or bisexual.

- Overall the data from Northern Ireland is scant and indicates little more than the fact that experiences of homophobic violence is as high if not higher than in England and Scotland. The analysis of the ICR survey of homophobic harassment and violence in Northern Ireland in Section 5 will permit a more detailed comparison with the experiences of people in England, Scotland and Ireland.



### 3. Police Data on Homophobic Incidents

The PSNI have collected data on homophobic incidents since July 2000. Over the two and a half years from July 2000 until December 2002 the police have recorded 120 homophobic incidents across Northern Ireland. The definition of a homophobic incident used by the police is:

*any incident which appears either to the victim, investigating officer or any other person to be motivated by homophobia, that is animosity towards lesbians and gay men.*

Information on homophobic incidents is recorded on a special form, 'Form 80', by the investigating officer. This is forwarded to the officer in the Community Involvement Branch who has responsibility for liaison with the various minority communities. Homophobic incidents may therefore be followed up through two separate procedures: by the investigating officer or by the Community Involvement officer. In some cases the incident may not involve a crime, or there may be no evidence of the perpetrator and follow up contacts will be pursued by the Community Involvement Branch.

Information on homophobic incidents can also be recorded by third parties and then passed on to the police who will include the details within their records. A number of LGB groups take calls or receive reports from individuals who have been subject to homophobic harassment and violence but who do not wish to report the incident to the police. These groups have copies of Form 80 so they are able to record the information in the same manner as a police officer. The information is passed to the police so that data can be gathered even though an incident recorded by a third party will not be investigated.

Data on homophobic incidents is forwarded to the Community Involvement Branch in police headquarters who collate and analyse information on such incidents to identify emerging or changing crime patterns. The data is currently held as a paper copy but PSNI plan to computerise their data in the near future.

ICR were given access to the police files of homophobic incidents from 2000 to 2002 for research purposes. All the relevant data, except personal information on the victim, was entered onto a database for

analysis. This dataset comprised information of 120 incidents: 42 were recorded in the six-month period from July to December 2000, 40 were recorded during 2001 and 38 were recorded during 2002.

The decline in numbers of recorded incidents over the short period that they have been recorded is somewhat surprising. It perhaps reflects the findings from research elsewhere: that many LGB people are reluctant to report their experiences to the police. The attitudes of respondents, who completed the homophobia questionnaire, to reporting incidents to the police are detailed in Section 5.

### Victims of Homophobia

Most homophobic incidents were reported by gay males (75% of the total), 108 of the 120 incidents being reported by men (90% of the total). Only 10 of 120 incidents were reported by women while three were by reported by transgender persons. In one incident a male and female were together when attacked. The full details of the sexual orientation and gender of the victims of homophobic incidents is set out in Table 1.

**Table 1: Incidents Recorded by Police**

	2000	2001	2002	Total
Bisexual - Male	1		3	4
Bisexual - Female			1	1
Gay - Male	35	31	24	90
Gay & Lesbian	1			1
Hetero - Male			2	2
Hetero - Female			1	1
Lesbian - Female	2	4	1	7
Lesbian - Trans		1	2	3
Not Declared - Male	3	4	4	11
<b>Total</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>120</b>

**Age of Victims:** The age of those reporting homophobic incidents ranged from 15 to 63 years of age. The highest percentage of victims was between 21 and 30, with nearly 50% of victims aged between 21 and 40. In total 87% of those victims who gave their date of birth were between 16 and 45 years of age.

Table 2: Age of Victims

	Number	%
20 and under	17	14
21-30	36	29
31-40	23	19
41-50	20	16
51-60	1	1
61 and over	3	2
Not Known	24	19
<b>Total</b>	<b>124</b>	<b>100</b>

*Note: In some cases the age of more than one victim was given.*

**Number of Victims:** In the vast majority of cases (95 out of 120 or 79%) the victim was alone when they were harassed. In 22 cases (18% of the total) two people were harassed or attacked while they were together. In one case three people were victimised in the same incident and in 2 cases more than 5 people were victimised on the same occasion.

**Previous Incidents:** In 40 cases (33% of the total) the victim reported that they had suffered previous experiences of homophobic harassment, in 50 cases (42%) they reported no previous comparable experiences and in 30 cases (25%) no details of previous experiences were noted.

**Responding to Homophobia:** The report forms also provide details on the response that victims of homophobic violence and harassment might make, the annual breakdown for responses is set out in Table 3. In nearly half the cases (48%) the victim agreed to a follow up visit from the police, while in over 30% of cases the victim was unwilling to allow the police to pay a follow up visit. In 7% of cases the victim did not want any further action taken but simply wanted the incident to be recorded. In four cases (3%) the victim either planned to move or was considering moving as a result of their experiences and in one case the victim registered a complaint against the police.

**Table 3: Victim Responses**

	2000	2001	2002	Total	%
Agrees to Police Visit	21	14	22	57	48
Declines Follow Up Visit	10	14	13	37	31
No Further Action	5	3		8	7
Plan/Wish to Move	1	2	1	4	3
Civil Action		1		1	1
Complaint Against Police		1		1	1
Unknown	5	5	2	12	10

### Geographies of Homophobia

Cases of homophobic harassment and violence have been recorded in all counties of Northern Ireland except County Fermanagh where not a single incident has been recorded in the three years that data has been collected.

Most incidents have been recorded in Belfast, with 52% of all incidents recorded as having occurred in the city. Belfast recorded a significantly higher level of incidents than any other area in 2000 and 2001 but the proportion declined in 2002 to 42% of all incidents, at the same time the number and percentage of incidents increased in County Londonderry from 7% in 2000 to 34% in 2002.

Table 4 shows that a total of 35 incidents have been recorded in the remaining four counties: 13 in Down, 8 in Armagh and 7 each in Antrim and Tyrone. Of the 22 incidents recorded in County Londonderry, 19 occurred in Derry Londonderry. Although most of the incidents have been recorded in urban areas, apart from Belfast and Derry Londonderry, only Armagh city has recorded more than three incidents.

**Table 4: Incidents in Belfast and Counties**

	2000	2001	2002	Total	%
Belfast	23	24	16	63	52
Antrim	2	2	3	7	6
Armagh	4	3	1	8	7
Down	7	4	2	13	11
Fermanagh	0	0	0	0	0
Londonderry	3	6	13	22	18
Tyrone	3	1	3	7	6

The incidents in Belfast can also be broken down into a number of distinctive zones: (i) the central commercial and entertainment area, from Botanic Avenue to the Cathedral Quarter, (ii) the southern university and residential area, (iii) the area east of the Lagan and (iv) the north of the city. Central Belfast has recorded the highest number of incidents, the 31 cases account for over 25% of all recorded homophobic incidents. The south of the city has recorded the second highest number of incidents (21 incidents and 18% of the total). East Belfast and North Belfast have recorded the fourth and fifth highest number of incidents (6 and 5 incidents respectively). No incidents have been recorded in West Belfast.

The figures for central and south Belfast with those from Derry Londonderry, which recorded the third highest number of incidents with just fewer than 16% of the total, account for 71 of the 120 recorded incidents, nearly 60% of all such incidents.

**Table 5: Incidents by Belfast area, Towns and Villages**

	2000	2001	2002	Total
Belfast Centre	16	12	3	31
Belfast South	5	4	12	21
Derry Londonderry	3	4	12	19
Belfast East	1	4	1	6
Belfast North	1	4		5
Armagh	1	2	1	4
Blackskull	3			3
Newry		1	2	3
Omagh		1	2	3
Aghalee	2			2
Bangor	1	1		2
Carrick		1	1	2
Dromore	1	1		2
Dungannon	2			2
Keady	1	1		2
Portadown	2			2
Portstewart		1	1	2

It is worth noting that in the first two years of recording the largest number of incidents occurred in central Belfast whereas in 2002 south Belfast and Derry Londonderry recorded the highest number of incidents and only 3 cases were noted in the central area of Belfast (Table 5). The remainder of recorded incidents occurred across a broad range of

geographical areas, these include the broad greater Belfast area (Bangor, Carrick) other urban areas (Armagh, Dungannon, Newry, Portadown, Omagh) and in small towns and rural settings (Dromore, Keady, Aghalee, Blackskull). The remaining nine incidents have been recorded in a mix of urban and rural locations. One incident has been recorded in each of the following: Cookstown, Culcavy, Dunmurray, Limavady, Moneyreagh, Moy, Newtownabbey, Rostrevor and Whitehead.

### Location of Homophobic Incidents

The location of homophobic incidents is set out in Table 6, these have been categorised into a limited number of specific locales. The most pertinent categories for homophobic incidents are: the street, the home, a social or leisure venue, and the workplace. The largest proportion of recorded incidents took place in the street, this accounts for 68% of all occurrences. Incidents in the home accounted for 18% of records and incidents in a social or leisure setting account for 13% of cases. The police only recorded one incident that occurred in a workplace.

The data can also be considered from another perspective so that incidents occurring in the street are divided into those that occurred outside the home and those that took place in more anonymous locations. Of the 82 incidents that took place in the street (68% of the total), 31 occurred immediately adjacent to the victim's home. This means that 44% of cases happened in or near to the domestic arena. Finally there were 16 incidents that took place in social settings (13% of the total), most of these occurred in bars or clubs.

**Table 6: Location of Incident**

	2000	2001	2002	Total	%
In the Street	19	14	18	51	43
Outside Home	14	11	6	31	26
In the Home	3	9	9	21	18
Pub/Club	6	4	3	13	11
Other Leisure		1	2	3	2
Work	1		1	1	
<b>Total</b>	42	40	38	120	101

## Nature of Homophobic Harassment

Homophobic harassment takes four primary forms: physical assault, verbal abuse, criminal damage and theft. However a single incident may involve one or all of these forms of harassment – a person may be assaulted, abused, robbed and have property damaged all as part of a single event.

**Table 7: Principal Form of Harassment**

	2000	2001	2002	Total	%
Physical Assault	21	16	17	54	45
Theft	1	2	2	5	4
Damage to Property	9	9	5	23	19
Verbal Abuse	11	13	14	38	32
<b>Total</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>100</b>

The table above categorises the incidents by the nature of harassment: physical assault, theft, damage to property and verbal abuse. In many cases more than one form of harassment may be experienced in a single incident. For the purpose of this report we consider physical assault as the most serious incident, followed by theft, damage to property and finally verbal abuse. Assaults are the most numerous single category of incident with 54 cases, 45% of all recorded incidents, including some form of physical assault. These include one case of murder, one case of rape, two cases where weapons were used and 16 cases where the victim required treatment in hospital.

There were only five cases where theft was the most serious form of harassment, but there were 15 cases of theft altogether. This indicates that in 19% of cases involving assault, the victim suffered a theft as well as an assault.

There were 38 cases where abuse was the main incident being reported (32% of the total), these included 22 instances of verbal abuse, 4 cases where threats were made, 4 cases of discrimination, 3 threatening phone calls, 2 instances of graffiti, 2 cases of written abuse and 1 case described as 'causing a nuisance'. However, while abuse is considered the least serious of the 4 categories of harassment, it was a factor in 83 recorded incidents of harassment, thus in over 69% of cases the victim suffered some form of personal abuse.

### Time and Date of Harassment

Most homophobic incidents occurred in the twelve hours between 6pm and 6am, 96 of the 120 incidents (80% of the total) occurred during this period compared with 15 incidents (13% of the total) during the other twelve-hour period (no concise time is recorded in 9 incidents). 45 incidents (38% of the total), occurred in the three-hour period after midnight, while 20 incidents or 17% of the total occurred in the three hours before midnight. Figure 1 details the times at which incidents occurred.

There are no clear patterns of harassment in the annual cycle. In both 2000 and 2001 September was the month with the highest number of recorded incidents, in 2002 the numbers peaked in June and July, but remained at a low level after that. Figure 2 indicates the number of incidents recorded in each month since July 2000.

Figure 1: Time of Day of Incidents Reported to the Police

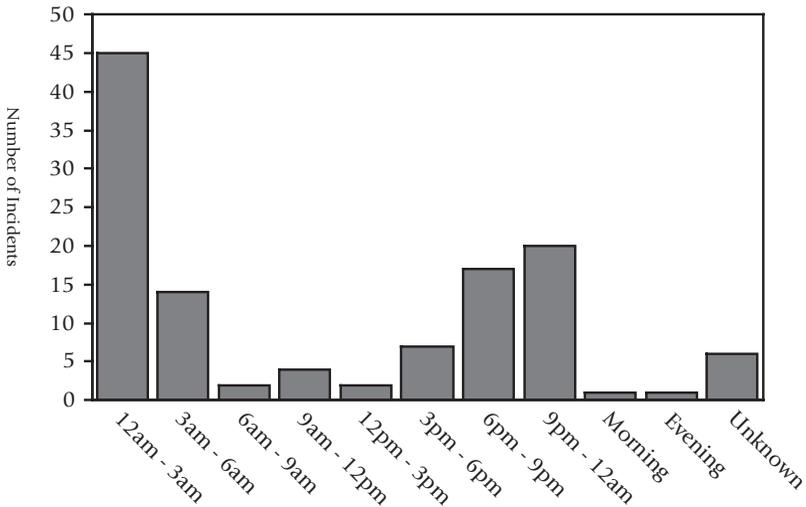
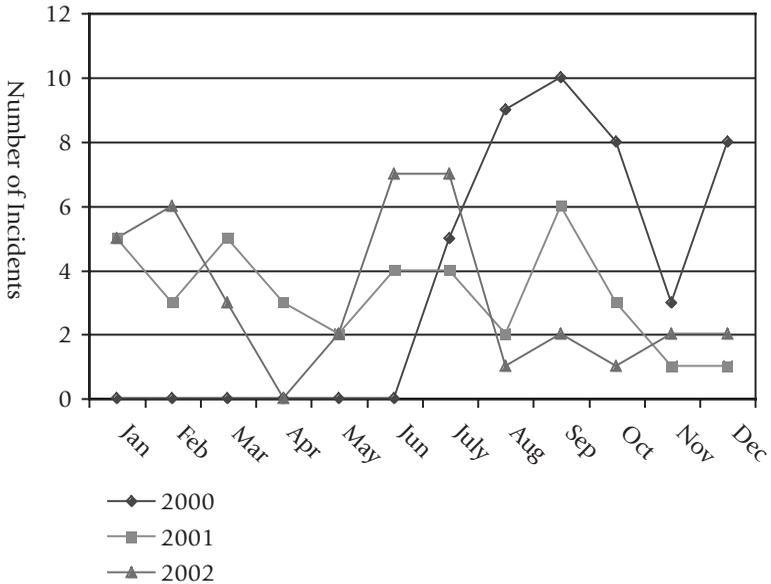


Figure 2: Number of Incidents in Each Month



**Perpetrators of Homophobic Harassment**

The perpetrators of homophobic harassment were completely unseen in 13% of cases while in 87% of cases the perpetrator was seen by the victim. This 87% includes 9 cases (8%) where the perpetrator was identified as a neighbour of the victim, 17 cases (14%) where the perpetrator was identified as a local person, and in 30 other cases (25% of the total) the perpetrator could be identified by the victim.

**Gender of Perpetrators:** In 75 cases (63% of the total) the perpetrator was male and in 7 cases (6%) she was female. In 10 cases (8% of the total) males and females were involved in the harassment. In 28 cases (23% of the total) the gender of the perpetrator was unknown.

**Age of Perpetrators:** In 36 cases (30% of the total) the perpetrator was an adult and in 34 cases (28%) the perpetrator was described as a youth. In 50 cases (42% of the total) the age of perpetrator(s) was unknown. No children were identified or accused of being involved in homophobic harassment.

**Numbers of Perpetrators:** In 27 cases (23% of the total) the perpetrator was acting on their own while in 77 cases (64% of the total) more than one person was involved. In 16 (13%) the number of perpetrators was unknown.

### Police Responses

The police response is recorded in 56 cases (47% of the total). These are set down in Table 8 below. In most cases the report forms do not record the police response to an incident. In many cases there is little that the police can do either because no crime has been committed, no perpetrator has been identified or the victim does not want the matter to be taken any further.

**Table 8: Recorded Police response to reports of homophobic incidents**

	Number	%
No Action Taken	24	19
Perpetrator Spoken To	10	8
Arrests Made	8	7
Enquiries Ongoing	5	4
Perpetrator Charged	4	3
Prosecutions Brought	2	2
Report to DPP	1	1
Letter Forwarded	1	1
Perpetrator Visited	1	1
Unknown	64	53

However, a positive response is noted in relation to 32 cases (27% of the total) where the perpetrator has been spoken to, arrested or pursued through the criminal justice system. This would appear to be a relatively high percentage and is higher than the overall rate for notifiable offences recorded and cleared, which stands at 20% for Northern Ireland for 2001/02.

## 4. Homophobia Survey: Methodology

At the outset of the research a number of organisations were invited to participate in an advisory group which would guide and advise on the form, nature and content of the research programme. Invitations were sent to the following organisations: Belfast Interface Project, Butterfly Club, Committee on the Administration of Justice, Coalition on Sexual Orientation, Counteract, Equality Commission Race Directorate, Multi-Cultural Resource Centre, Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities, Northern Ireland Gay Rights Association, Rainbow Project and Trademark. Most of these agreed to join the advisory group although a small number did not respond. As the research progressed other groups and individuals expressed an interest and were invited to join the advisory group.

Because of the limited police data it was decided to conduct a survey of people's experiences of homophobic violence and harassment and their attitudes to reporting such experiences to the police or other bodies. The survey was designed to complement the police data and to widen and deepen the available information on the issue. The questionnaire was designed, developed and piloted in conjunction with members of the LGB community in Belfast and Derry Londonderry. A number of other recent surveys of the LGB communities in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland were also drawn upon to inform the design process of the questionnaire (Mason and Palmer 1996; GALOP 1998; Morrison and MacKay 2000). Some questions were taken directly from other surveys in order to allow us to compare the results.

The key themes for the survey were as follows:

- Experiences of homophobic harassment and violence: We included separate sections for experiences of harassment and of violence. We asked how many times the respondent had experienced different forms of harassment and violence, and how many times they had experienced it in the past two years. They were then asked why they felt the incident was homophobic.
- Reporting homophobic incidents: We asked respondents if they had reported the events to the police or another agency and their experience of doing so. If they had not reported to the police, we asked why they had not.

- Seeking support: Respondents were asked if they had ever sought support after a homophobic incident – and if so, what form of support and from whom. They were also asked how they had been affected by such incidents.
- Perceptions of safety: Respondents were asked about their perceptions of safety in different places, how likely they felt they would be victims of homophobic incidents, and how often they worried about their safety.
- Attitudes and knowledge: A final section covered such matters as behaviour adopted to avoid homophobic harassment and violence, attitudes to the police and knowledge of their procedures, knowledge of LGB groups and suggestions for ways to combat homophobic attacks in Northern Ireland.

A draft questionnaire was piloted among 15 members of LGB groups to ensure the questionnaire was understandable; that questions were phrased in an appropriate manner and to determine how long the questionnaire took to complete. The pilot phase led to a number of changes, and the final version included 61 questions in total. The questionnaire is available at [www.conflictresearch.org.uk](http://www.conflictresearch.org.uk)

## **Issues**

**Ethical Concerns:** We realised that the questions we were asking could bring back painful and/or traumatic memories for some respondents and we were concerned that people completing the questionnaire were aware of the support available from local groups. A list of support groups in NI was drawn up, and included with each questionnaire. A page containing this same list of contact details for support groups came up each time the online questionnaire was completed and submitted.

**LGB or LGBT?** At the beginning of the research process, the advisory group discussed whether the survey should include transsexuals or transgendered individuals (hereafter ‘trans’). Many groups working with lesbians, gay men and bisexuals include trans individuals as members, despite the fact that being trans is a gender, rather than sexual orientation. Because of the small number of trans individuals in Northern Ireland, many associate with LGB organisations. No questions were included in the questionnaire about transsexuality, as it was felt that this was a separate issue to sexual orientation. However, in retrospect it may have been advisable to ask respondents whether they were

transsexual – one respondent wrote about being the victim of homophobic violence, despite recording herself as ‘straight’ in the questionnaire. The person explained that she was male-to-female transsexual, and the experiences of homophobic harassment occurred when the respondent was a gay man.

**Other concerns:** Concerns were raised by some respondents about question 53, in which they were asked if they avoided appearing ‘obviously gay’. The idea that one could look gay was perceived by some as being offensive. This question had been copied from Stonewall’s 1996 *Queer Bashing* questionnaire, and had been replicated in order to allow a comparison between their and our results. A small number of respondents also expressed displeasure at question 3, in which respondents were asked about sexual orientation, the first optional response was ‘straight’ – putting this option first was felt by one individual to correlate ‘straight’ with ‘normal’, and therefore was homophobic. Perhaps the best learning that can be derived from these complaints is that piloting as widely as possible is essential in order to minimise the chance of causing offence.

### **Distribution and Publicity**

We distributed questionnaires through mailing lists of LGB groups and by leaving them in offices and drop-in centres in Belfast and Derry Londonderry. We contacted LASI (Lesbian Advocacy Services Initiative) and asked them to publicise the survey within their group and researchers attended the Belfast and Derry Pride events and meetings of some LGB groups to promote the project. The Rainbow Project distributed details of the questionnaire with their sexual health packs in social venues in Belfast.

We publicised the questionnaire through LGB media, including a radio programme aimed at the LGB community on Northern Visions Radio. Questionnaires with reply paid envelopes were included with the November 2002 issue of GCN (Gay Community News). We also publicised the survey through LGB entertainment venues. An eye-catching card was printed with information about the research and how the questionnaire might be accessed. Cards were displayed in four LGB entertainment venues in Belfast and one in Derry Londonderry.

After discussions with the advisory group, it was decided that the questionnaire should also be available online. It was felt that this would allow individuals to complete the questionnaire in privacy, and would

not involve them having to give out personal details in order to get a questionnaire sent to them. It would also prevent accidental 'outing', if an individual accidentally left the questionnaire or associated information in a place where others could find it.

Publicising the questionnaire to LGB individuals who were not 'out' was another challenge. We used a number of gay chat rooms to advertise the survey; this included posting messages, sending emails to members, and asking site managers to create links to the questionnaire on their site. We also asked local LGB groups to provide links from their web sites to the questionnaire.

Finally, we publicised the survey within the mainstream media and through community networks. Press releases were sent to 70 local papers and the three daily papers, to BBC, UTV and local radio stations. Articles were submitted to *Fortnight*, *Women's News*, and QUB Students Union magazine. Questionnaires and publicity cards were sent to all Victim Support offices and Citizens Advice Bureaux across Northern Ireland. The Women's Support Network sent out questionnaires with *Women's News*. The Greater Belfast Community Network also sent out publicity cards to around 360 member organisations.

## **Responses**

The survey was carried out between November 2002 and February 2003. In total 186 people responded by completing questionnaires, of these 66 (36%) were completed online while the remainder were either sent out by ICR, were received via an LGB group mailing, were passed on by a friend or via an LGB social location. We were somewhat disappointed at the relatively small scale of the response. However, two factors need to be considered in this regard. First, there are no statistics on the size of the LGB communities in Northern Ireland. No questions are asked on sexual orientation in the Census, LGB individuals are not obviously visible as such and there are no ways of enumerating the population beyond such broad (and meaningless) claims as 'around X% of the population are gay'.

Second, we can thus only gauge the value of the survey in comparison with other surveys of the LGB communities in Northern Ireland and beyond. The Rainbow Project surveys on suicide, drugs and counselling were completed by 122, 195 and 163 gay men respectively. In each case the questionnaires were distributed through mailing lists and through surveys of men in LGB social settings in Belfast, with the latter providing

the larger number. The Stonewall survey included responses from around 85 individuals from Northern Ireland (2% of the total sample of 4216). A survey of young LGB people in the northwest in 1998 drew responses from 45 individuals. The LASI survey of lesbians involved consultation with 160 women, through a mixture of interviews, focus groups and a questionnaire.

It has thus proved difficult to get a large sample for surveys of LGB people in Northern Ireland. The only survey to break this trend has been a needs analysis of young LGBT individuals carried out by Youth Net which received over 350 responses. Details of this research have yet to be published.

Other surveys of the LGB communities in Britain have also been based on small sample sizes. Apart from the Stonewall survey, which had over 4000 respondents, most surveys have been relatively small in number. The GALOP survey of young LGB people in the London area gathered 202 responses (GALOP 1998), the Edinburgh survey managed 300 responses from gay males (Morrison and McKay 2000). However the most recent survey by Beyond Barriers (2003), a needs analysis of LGBT people throughout Scotland, managed 924 responses.

All of these surveys utilised a variety of means to gather data: questionnaires were distributed by post, via mailing lists and among social networks, the Stonewall and NAG surveys were also distributed through LGB journals and the Edinburgh study also drew upon individual interviews. To date only the Beyond Barriers survey has had an online version. Although each of these projects surveyed a larger number of people than our survey they were also all carried out within a much larger population and in areas with a significantly larger and more public LGB community.

The LGB communities have thus far proved difficult to survey in large numbers in Northern Ireland. In part this might be because the organised, visible or 'out' communities are relatively small and in part because homophobic attitudes within the wider community ensure that individuals are unwilling to declare themselves. However, we feel that we have a reasonable sized sample of respondents to our survey. Also by drawing upon the data from other surveys carried out in Northern Ireland that have touched upon the issue of homophobic harassment and by comparing our data with surveys from England and Scotland we can identify clear patterns of the significance of harassment and violence for LGB people here.



## **5. Homophobia Survey: Findings**

### **Crime, Violence, Harassment and Intimidation**

Homophobic hate crime is a broad category of actions perpetrated on an individual or individuals because they are, or are perceived to be lesbian, gay or bisexual. Although the term 'crime' is used, hate crime includes actions that are not criminal, such as verbal abuse, but which are offensive or may constitute harassment and intimidation. The police term 'homophobic incident' includes both criminal and non-criminal activities.

The questionnaire contained separate sections on harassment and violence, each section listed a range of activities that constitute forms of harassment or acts of violence. Harassment includes verbal abuse, threats, offensive mail, phone calls and graffiti as well as being followed and having property stolen. Violence includes physical and sexual assault but also attempted physical assault, being spat at and being the target of thrown objects. Each category allowed the respondent to register other forms of harassment and violence they had experienced.

Throughout the report we have used the terms violence, harassment and intimidation to cover the diverse activities within the rubric of hate crime / homophobic incident. Although there are overlaps and similarities in the meaning and in the ways these different terms are used, in some studies acts of violence are included within the term harassment while in others intimidation is an overarching process that includes violent and non-violent activities (Darby 1986, McVeigh 1994). In this report we include all non-violent actions within the term harassment, these are primarily forms of verbal or textual abuse but include physical activities such as being followed. The term violence includes all activities involving physical contact. However we have also always accepted the respondents' own definition of what constitutes harassment or violence.

For our purposes intimidation refers more to the impact that such activities might have had on the respondent than the form that the actions actually took. Harassment or violence has most impact on a victim (and also on the subject community to which the victim belongs) if it creates a feeling of intimidation and thus forces her/him to adapt or change their behaviour. The process of being intimidated is addressed in the questions related to adapting and changing one's patterns of behaviour, but feeling intimidated also feeds the need or desire to seek

support and the general sense of safety one has in continuing to inhabit one's routine environment.

### **Levels of Harassment and Violence**

In total 186 people responded to the hate crime survey. 153 people, 82% of the total responding, reported that they had experienced some form of homophobic harassment and 103 people, 55% of the total, reported that they had experienced some form of homophobic violence. In total 160 of the 186 respondents, 86% of the total sample, had experienced some form of harassment or violence because of their sexual orientation. Males were more likely to have experienced both harassment and violence than females, 85% of males reported being intimidated compared to 76% of females, while 61% of males reported experiences of violence compared to 42% of females.

These figures are high compared with other surveys of the lesbian and gay community in Britain and Ireland. Direct comparison with other surveys is not possible as they included different constituencies within their target group, some only target males others only females, some include the trans community some do not, while each survey has slightly different terms for the forms of abuse, harassment and violence they are investigating. Nevertheless some broad comparison is instructive and is set out in Table 9 below.

The highest figures of homophobic harassment were reported among young LGB people in London, 83% of whom reported experiences of verbal abuse and 47% had experienced some form of physical abuse. These are very similar to the findings of the Northern Ireland survey. The other surveys were carried out among the full age range of the LGB(T) communities and these tend to show lower levels of harassment and violence than amongst young people or the findings from Northern Ireland.

The findings of the Northern Ireland survey indicate a significantly higher percentage of gay males have experienced homophobic harassment and violence than in other parts of Britain and Ireland, while the experiences of lesbians and bisexual women are as high as any except for the young women surveyed in London by GALOP.

**Table 9: Details of other surveys of LGB communities in Britain and Ireland.**

	Violence		Harassment	
	Females	Males	Females	Males
Stonewall (1)	24	34	75	72
GALOP (1)	44	49	89	82
NAG (2)			64	67
Edinburgh (3)		26		57
Beyond Barriers (4)	23	23	68	68
GLEN & Nexus (4)	25	25	79	79
LASI (5)	20			
ICR	42	61	76	85

*Notes: All numbers refer to percentages of respondents in each survey. (1) Harassment here refers specifically to verbal abuse; (2) Harassment includes all forms of homophobic incidents including violence; (3) Survey only covered gay men; (4) No distinction given of male and female experiences; (5) Survey only covered lesbians and bisexual women.*

It might be thought that the high levels of experiences of homophobic incidents are in part due to the fact that this was specifically a survey of experiences of hate crime. However many of the other surveys cited earlier (Stonewall, GALOP, NAG, Edinburgh) also focused purely on forms of violence and harassment rather than on a broader range of needs and issues related to the LGB communities that the Glen and Nexus, Beyond Barriers and LASI addressed. There does not appear to be any great divergence in the findings of the two broad types of survey.

The next section summarises the personal details of respondents to the survey. This is then followed by a section that deals with experiences of harassment and violence, and on the perpetrators of such harassment. The later sections explore attitudes towards reporting incidents, seeking support after an incident and the general impact that forms of homophobic harassment and violence have on people's sense of safety. The questionnaire also included a space for people to elaborate on any questions or to add comments on any issue they wished. The quotations inserted in the analysis are taken from these comments. Some of these include a number of separate points within a single comment but we have used all the comments in their entirety in what to us is the most appropriate location in the report.

## Background Details of Respondents

We received 186 replies to the questionnaire, 126 of these were from males and 59 from females. One person described themselves as 'unsure' of their gender. This proportion of two-thirds male and one-third female is comparable to the Stonewall, GALOP, NAG and Beyond Barriers surveys. Only the Glen and Nexus survey achieved more female respondents than male. Over 60% described themselves as gay, 27% as lesbian and 8% as bisexual. The full breakdown of people's self-defined sexual orientation is set out in Table 10.

**Table 10: Sexual orientation of respondents**

	Number	%
Gay	113	61
Lesbian	50	27
Bisexual Male	9	5
Bisexual Female	5	3
Unsure	3	2
Straight/Heterosexual	2	1
Closer to Bisexual	1	0.5
Epebophile	1	0.5
Open Minded	1	0.5
Other	1	0.5

*Note: The definition of an epebophile is 'someone who is sexually attracted to adolescent boys aged between 14 and 17'.*

The largest proportion of respondents to the survey, 105 people or 67% of the total, were between 21 and 40 years old. The sample included one person under the age of 16 and three people over the age of 60. Just over 43% of respondents live in the Belfast area while just over 20% live in Derry Londonderry. The next largest samples were from the Greater Belfast area. These included 8% from North Down, 7% from the Newtownabbey and mid-Antrim post-code areas and 5% from the Lisburn / Ballynahinch area. We received small numbers of completed questionnaires from most areas of Northern Ireland.

All except three respondents described themselves as having a white ethnic background, with two people describing their background as mixed and one as Ashkenazi Jewish. Just over 55% described their religious background as Roman Catholic and 34% came from a Protestant background. Approximately 38% live in a mainly

Catholic/nationalist area, with 26% living in a mainly Protestant/unionist area and 31% living in a 'significantly mixed' residential area. Over 30% of respondents live with their parents, while 27% live alone and 23% live with a partner.

Nearly 50% are in full time employment with 11% employed part time. A further 28% are students. Nearly 35% have a degree level qualification, 21% have A level standard qualifications and over 13% have NVQ or BTEC level qualifications. Fewer than 6% have no formal qualifications.

We also asked people how open they are about their sexual orientation with friends, family and colleagues (Table 11). Over 70% of all respondents described themselves as being completely open with their friends and a further 24% are partly open, but under half consider themselves as being completely open with either their family or with colleagues. Nearly 25% of respondents are not open at all with colleagues, while 17% are not open at all about their sexual orientation with members of their family.

**Table 11: How open are you about your sexual orientation?**

	Completely - %	Partly - %	Not at All - %
With Friends	71	24	5
With Family	47	37	17
With Colleagues	48	29	23

One person addressed the issue of being out in a separate comment:

*I have just moved back to Belfast after living in (town in England) for several years and as yet have not experienced any homophobic incidents. However I do find the attitudes to sexuality and the levels of tolerance and understanding quite intimidating. I am no longer out to work colleagues, some friends etc. The stories I have heard about people getting attacked in cruising areas are pretty scary and I don't think cameras, police presence is the best way of dealing with it (Male 21-30, BT4).*

This clearly indicates that being out is not simply a once and for all process and that a general awareness of levels of intimidation and harassment for LGB people can impact on the decisions individuals make about their public identity. It is also worth noting that although this man had not experienced any direct homophobic harassment since returning from England there is a sense of inevitability in the words 'as yet have not' - that it is only a matter of time before he is confronted by more direct hostility than he has to date.

Full details of the age, religious background, residential details, educational qualifications, employment details and average earnings of the respondents to the questionnaire are provided in the Appendix.

### Experiences of Homophobic Harassment

We asked respondents if they had ever had any experience of homophobic harassment. 153 people, over 82% of the sample said that they had personal experience of homophobic harassment while 33 people (18%) had not had any such experiences. The most common form of harassment are forms of verbal insult, 71% of the respondents had been verbally intimidated at one time with 62% experiencing such harassment in the past two years.

*Don't think I look or act gay – think the incident I'm referring to here was just hostility in general from some lads looking for trouble and the word 'faggot' is one of the strongest provocations (Male 21-30, BT48).*

Nearly one in four respondents (24%) have been intimidated by being followed on foot in the last two years and more than one in ten people have been intimidated in the past two years by each of the following: graffiti, offensive or abusive phone-calls, being followed by a car and having their property vandalised (Table 12).

**Table 12: Forms of harassment experienced**

	Ever	%	Last 2 Yrs	%
Verbal Insults	132	71	116	62
Followed on Foot	50	27	45	24
Graffiti	35	19	25	13
Offensive Phone-calls	33	18	21	11
Followed by Car	29	16	21	11
Property Vandalised	29	16	21	11
Stalked	24	13	12	7
Property Stolen	17	9	10	5
Hate Mail	12	7	14	8
Blackmailed	11	6	8	4
Other	14	7	3	2

One form of harassment that was not drawn out clearly in the questionnaire was that involving children and young people. The findings of earlier research in Northern Ireland (Birkett 1998, White 1998) as well as a wide range of anecdotal evidence indicates that bullying and other forms of harassment are a significant problem for many young people, whether they are LGB or not. Two comments from respondents highlight this issue. The first is explicit about the scale of homophobic bullying at school and the failure of the educational system to even acknowledge this let alone respond to it:

*Majority of my homophobic incidents occurred in school or near school or by so-called classmates who lived near my home. I did report some of these to teachers but they never seemed to act on it. Said it wasn't really serious cos no-one had witnessed (no one was willing to back me up even those who were being bullied too) and as there was no physical injuries. And at times certain teachers perpetuated it by cracking derogatory jokes about being gay in class, little realising they were just re-affirming the bullies' belief they were right. Genuinely some teachers wanted to help but were prevented due to lack of support from school policies as there were none for homophobic bullying at all. Wasn't even recognised (Male 21-30 BT17).*

The need to address the problem of homophobia through the education system was made by several respondents and will be discussed in more detail in Section 6. The second quote addresses a different form of homophobic harassment of young people whereby a young person is bullied because of the sexual orientation of their parents:

*We have been a family unit for nearly seven years, we do not hide the fact. We are so normal and ordinary we are nearly boring (joke). Our son has been the victim of severe bullying solely because of us, his parents, he deals with it very well and protects us from most of it. Last week he had to leave his Saturday job because, in his words, he couldn't take any more. The father and son of the business were making fun of us and making up rhymes and this had been going on for weeks. He didn't tell us, we had noted at times on return from work he was angry with us and we couldn't get to the bottom of it. He is 12 years old and a son we are so proud of, he is the most accepting and caring boy and a pleasure to be around. He deals with all this outwardly well but we do worry of the effects of all this on him. We welcome programmes, eg The Bill and others, introducing gay people hopefully so as it normalised it all for him (Female 31-40, BT23).*

These two quotations reveal something of the diversity of homophobic harassment that this report can only begin to address. First, homophobic

harassment can start at a very young age and can persist and recur over many years. As many people have noted or commented in the course of this research, repeated bullying from an early age can 'get to your very core' and thus begin to 'destroy all confidence in yourself'. The adults who have responsibility for young people equally have a responsibility to protect young people who are being victimised. Second, homophobic harassment can have a significant impact on families, and although in most cases people have referred to problems of rejection, this above quote also highlights problems derived from being associated with 'homosexuality'. Experiences of harassment are therefore clearly widespread and diverse within the lesbian, gay and bisexual communities in Northern Ireland. Two quotations illustrate further the diversity of the types of harassment that people have experienced because of their sexual orientation:

*I was on YTP and this fellow was reading the Daily Sport. He was talking about the women in it to the rest of the trainees and asked me if I would go with one and I said I was a virgin. He said to the rest of them 'he's a wee virgin'. He kept asking me for money and kept calling the caretaker and teacher 'bum chum' and queer (Male 21-30, BT48).*

*I was intimidated for approximately 2 years by a man who lived across the back entry of my house. He continuously threw things over my wall / against my windows eg sexual magazines, food, snowballs, fireworks, I felt at the time that homophobia was a fact of life and wouldn't report it. I would however report a similar incident now (Female 31-40, BT5).*

These quotes illustrate how harassment is enhanced by the fact that it is common for people to experience repeated instances of intimidatory behaviour. More than half of those people who had been intimidated by verbal abuse, by being followed, by being confronted by graffiti, by receiving abusive phone-calls, by having property vandalised and by receiving hate mail had more than one such experience. In fact 75% of those people who had suffered verbal abuse had been abused on more than one such occasion, while over 40% had experienced some form of verbal abuse on 6 or more occasions in the past two years.

**Table 13: Experiences of multiple acts of harassment in past two years in percentages**

	1	2-5	6-10	11-20	21 +
Verbal Abuse	25	33	22	7	14
Followed on Foot	31	49	13	2	4
Graffiti	40	48	8		4
Phone-calls	24	33	19	14	10
Followed by Car	52	33	10		5
Property Vandalised	38	57	5		
Stalked	67	25			8
Property Stolen	70	30			
Hate Mail	43	36		7	14
Blackmail	88				12

It is also evident that in many cases individuals experience multiple forms of harassment on a recurrent basis. In some cases verbal abuse may lead on to physical abuse, in others the very threat or fear of recurrent or escalating harassment may encourage the person to consider making major changes in their lives:

*I would be called names, things thrown at me on a daily basis, verbal abuse etc, spat on etc. I find it very hard living in Derry and sometimes think of leaving Derry because of the above stuff (Male 31-40, BT48).*

This comment also indicates the difficulty in drawing a clear distinction between verbal abuse and physical abuse. Experience teaches people that verbal abuse may simply be the precursor to physical abuse.

### **Experiences of Homophobic Violence**

Perhaps not surprisingly fewer respondents had experienced homophobic violence than harassment, but 103 people (55% of the total) reported that they had been subjected to some form of violence because of their sexual orientation at some time in their life. Seven respondents reported that they had experienced homophobic violence but had no experience of homophobic harassment. The most commonly experienced form of violence was having something thrown at them, although when dealing with just the past two years more people reported experiencing physical assault than being attacked with a missile (Table 14). In total one in four respondents (25%) had been physically assaulted, a similar proportion had been attacked by a missile in the past two years and nearly one in five (19%) had been the target of an attempted assault.

**Table 14: Forms of Homophobic Violence**

	Ever	%	Last 2 Yrs	%
Something thrown	65	35	45	24
Assaulted	56	30	46	25
Attempted assault	53	29	36	19
Spat upon	34	18	25	13
Mugged/robbed	19	10	13	7
Sexual assault / rape	18	10	10	5
Other	8	4	3	2
None of above	83	45		

It is also worth noting that more than one in twenty respondents (5%) had been sexually assaulted or raped in the past two years and one in ten (10%) had been sexually assaulted or raped at some time. All except two of the sexual assaults or rapes were noted by men.

*I was out at a local bar here in Magherafelt 10 years ago. I had a few too many drinks I got a kicking, black eyes, etc by two fellas under 25. I always saw these fellas about. They gave me the kicking because they said I looked gay. I had too many drinks to fight back. I would like to see a gay group in my area. I have been trying to get a group in Magherafelt this last few years, no luck so far (Male 31-40, BT45).*

*Bout two years ago I had 3 men jump me for no reason and each of them had a go at kicking the living daylights out of me, I was leaving my best friend home and I kissed him good night, they must have seen that and decided that they could judge me. After they had done this it was the kindness of a stranger that picked me up and carried me into the city centre to safety, never found out who he was, but he probably saved my life (Male 21-30 BT47).*

These two descriptions of assaults raise a number of points. First the apparently random and unexpected nature of the attack, which was explained or rationalised because the person was perceived to 'look gay' or had 'acted gay'. However, this assumption of assault by a stranger is undermined in the first quote by the fact that the individual saw the two attackers around long after the attack; this suggests that the perpetrators may well have known the victim and waited for an opportunity when he would be an easy target. It is also worth noting that in both cases the victim was attacked by two or more men, a common occurrence according to the survey.

Although reports of multiple incidents of violence were not as common

as in the case of experiences of homophobic harassment, repeat victimisation was nevertheless high.

*Series of attacks on my home, many windows broken, one person injured. Final attack involved a breeze-block being thrown through a window (Male 51-60, BT9).*

Nearly 40% of people who had been subject to homophobic assault had experienced more than one such assault and 8% had experienced six or more such attacks. Similarly more than 40% of respondents who had been subject to missiles being thrown at them, to attempted assault or who had been spat upon had been targeted on more than one occasion. In each of these cases 13% or more had more than six such experiences.

**Table 15: Experiences of multiple acts of violence in the past two years, in percentages**

	1	2-5	6-10	10-20	20+
Something thrown	56	31	7	2	4
Assaulted	61	30	4	4	
Attempted assault	39	47	14		
Spat upon	52	32	16		
Mugged / robbed	77	15	8		
Sexual assault / rape	70	20	10		

In a large majority of cases, 67% of incidents of harassment and 72% of incidents where violence was used, the victim was alone when the incident occurred. However in around 20% of all incidents, the victim was with another person and in a surprising number of cases, nearly 10% of incidents of harassment, four or more people were targeted at once.

**Table 16: Number of Victims**

	Harassment Number	%	Violence Number	%
One	101	67	68	72
Two	26	17	21	22
Three	10	7	3	3
Four or more	14	9	2	2
<b>Total</b>	151	100	94	99

Thirty-three (18%) of the 103 people who reported that they had been victims of violence reported that they had received no injuries as a result

of the incident (Table 17). Of the 82% who had been injured in some way, most received minor injuries with bruises, black eyes, cuts and scratches accounting for over 70% of injuries. However, in 12% of the cases the individual attended hospital and in 3% of cases they were forced to stay in hospital. A similar percentage reported that they suffered broken bones as a consequence of the incident.

**Table 17: Injuries Received by victims of violence**

	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>
Bruise / Black eye	42	22
Cuts / Scratches	30	16
Attended Hospital	23	12
Needed first aid	6	3
Broken bones	6	3
Stayed in hospital	6	3
Other	13	6
No Injuries	33	18

### **Why Classify It As Homophobic?**

We asked respondents why they felt the incident should be classified as homophobic. The largest number, two thirds (66%) of those who had been intimidated and over one half (53%) of those who had been subject to violence, said it was because of the names that they were called. One third (33%) of those who had experienced harassment and more than a quarter (28%) who had been subject to violence said it was because the perpetrator knew them. The next most significant categories given for being intimidated or attacked were because the person felt they were categorised as lesbian, gay or bisexual in some way either because they were in, near or leaving a LGB venue, in or near a known cruising area or because they looked like a lesbian, gay or bisexual person or were with other lesbian, gay or bisexual people.

Table 18: Why do you believe the incident was homophobic?

	Harassment Number	Harassment %	Violence Number	Violence %
Called Names	101	66	48	53
They knew me	50	33	25	28
Near LGB venue	36	24	18	20
I Look LGB	34	22	14	16
With LGB people	31	20	13	14
In LGB venue	12	8	6	7
In/near cruising area	9	6	6	7
Don't Know	3	2	8	9
Other	9	6	10	11

The importance of being identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual, and thus of being harassed or subjected to forms of violence, by being near, or being seen leaving, a clearly known LGB club or bar was confirmed when we asked respondents where an incident had occurred (Table 19). Over 20% of cases of violence and 25% of cases of harassment occurred near, or outside, a LGB venue. It is also worth noting that 8% of people had experienced homophobic harassment in a LGB venue. One man raised this issue in discussing his experiences of straight males associating with gays:

*Some incidents of verbal abuse particularly seem to come from, in my experience, straight men or youths who seem to go to gay venues, or hang around the area, for the express purpose of threatening or causing trouble. I was once, for instance, crossing the road to XXX Taxis, in XXX Street, when a passer-by said, 'You going in here for a taxi?' I replied yes, so he gave me a stream of abuse which included phrases like 'Queer Bastard', 'Stinking Faggot', 'Fucking Pervert' and other similarly charming expressions. Not all of them stop at verbal abuse either as I related earlier. I find security generally very good at gay venues. Any time I have had hassle in a venue, (the Parliament is my local) they have been firmly and quickly dealt with and removed. I am all for straight people coming to gay venues, providing they respect where they are! That's why I go to gay venues, mostly so I can relax and be free from fear of trouble (Male 51-60, BT12).*

This quote clearly illustrates the complex varieties of harassment that might be experienced while socialising in public spaces, whether in bars or in the street. It is also worth noting that harassment in a LGB club or bar can be dealt with more readily, providing adequate security is provided, than in the street or public space. It is therefore not surprising

that the most frequent location overall, both in cases of harassment and of violence, was the street, with 32% of reports of harassment and 38% of reported acts of violence occurring in the street. Furthermore, this percentage increased to 37% and 49% if one adds in figures for other incidents occurring in a public space, such as outside a non-LGB bar or in a park or other open space.

**Table 19: Location of homophobic incidents**

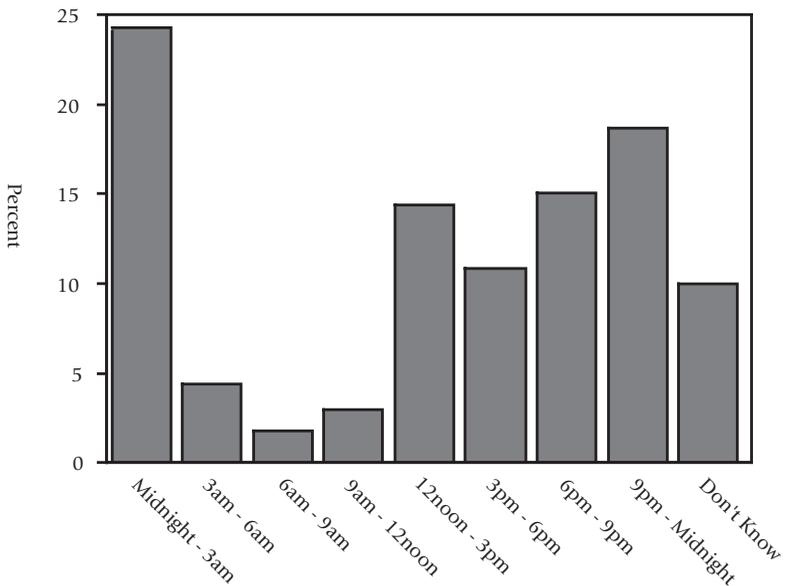
	Harassment Number	%	Violence Number	%
Outside LGB bar	38	25	21	21
At home	21	14	6	6
Street	21	14	20	21
Street near home	19	13	13	14
Work	14	9	4	4
School/College/ University	12	8	6	6
Street near work	8	5	3	3
Bar	5	3	7	7
Outside bar	4	3	6	6
Park / Open Space	3	2	5	5
Leisure Centre / Pool	2	1		
Church	1	0.5		
LGB bar			1	1
Police Station	1	0.5		
Website	1	0.5		
Other	2	1	3	3

A percentage of incidents, however, did not take place in the street nor did they occur in a social setting. In fact 9% of cases of harassment and 4% of cases of homophobic violence were experienced by someone at work and 8% of cases of harassment and 6% of acts of violence occurred in a school, college or university setting. Perhaps most worrying is the number of incidents that occurred in the home with 14% of people reporting being harassed in their home and 6% reporting being assaulted. Some of the earlier quotes have noted how people can be subjected to repeat harassment in their home. Even if an individual is not the immediate victim of an assault, it can nevertheless have a significant long term impact on their sense of personal security.

*I was hosting a party at my house. It was getting late and two strangers (neighbours as it turns out) had been let in. One decided to urinate in my back garden – I asked him to leave, then showed him the back door and his friend the front door. He hurled discarded furniture over the back gate then went around to the front door and punched one of my guests. He called all my guests a wide variety of names and told me that my house was 'marked'. Although the physical assault was not against me, it easily could have been as my guests were in danger. I also had to live with the fear that the attacker would live up to his threats (Male 31-40, BT9).*

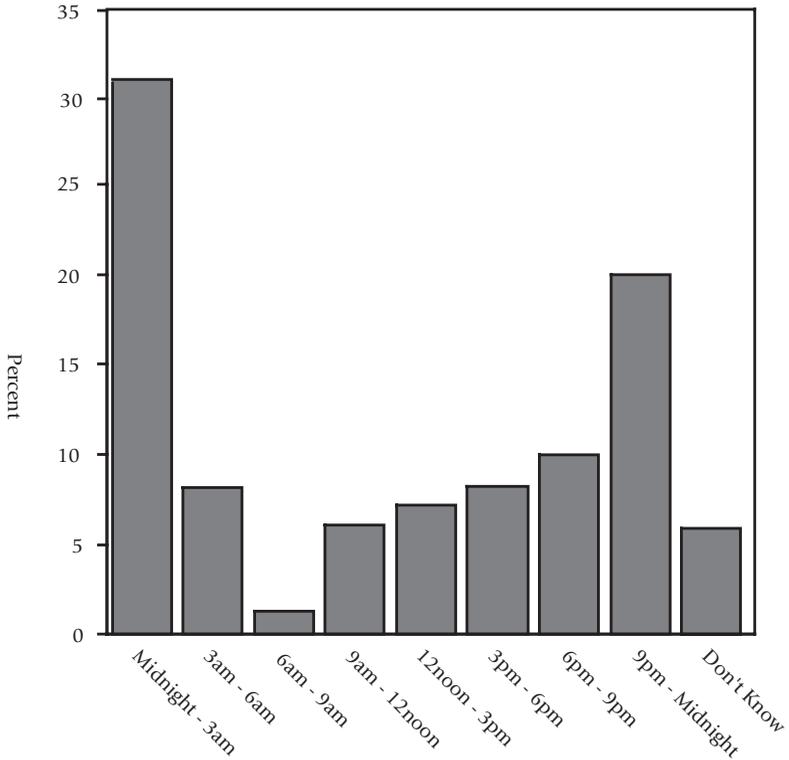
As was the case in the incident described above, most homophobic incidents occurred at night, with 18% of cases of harassment and 19% of cases of violence occurring between 9pm and midnight and 24% of incidents involving harassment and 31% of those involving violence occurring between midnight and 3pm. Figures 3 and 4 indicate the timing of all incidents of harassment and violence respectively.

**Figure 3: Time of Incidents of Harassment**



While most incidents occurred at night, it is worth noting that more than one in four cases (27%) of harassment and nearly one in four cases (23%) of violence occurred during the day between 9am and 6pm, while one in seven cases (14%) of harassment and more than one in ten cases (11%) of violence occurred in the early evening between 6pm and 9pm.

Figure 4: Time of Incidents Involving Violence



## Perpetrators of Homophobic Incidents

In the majority of cases the respondents noted that more than one person was involved in the harassment (Table 20). There was just one perpetrator in only 17% of cases of harassment and in 14% of cases of violence, whereas four or more people were involved in 35% of cases of harassment and 33% of cases of violence.

**Table 20: Number of Perpetrators**

	Harassment Number	%	Violence Number	%
One	26	17	13	14
Two	13	9	20	22
Three	22	15	11	12
Four-Six	36	24	19	20
Seven and above	17	11	12	13
Don't Know	37	25	18	19
<b>Total</b>	<b>151</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>100</b>

In 73% of cases of harassment and 84% of cases of violence a male was the main perpetrator, with females the main perpetrator in 6% and 3% of such cases respectively. In 18% of cases of harassment and 11% of cases of violence both males and females were involved.

*The most serious homophobic incident I have experienced was when I was walking a drag queen friend to a cash machine. Four girls aged 13-16 years of age approached us and started asking my friend questions. One of them asked could she see her wig and when my friend said no she stole it. They gave us verbal abuse when we took the wig back. They hassled us and my friend was quite upset by the time we reached the gay club. All in all we were quite lucky we have not experienced more serious homophobia than this (Male 21-30 BT7).*

Most perpetrators were described as youths or adults, over 50% of cases of violence and harassment were carried out by young people aged between 16 and 25. A further 23%, in cases of harassment, and 30%, in cases of violence, were carried out by adults over the age of 25 (Table 21). Youths and adults were both involved in 13% of the incidents. Children under the age of 16 were identified as the perpetrator in only a small percentage of cases.

**Table 21: Age of Perpetrators**

	Harassment Number	%	Violence Number	%
Child Under 16	7	5	3	3
Youth (16-25)	81	54	47	50
Adult (over 25)	34	23	28	30
Youth and Adult	19	13	12	13
Don't know	9	6	4	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>100</b>

In a large percentage of the incidents the victim saw the perpetrator. In fact there were only 10 cases of harassment and 4 cases of violence where the victim did not see the perpetrator. As Table 22 indicates the largest category of perpetrator is a person (or persons) that the victim has never seen before, this is the case in 49% of cases involving violence and 42% of cases involving harassment. This also means that in a similar proportion of cases the victim had seen the perpetrator before.

**Table 22: Identity of Perpetrator**

	Harassment Number	%	Violence Number	%
Never seen before	65	42	46	49
Seen but not know	23	15	15	16
Local resident	21	14	10	11
Someone known	15	10	11	12
Work colleague	14	9	2	2
Fellow student	12	8	5	5
Neighbour	10	7	7	8
Relative	8	5	2	2
Friend	5	3	1	1
Other	2	2	7	8
Partner	1	0.5		
Did not see	10	7	4	4

In 43% of incidents of harassment and 30% of cases involving violence the perpetrator was someone known to or close to the victim. This category includes work colleagues, fellow students and neighbours as well as relatives and friends. Only one person made any direct comment about intra-family homophobic violence:

*I feel I have been fairly lucky in experiencing only a low level of homophobia. One friend has been beaten so badly she has been hospitalised twice, on one occasion by her older brother. Perhaps if tolerance was taught in schools from an early age it would help combat homophobia (Female 21-30 BT12).*

This woman also reveals something of the fatalism about homophobic harassment that runs through many of the comments when she suggests that she has been 'lucky' in experiencing only a 'low level' of harassment, especially in comparison with that experienced by her friend. However, she also raises the need to tackle the problem, an issue that is addressed in detail later in the report.

The sense of fatalism about homophobic harassment was not shared by everyone who responded. At least one person felt that it was not really a major issue at all:

*I have a harder time being a dissident vegetarian pacifist and atheist in NI than in being queer (Male 60+, BT 30).*

Another man felt that the potential threat of violence was a fact that all people in Northern Ireland had to live with.

*The experience of homophobia in Northern Ireland (compared with my native country France) is more a moral one than any physical manifestation. The moral constraints seem so high, while the physical violence seems a constant 'potential threat' in Northern Ireland regardless of one's sexual orientation (Male 21-30, BT96).*

## **Reporting Homophobic Incidents**

Forty-two people, 26% of those who had experienced some form of violence or harassment, had reported an incident to the police, while 24 (15%) had reported an incident to an LGB organisation (15 people mentioned they had reported to Foyle Friend, 5 to the Rainbow Project, 2 to GLYNI and 1 to NIGRA) and 15 (9%) had reported an incident to a doctor or a hospital (Table 23).

The majority of those who had reported to the police did so either by phoning them or reporting in person at the police station: 21% phoned 999 immediately while 14% phoned the nearest police station immediately, equal numbers of people either went to the police station immediately (17%) or some time later (17%). Other respondents either approached a police officer on the street, delayed phoning the police until some time later or had contacted them through a third party.

**Table 23: To whom did you report an incident?**

	Number	%
Police	42	26
LGB organisation	24	15
Doctor / Hospital	15	9
Housing Agency	6	4
Victim Support scheme	6	4
Other	6	4

When reporting the incident over half the people (53%) of those who contacted the police informed them that they were lesbian, gay or bisexual and in 13% of cases the police raised the issue of sexual orientation. However in 35% of cases the issue was not raised and it is therefore questionable whether the incident would have been recorded as a homophobic incident. Furthermore, according to the respondents only 12% of such incidents were recorded on a homophobic incident report form (Form 80), with 54% being recorded on a standard incident report form and 10% not recorded at all. This again suggests that some of these incidents would not have been recorded as homophobic.

In 35% of cases the police contacted the victim in response to the initial complaint, in one case the respondent reported attending an ID parade and in two cases the victim was aware of further action against the perpetrator. However, in 40% of cases the victim had heard nothing from the police since reporting the incident. When we asked how satisfied they were with the police response to their complaint 56% of those reporting an incident were either very or fairly satisfied, while 44% were either very or fairly dissatisfied.

One man who had reported an incident to the police some time ago, had no complaints about the way he was treated as a gay man but was not happy with the way the police responded to the incident:

*My attack took place prior to Form 80. Police were fine about the gay side, just shite at police work. Ambulance arrived first, my friend followed in their car and passed the attackers but police still didn't lift them (Male 31-40 BT7).*

We also asked those who had reported to another body apart from the police (these included LGB organisations, doctors, housing agencies and victim support schemes) how satisfied they had been with the response they had received. Respondents noted a much higher satisfaction rating in the response from non-policing agencies, over 76% were either very or

fairly satisfied with the response and only 7% were very or fairly dissatisfied.

Just over one third (34%) of those who had reported an incident to the police felt they were more likely to report a future incident to them, while just under one third (32%) felt they were less likely to do so. We also asked people why they either did not report an incident to the police or would be reluctant to do so. The main reasons given were because the respondent did not feel the police could help (28%), did not feel the police would be interested (27%) or because they thought the police would respond in a homophobic manner (23%). The full list of reasons that were given is set out in Table 24.

**Table 24: Reasons for not reporting incident to the police**

	Number	%
Police could not help	52	28
Police not interested	50	27
Police homophobic	42	23
Too trivial	31	17
Not a crime	26	14
Fear of reprisal	25	13
Didn't want police to know sexual orientation	25	13
Homophobia a fact of life	17	9
Didn't want anyone to know sexual orientation	14	8
Private/personal/family matter	12	7
Poor relationship with police	9	5
Too upset	8	4
Not convenient	8	4
Don't co-operate with police	6	3
Other	11	6

Two people elaborated on their reasons for not reporting an incident. In one case deciding not to report was a mixture of concern for her family and fear of paramilitaries:

*I am openly gay, this often causes problems, but I am not ashamed of it. However I must stress that I have not reported assaults due to their involvement in paramilitary organisations and I have to think of my family, otherwise I feel that now I would, if there was sufficient support and services (Female 16-20, BT38).*

However, this woman also indicated a willingness to report a future incident to the police if there was an appropriate level of support services. This also appears to have been the primary factor in influencing another person not to report a homophobic attack:

*A lot of gay lesbian and bisexual people that I know feel like the police just don't care enough about the gay community to do something about all the homophobic hate crimes in Northern Ireland. I think I would have reported my assault if there was a gay or lesbian police officer or counsellor that I could have explained it to. I wouldn't have felt comfortable talking to a straight police officer about what they said and did to me. But I would have come forward if there had been a separate facility available for me to report the incident where I could feel more comfortable (Female 21-30, BT12).*

### **Attitudes and Knowledge of Policing Issues**

We also asked all respondents a number of questions about their general attitudes towards reporting homophobic incidents to the police – what type of incidents they were most likely to report and which they were less likely to; and if they would not report an incident why would they not do so. In each case the ‘in principle’ answer can be compared with practical responses from those people who have experienced homophobic harassment.

These answers reveal that people were most likely to report cases of theft or damage to property (80%), sexual assault (79%) and physical assault (77%) but only around one in four (26%) claimed they would bother to report instances of verbal or written harassment. In practice 31% of those who had experienced any form of harassment had reported this to the police.

We then asked why people would be reluctant to report an incident to the police. The reasons given followed the same order when considered ‘in principle’ as ‘in practice’, but a significantly higher percentage of people cited concerns about police interests and attitudes for being reluctant to report an incident in any circumstances (Table 25). Nearly half the people (45%) would not report an incident because they believed the police could not help in any way and over a third believed the police would not be interested in homophobic harassment (38%) or were homophobic themselves (37%). Perhaps most worryingly one in seven (14%) LGB people believe homophobic harassment is a fact of life and something that has to be put up with.

**Table 25: Reasons would not report an incident to the police**

	<b>In Principle</b>	<b>In Practice</b>
Police could not help	45	28
Police not interested	38	27
Police homophobic	37	23
Fear of reprisal	29	13
Didn't want police to know sexual orientation	22	13
Homophobia a fact of life	14	9
Didn't want anyone to know sexual orientation	7	8
Poor relationship with police	8	5
Don't co-operate with police	5	3

Nevertheless it is worth noting that when people have an actual experience of homophobic violence or harassment they do appear to be more willing to report the incident than they suggest they would. They thus appear less pessimistic of police attitudes and more willing to challenge the notion that homophobia is something they have to put up with in practice.

The survey thus suggests that LGB people are generally cautious about engaging with the police on issues to do with homophobic harassment. This may well be related to the fact that respondents revealed a lack of knowledge of recent police initiatives to respond to the problem and work with the LGB communities to deal with homophobic incidents. Nearly 73% of respondents did not know that the police had a special form for recording homophobic incidents and only 10% had seen the form or had used it, 67% of respondents also said they had no knowledge of the PSNI leaflet entitled *Homophobic Incidents – Protecting Your Rights* and less than 20% had seen a copy.

### Seeking Support

We asked respondents if they had ever sought support from anyone after experiencing a homophobic incident. The most frequently utilised support was a close personal relationship, with 83 people, or 45% of the total, seeking support from a friend, while 42 people (23%) had turned to their partner and 28 people (15%) had drawn upon family members. The next most significant network was the local LGB groups with 26 people (14%) naming one of five projects (17 people had sought support from Foyle Friend, 5 from the Rainbow Project, 2 from GLYNI

and one each from Lesbian Line and Queer Space). This was followed by solicitors, doctors and the police (9%, 8% and 5% respectively) while a small number of people had turned to a passer-by, housing agency, a neighbour, a victim support group or the clergy.

In nearly all cases (93%) people primarily sought emotional support, but many people also cited the need for counselling (17%), medical support (16%), legal advice (16%) and advice on safety and security (9%). It is also worth mentioning that 5% of people sought out self-defence classes after experiencing a homophobic incident, thus perhaps indicating that they were prepared to take a more assertive position if they were harassed in future. However, at least one respondent was critical of the LGB community in responding to the problem of homophobic harassment and violence and suggested that more could and should be done:

*Sadly a lot of things that go on are due to apathy within the gay community. There's not much sympathy even within your own community and that needs to be tackled also (Male 21-30, BT23).*

A small number of people noted that they did not seek support either because they did not know where to get help (4%), did not want anyone to know of their sexual orientation (4%), were too upset (4%) or were worried about getting a homophobic response (3%). One person indicated that a lack of a sympathetic ear was a significant factor in no longer seeking support from anyone:

*Have been attacked by small-minded people that can't really get the concept that there are other people on this planet who have a right to live apart from them. I don't really like talking 'bout things like this, mainly because people always tease me and think its my fault (Male 21-30, BT47).*

The questionnaire also asked people about the impact of their experiences of homophobic harassment (Table 26). Respondents were able to cite as many affects as they wished with the most widely reported factors being fear, stress, anger and depression: 59% of respondents said their experiences had created stress and/or fear, 43% said it had made them very angry and more than one in four (27%) claimed it had made them depressed. Other impacts of being harassed were the need for time off work, medical attention and in nearly one in ten cases (9%) the person had felt the need to move house.

Table 26: Impact of homophobic harassment

	Number	% (of 153)
Stress and/or fear	91	59
Anger	66	43
Depression	41	27
Nightmares	23	15
Time of work	23	15
Medical attention	23	15
No ill effects	20	13
Move house	14	9
Other	11	7

The more generalised homophobia that many LGB people identified as widespread across Northern Ireland can also feed a sense of insecurity, which can impact on people's willingness to come out as LGB. This more intangible impact of homophobia was addressed by one respondent who had no personal experience of homophobic harassment or violence:

*As a 'straight acting' gay man I have never really suffered for my sexuality, though it was a cause of low self esteem when I was 'in the closet'. Being out and the more adept at being out the longer I am out, I find myself more concerned with men who live 'in the closet' more for the fear and isolation of their self imposed 'homophobia'. Being so secretive about something that can be so obvious to others denies people 'in the closet' the choice of courage, confidence and energy for life. I do what I can to help (Male 41-50, BT30).*

This respondent raises issues of low self esteem, lack of confidence and isolation that has been identified in other studies as affecting people's sense of self worth and which in turn can fuel self destructive and/or addictive behaviour as much as more explicit forms of homophobia.

### Perceptions of Safety

We asked people about their perceptions of their personal safety in a number of differing social environments: their home, at work, in both LGB and non-LGB social settings, in the streets near home and outside a LGB venue, and in the street generally during the day and at night. The answers reveal a very distinctive pattern of LGB people's perceptions of their safety. The overwhelming majority of people (90%) said that they felt safe or very safe at home, and a similar large percentage also said that they felt safe in the street during the day (81%), in an LGB venue (81%) and at work (80%), while a large majority also felt safe in the streets near

their home (70%). In contrast only 27% of respondents felt safe or very safe in the street outside a LGB venue or in the street anywhere at night:

*I continue to experience verbal abuse and do fear for my safety when walking through the town at night (Male 31-40 BT47)*

In fact only 52% of LGB people felt safe or very safe in a non-LGB bar, and many people felt uncomfortable in public spaces at any time. A large majority (65%) reported feeling unsafe or very unsafe in the street at night and 61% felt unsafe in the street near a LGB venue, but one in four people felt unsafe in the streets near their home and one in eight (13%) feel unsafe in the street during the daytime. Many people also believe they have a real basis for these fears, 49% of respondents think that it is very or fairly likely that they will be the victim of homophobic harassment in the next year. One consequence is that almost 50% of respondents stated that they worry about their safety 'always' or 'frequently', with another 30% worrying about their safety 'sometimes'.

**Table 27: Perceptions of Safety**

	V. Safe	Safe	Unsafe	V. Unsafe	D/K-N/A
Home	59	31	2	1	8
Streets nr Home	23	47	15	10	5
Work	48	32	5	1	14
LGB bars	34	47	8	1	10
Street nr LGB bar	5	22	34	27	12
Non LGB Bar	8	44	26	14	8
Street at night	3	24	31	34	8
Street during day	26	55	9	4	6

These widespread feelings of a lack of personal safety, particularly in public, means that many people adopt specific strategies to reduce their potential vulnerability to attack or harassment or to reduce the possibility of being identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual (Table 28). Nearly 70% of lesbian, gay and bisexual people said they would never hold hands with a member of the same gender in public, 78% would take steps sometimes or always to avoid appearing to be lesbian, gay or bisexual and 76% would sometimes or always avoid telling someone about their sexual orientation.

*I have only experienced minor homophobia ie being called a 'carpet muncher' etc by some youths on the street (only twice). I do not hide my sexuality generally but do not feel that openly showing my sexual orientation in public*

*would be well received so unfortunately I cannot be affectionate to my partner in public, which I would like (only holding hands! – no snogging – I don't like anybody doing that in my company!!) (Female 41-50 BT7).*

Over two thirds (67%) of lesbian, gay or bisexual people would, on occasion, avoid using public transport at night and over 80% would similarly avoid leaving a LGB social venue alone, with nearly half (44%) never leaving alone because of concerns for safety.

**Table 28: Strategies to avoid being identified as LGB**

	Always Avoid	Sometimes Avoid	Never Avoid
Hold hands in public	69	26	6
Tell people I'm LGB	14	62	24
Appear obviously LGB	36	42	23
Public transport at night	32	35	33
Leave LGB venue alone	44	37	19
Associate with LGB org.	19	24	57

Among the other strategies that people had adopted in an attempt to avoid being harassed or attacked were always driving or using taxis when going out, avoiding straight bars, avoiding looking at men unnecessarily, showing no affection to a partner in public, acting and dressing straight and even trying not to go out at all. However, at least one person took a more pragmatic view, advocating a mixture of strategies and behaviours to minimise the likelihood of being targeted:

*Be assertive and look confident, have keys and mobile in hand or pocket, avoid known trouble areas, awareness of who comes to visit, hug friends goodbye in house, close curtains even if just holding hands inside (Male 21-30, BT28).*

Finally over 40% said that they would avoid associating with an LGB organisation or would not tell someone of their association with an LGB organisation. Interestingly when, later in the questionnaire, people were asked to write down the names of the LGB organisations they knew, only the Rainbow Project was identified by a majority of respondents, although more than one in three people had heard of Cara Friend, Foyle Friend, Queer Space and GLYNI. And while one in five (22%) people had used or were members of the Rainbow Project and Foyle Friend and more than one in six (15%) had used Queer Space, in no other case had more than one person in ten any real knowledge or experience of any of the LGB groups in Northern Ireland. Other groups, organisations or places mentioned were the Butterfly Club, Belfast Pride, LGB Rights, Men of the

North, Gay Men’s Health project, Belfast Out Resource Centre, Out and About, Sunday Scene for Women, Dykes with Babes, Unison L&G Group, Delga, Changing Attitude, Pepe’s Bar, Outrage and Stonewall.

**Table 29: Knowledge of main LGB groups**

	<b>Know Of - %</b>	<b>Member/Used Services - %</b>
Rainbow Project	59	22
Cara Friend	46	10
Foyle Friend	36	22
Queer Space	36	15
GLYNI	34	9
NIGRA	20	3
CoSo	17	3
Lesbian Line	15	2
LASI	8	0.5
QUB LGB Society	5	2

This apparent lack of knowledge of the organised LGB groups suggests a number of issues. On one hand a relatively small percentage of lesbian, gay and bisexual people are actively involved in the politics of the community, and the organised groups are not actually reaching the consciousness of many within the broader community. On the other hand the fact that a relatively high percentage of people who are not connected in any way to an active or campaigning organisation felt impelled to complete the questionnaire suggests that the issue of homophobic harassment and violence is a real issue for people in the lesbian, gay and bisexual communities in Northern Ireland.

## 6. Homophobia, Harassment and Other Issues

In the interviews and discussions with members of the lesbian gay and bisexual communities in Belfast, Derry Londonderry, Dundalk and Strabane and with members of the PSNI who work with the LGB communities, a number of issues related to homophobia and harassment were raised. Many of these complemented and built upon themes addressed in the questionnaire but a small number of new issues emerged as well. In the following pages we group these points into a number of larger themes, however these are rarely discrete categories and thus there is some degree of overlap between the various issues under discussion. The discussion is complemented by selected quotations and comments, which are drawn from comments added to the completed questionnaires.

### Homophobic Violence

There were two broad perspectives about whether homophobic violence was on the increase or not. Some people argued that there had been a general increase in violent attacks on LGB people while others felt that the overall levels of harassment had not increased but there was now a greater use of violence and a greater propensity to use violence in such attacks. In both cases people cited examples of prominent recent attacks on members of the gay community. These include the murder of Ian Flanagan in the Queen's University Playing Fields in September 2002 and the murder of Aaron McCauley in Central Belfast in December 2002. People also offered anecdotes of numerous attacks on men in the Giants Ring and neighbouring areas of South Belfast and of recurrent instances of harassment and violence towards members of the LGB communities in the neighbourhood of the openly LGB venues in the Cathedral Quarter of Belfast and the Strand Road/city centre in Derry.

Some people noted that while many of these attacks were apparently random incidents perpetrated by individual assailants or small groups of youths and men, in a number of areas the attacks seemed to be more systematic and organised. This raised the spectre of paramilitary organisations that were deliberately and persistently engaging in 'queer bashing'.

*I think there is great awareness of where gay men go to look for sex. These areas are targeted by men/youths who want to attack/assault gay men. They see gay*

*men in these areas as soft targets. This I believe is encouraged by some of the paramilitary organisations. I felt that someone would be killed as in the recent death in Barnett Desmone (Male 31-40 BT27).*

A number of interviewees noted that while the focus of attention was on attacks that occurred in the street or other public areas, less attention was being paid to (often low-level, but also persistent) harassment that occurred in the workplace, schools and other educational establishments. It was noted that people could be subjected to homophobic harassment regardless of their sexual orientation, and regardless of whether people were openly or publicly out. Nevertheless such harassment could still have a significant impact on an individual. A number of people cited personal experience or recounted anecdotes of harassment in such situations and they also noted that this type of harassment was considered to be common, widespread and even expected. More worryingly such harassment was rarely reported to any formal authority, and if it was reported it was rarely addressed adequately or effectively.

*It should be stressed that anyone can be a victim of homophobic violence/harassment. A person does not have to be gay to experience this. Much of the bullying (in schools and elsewhere) that occurs is about sexuality. This is used as a weapon against anybody who is different or weak. Large organisations need training about this and awareness raising about personal values and institutional homophobia eg PSNI, teachers, unions, Health workers, youth and community sector (Unsure 31-40, BT6).*

Many felt that some LGB people had an almost fatalistic acceptance of homophobic harassment – it had become part of life for many people and was something that simply had to be put up with. It was common for people to assert that homophobic harassment was considered to be understandable, and even acceptable and was not treated with the same seriousness as, for example, racist harassment.

*As a gay man in a youth work setting I generally feel supported by my work colleagues. Other people in different disciplines are not so fortunate. As a youth worker I feel and have observed how others often assume heterosexuality among young people. Homophobia is very rarely addressed with the youth work curriculum – this should be higher priority. By not addressing issues around sexual orientation is denying all young people a healthier attitude in life and supporting alienation and poor mental health among young gay men (Male 31-40 BT15).*

Others focused upon discrimination within the criminal justice system, noting for example the different laws governing heterosexual and homosexual sexual activity and differences in the legal regimes in England and Wales compared with Northern Ireland (NIHRC 2001). Another example cited was the 'gay panic' or 'Portsmouth' defence that is still used in some cases where a lesbian or gay man has been murdered. Under this defence the perpetrator of a homophobic attack can justify the assault by claiming that the victim had made sexual advances and this had caused revulsion and thus provoked the assault. A brief search on the Internet reveals that the use of this defence is an issue of some concern in many English-speaking countries. Redwood (1999) claims the defence had been used 32 times since 1986 in England, in 20 cases a murder charge had been reduced to manslaughter and in one case a defendant who admitted a killing was completely acquitted.

Others have noted that little publicity is given to homophobic harassment and that a recent consultation document on aggravated assaults identified the issues of racist and sectarian violence as growing problems but did not include homophobic violence within its framework (NIO 2002).

It was claimed that there were still few effective responses to homophobic harassment. The victims were often vulnerable and isolated and while the LGB communities had become increasingly visible in recent years this had not been balanced by an increasing public acceptance. People noted that some police officers were taking a more positive response in working with the communities, but others were all too often perceived as visibly homophobic and not at all sympathetic to the plight of victims.

It was widely felt and emphatically asserted that there was an urgent need for an extensive and sustained education and publicity programme to publicise the scale and significance of homophobic harassment and violence at all levels of society. Homophobic attacks should be treated in a similar manner to racist violence, which was now regarded as being recognised as completely unacceptable by the majority of people in Northern Ireland.

## The Police

Although some people had had bad experiences with police officers in the past and more recently, most people acknowledged that the PSNI had made a considerable effort to engage with the LGB organisations in recent years. A number of people cited some excellent work being done by officers in the Community Involvement Branch (CIB) to build links and mutual understanding and felt that because of this work relationships with the police had improved significantly. However, a number of interviewees were still cautious about working closely with the police. They pointed out that being gay did not stop them being part of the larger Catholic and Protestant communities. Their experiences of policing were thus refracted through more than one perspective and their experiences as Catholics or Protestants provided a counterbalance to their experiences as members of the LGB communities.

There was also some caution that the developments within the PSNI involved a small number of officers and there was thus still a relatively thin veneer of understanding of LGB issues within the police service more generally. Furthermore it was noted that the positive working relationships were largely limited to CIB officers based in Belfast and Derry Londonderry, the only two locations with an organised LGB community.

A number of people recalled a lack of sensitivity among police officers in approaching people at their home when investigating the murder of Darren Bradshaw a few years ago. Others cited complaints of entrapment and targeting of gay men in public sex environments, particularly in the East Tyrone area, as evidence of the diverse attitudes within the PSNI and of their still fragile relationship with the police.

*If police are to increase their patrols in or near areas used by gays, they should not use it as an opportunity to 'crack down' on activities such as cruising. This attitude makes them part of the problem as opposed to part of the solution. I have witnessed and experienced homophobia from police officers this needs to be seriously tackled as it appears to be an institutional problem similar to that experienced by the Met. in relation to racism. As a force they don't yet understand what homophobia is let alone recognise it and deal with it (Male 31-40, BT48).*

A number of ideas were raised about how the relationships with the police could be developed and consolidated. Many felt that there was a need for better and more extensive training of police officers on issues

related to homophobia and engaging with the LGB communities. At present LGB groups are involved in a limited amount of training with new police recruits. Not only would this benefit from greater depth and breadth of issues but there is also a need for training with established officers.

It was also said that the police could do more to keep the LGB communities informed about what they were doing in response to reports of homophobic harassment. Many felt that while the LGB groups were being encouraged to report incidents to the police and to publicise information about prominent incidents, the groups did not get much feedback from the police. It was pointed out for example that figures for the number of homophobic incidents recorded by the police was not even included in the 2001-02 Chief Constable's Annual Report, although this omission has been rectified in the 2002-03 Annual Report.

All interviewees agreed on the need to encourage people to report homophobic incidents to the police and recognised that they could assist in this by acting as an intermediary and by providing third party reporting facilities. They also acknowledged the reluctance of some people to report an incident. This might be because they were not out or did not identify as LGB, because they were engaged in illegal activity when the incident happened or because they were not comfortable in dealing with the police about such matters. These might be particularly pertinent in small towns and rural areas where people might not feel that they could report an incident at the local police station without revealing something of their sexual orientation.

The benefit of creating a specialist or centralised unit within the PSNI for dealing with homophobic incidents was discussed as one way of encouraging more reporting of incidents while at the same time ensuring that personal confidentiality was maintained. It was noted that while CIB officers were doing important work, issues related to the LGB communities was but one of their responsibilities. It was suggested that a specialist unit would enable the police to respond more effectively and sensitively to homophobic incidents, would allow a body of expertise to be built up in dealing with homophobia, within the police and with other bodies and would enable stronger and closer links to be built between the police and the LGB groups.

*A lot of gay lesbian and bisexual people that I know feel like the police just don't care enough about the gay community to do something about all the homophobic hate crimes in Northern Ireland. I think I would have reported my*

*assault if there was a gay or lesbian police officer or counsellor that I could have explained it to. I wouldn't have felt comfortable talking to a straight police officer about what they said and did to me. But I would have come forward if there had been a separate facility available for me to report the incident where I could feel more comfortable (Female 21-30, BT12).*

It was also felt that a central homophobic incident unit (perhaps as part of a larger hate crime unit) might also help to raise the profile of the issue both within the PSNI as an institution and also as a growing area of crime.

Another issue related to this was the presence (or lack of one) of visible LGB police officers within the PSNI. There was no knowledge of any such officers in Northern Ireland but it was felt that the police could do more to actively recruit within the LGB communities and having visible LGB officers would be a step forward.

### **Cruising**

One particular issue that a number of people raised as one where there were continuing tensions with the police was in relation to cruising, copping and the use of public sex environments (PSEs). Although it was acknowledged that there were a number of different views on cruising within the LGB communities, it was nevertheless generally accepted that cruising was a distinctive facet of gay culture and was likely to remain so in the foreseeable future.

The use of PSEs was acknowledged as a practice that placed gay men in vulnerable and potentially dangerous situations, the location of specific cruising areas were well known outside the gay community and they were sometimes targeted by other males hostile to gay men. Furthermore, it was argued that it is not only gays who cruise; PSEs may also be used by men who enjoy sex with other men but who do not identify or who are not out as gay. Men attacked in PSEs may therefore be unwilling to report such incidents to the police because they do not wish to be identified as gay or as sexually active with other men or because they are aware that they have been engaged in illegal activity, in having sex in a public place, and (because of internalised fatalism about homophobic violence) may regard an assault as an 'acceptable punishment'.

Police attitudes to the use of PSEs appear to vary. In the not too recent past, according to interviewees, operations to entrap men in such situations were not uncommon, but more recently the police have taken

a more low profile on such issues and did not engage in entrapment operations.

*I was once 'accosted' by two policemen in broad daylight in Malone Park while out walking my dog. I feel safer walking in what others may consider gay cruising areas, but stress I was not cruising. The older policeman was grossly offensive, the younger merely embarrassed. I was informed that many weird and strange men were walking about – a clear reference to me as a gay male – and they told me to get out of the park immediately or I would be arrested. When I enquired what the charge would be, I was told 'I'll think of one by the time I get to the police station' I left feeling intimidated and have never returned (Male 51-60 BT22).*

Some people noted that the police said that they now only responded to cruising when they received a complaint from members of the public, and would even give warning to LGB groups in advance of any operations. Even so, it was suggested that it was important that police operations should be proportionate to the complaint they received, and this did not seem to always be the case. In some areas outside of Belfast and Derry Londonderry the police still seemed to relish launching operations to target gay men. It was argued that any attempt to provide more effective policing of PSEs should be focused primarily on those men and youths who target gay men rather than on the gay community itself.

*Police should open an office and publicise that they will offer a protective role and (an occasional presence) in gay cruising areas (especially at night) to prevent exploitation, intimidation, mugging of gays by straights in the areas – who know they can get away with it and its an easy target (Male 51-60, BT9).*

It was noted for example that police officers took a very different approach to heterosexuals who they found engaged in sex in public than they did to gays in similar situations. However, at the same time it was accepted that there was a responsibility on gay men and the LGB groups to raise issues of personal safety in such environments and to recognise that cruising in isolated or dark environments at night was always likely to be a dangerous activity unless more extensive precautions were taken than many did at present.

### **Public Safety**

There was a general acknowledgement of the need to raise awareness of personal safety issues within the LGB communities and that while this

applied particularly to men engaged in cruising, this was only one area of activity that required extra concern for personal safety. Some felt that the LGB groups could and should do more to raise issues of personal safety, especially as everybody interviewed admitted that LGB people were vulnerable to attack in public areas, particularly at night in the city centres of Belfast and Derry Londonderry.

A number said that they had developed personal strategies in relation to going to or leaving LGB venues in order to limit the likelihood of being attacked or abused. The police also encouraged individuals to be aware of the potential problems and the taking of greater personal responsibility and have also provided personal safety alarms to some groups to give out. However, the number of alarms available is always subject to budgetary constraints.

It was also suggested that some of the LGB venues should be involved in any discussions about increasing personal safety because arriving at or departing from such a location was identified by a number of people as a particularly vulnerable time. Having said that no one had any particular ideas about what the clubs and bars could do except to provide notices advising people about maintaining personal safety and to develop links with taxi firms who were sensitive to the LGB communities.

## **Education System**

One area where everyone seems to be agreed that there is a need and scope for considerable work on issues to do with homophobia is the education system. All interviewees noted that homophobic bullying was a recurrent, persistent and widespread problem, but was also one that had received little attention. While some work on this issue had been done by Birkett (1998) and a larger follow up study was being planned, there was a clear need for more work to be done on this theme.

A recent report on bullying in schools acknowledges that homophobic bullying is a serious problem for many young people, however it does not quantify the scale of particular types of bullying but rather concentrates on the form the bullying takes. The report also notes that while there is extensive awareness among staff and pupils that homophobic bullying is an issue only 6% of the 120 schools participating in the survey 'made reference to homophobia in their anti-bullying policies' (Collins, McAleavy and Adamson 2002:69). This concurs with the understanding of the interviewees for this study, many of whom felt that most schools and Colleges of Further and Higher

Education prefer to ignore the issue rather than respond positively.

*Majority of my homophobic incidents occurred in school or near school or by so-called classmates who lived near my home. I did report some of these to teachers but they never seemed to act on it. Said it wasn't really serious cos no-one had witnessed (no one was willing to back me up even those who were being bullied too) and as there was no physical injuries. And at times certain teachers perpetuated it by cracking derogatory jokes about being gay in class, little realising they were just re-affirming the bullies' belief they were right. Genuinely some teachers wanted to help but were prevented due to lack of support from school policies as there were none for homophobic bullying at all. Wasn't even recognised (Male 21-30 BT17).*

There was an almost unquestioned agreement that it was very important to raise the issue of homophobia in schools and places of education. There is also a need to have all school policies related to behaviour and bullying acknowledge the problem of homophobia, and for the issue to be raised as part of the broader educational curriculum in a way that cultural and racial differences and issues are being raised at present.

*If pupils were educated in schools about being Gay, Lesbian etc there wouldn't be so much prejudice and hate crimes and it might make more acceptance among all people (Female 21-30, BT23).*

However to date few positive leads had been taken to heighten the issue of homophobia and few of the establishments who had been contacted in relation to issues about sexual orientation and homophobia had been interested in engaging in any constructive manner. Furthermore, it was felt that while much of the decision-making in relation to policies and priorities was retained by the board of governors of each school, progress would be slow.

### **Work within LGB Communities**

While much of the discussions with members of the LGB communities focused on what other agencies and organisations, such as the police, criminal justice and education system had done or could do to respond to homophobia, there was also some awareness of the need for the LGB groups to take a lead on some issues.

It was generally accepted that there was considerable scope for developing a more effective information and publicity campaign to raise awareness of problems of attacks in dangerous areas, recent problems of

harassment and violence and to promote the importance of personal safety. As part of this safety strategy a number of the groups felt they could develop a more effective and co-ordinated approach to encouraging people to report homophobic incidents either to the police or to them as third parties. Although third party reporting does take place already it was felt that if this option was better publicised more people might be willing to report incidents.

There was also some scope for building a wider range of relationships with, for example local communities, the political parties, other statutory bodies and with local authorities. The groups in Derry Londonderry have good relations with many local communities and with some political parties and in this regard appear to be more integrated within the local community-political networks and structures. This appears to be less the case in Belfast. In Derry Londonderry the groups appear to be part of the wider local community while in Belfast they appear to be apart from the wider local community. This closer relationship in Derry Londonderry seems to have been utilised in responding to problems of homophobic harassment. We were told of cases where contacts were utilised within both the republican-nationalist political community and the loyalist-unionist community in a successful attempt to get persistent and recurrent cases of harassment brought to an end.

Some individuals acknowledged that there was some caution about engaging with any of the political parties in case the LGB communities came to be identified too closely with one party more than any other or with one constituency more than the other. However at the same time it was evident that various people had relatively close contacts with individuals in different political parties and there was some cautious sympathy for LGB issues in many parties and this could potentially be built upon.

There was also some recognition that the organised groups could do more to build relationships with some of the statutory bodies that might have some responsibility for engaging with issues related to homophobic harassment. In particular there could be value in building more established links with bodies such as the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, Victim Support and the Citizens Advice Bureaux. Having said that, it should also be noted that the organised LGB community is still relatively small, relatively new and it is also still poorly resourced. If the groups were to try to develop work in this area they would need some level of financial support and some commitment to maintain such support for a reasonable amount of time for projects to be established, delivered and refined.

## 7. Responding to Homophobic Harassment

Collectively the four sources of material drawn upon for this research: previous research, police data, survey findings and the data from interviews with key activists within the LGB organisations, all agree that homophobic harassment is a significant, persistent and recurrent problem for many lesbian, gay and bisexual people living in Northern Ireland. This finding necessarily poses a question: What can or should be done to respond to the problem of homophobic harassment and violence?

A number of ideas were raised in the previous section where interviewees suggested that changes to the way that the police dealt with the issue would help, that the LGB organisations could play a part, but that much work had to be done in changing people's attitudes and reducing tolerance of all forms of homophobia. The final question in the survey asked people to indicate what they thought should be done to combat homophobic harassment in Northern Ireland. They were offered a list of options, as well as space to add their own ideas. The answers are summarised in Table 30.

**Table 30: Combating homophobic harassment**

	%
Education for acceptance in schools	91
Public awareness raising	87
Schools should tackle homophobic bullying	83
Better ways of reporting incidents	67
More sympathetic police	62
More sympathetic local councils	61
Higher profile for Community Involvement Officers	55
More police on streets near LGB venues	54
Online reporting of homophobic incidents	50
Telephone help-line for victims	47
More discussions in LGB community on safety	45
More CCTV cameras	44
More assertiveness training	38
More police in cruising areas	31
Self defence classes	30
Personal alarms	20

It is perhaps not surprising that the highest percentages of respondents gave more support for work through the education system rather than through the policing system. In order of preferences the findings suggest the priorities should be focused around the following broad themes: education, reporting incidents, policing, support for victims and personal safety. Many of these issues were also raised in the interviews as major areas that need to be addressed. These issues and suggestions also feature prominently in many of the other studies that have focused on homophobic harassment. The suggestions made in the questionnaire thus form the basis for our recommendations for future action to respond to homophobic harassment. However, these suggestions are augmented by ideas raised in the interviews both with actors within LGB organisations and people from within the statutory sector.

### **Recommendations for Further Action**

- 1 Developing A General Campaign Of Awareness Around The Themes Of Homophobia And Homophobic Violence.** Homophobia is perceived by many LGB people to be a widespread problem within Northern Irish society. Many LGB people believe that homophobia is still regarded by many as an acceptable prejudice. Addressing the problem of homophobic harassment and violence needs to be done as part of a broad programme of education and information if there is to be any effective change in public attitudes. This should perhaps be led by the Equality Commission, who are already developing their work in relation to sexual orientation issues, but should involve a wide spectrum of society including action from all political parties.
- 2 A Task Force On LGB Issues.** Following on from the previous recommendation one way of initiating such a programme would be to establish a task force with responsibility for identifying a broad range of issues that need to be addressed in relation to the LGB(T) population in Northern Ireland and making a series of policy recommendations for government and statutory bodies. The Task Force could be similar to the LGB Advisory Committee established by the Equality Authority in Dublin or could be asked to produce a document similar to the OFMDFM Race Equality Strategy Consultation Document.
- 3 Introduction Of Hate Crime Legislation.** The NIO recently consulted on the option of introducing hate crime legislation covering racist and sectarian attacks. Although there is some question of the efficacy of such legislation it is accepted that it does at least

indicate that such actions are unacceptable and illegal. A significant gap in the consultation document was the non-inclusion of homophobic harassment. If any hate crime legislation is to be introduced in Northern Ireland it should include homophobic harassment within its framework. This would be a powerful signal that homophobia is no longer an 'acceptable prejudice'.

- 4 **Improving The Systems For Reporting And Recording Homophobic Incidents.** There was a general acceptance that people should be encouraged to report homophobic incidents to the police. But there could be improvements in the current system. These could include on-line reporting, wider options for third party reporting, and centralised reporting within the PSNI.
- 5 **Improved Information From The PSNI.** It was also noted that there was a need for more information to come out of the criminal justice system, both in terms of numbers and patterns of incidents and the variety of police and criminal justice responses to homophobic incidents. Some police services, such as Greater Manchester, West Midlands and Metropolitan Police produce detailed annual statistics and analysis of homophobic harassment either as a stand alone report or as part of a wider annual review of hate crime. The PSNI should consider producing such a report, which need be little more than a simplified version of Section 3 of this report.
- 6 **PSNI Hate Crime Unit.** The PSNI should consider creating a specialist unit with responsibility for all forms of hate crime, including homophobia, racism, and sectarianism. Such units have been created in other UK police organisations and would be one way of rapidly consolidating and extending the existing expertise in responding to these issues.
- 7 **Increasing Awareness Of Homophobia Among Police Officers.** There was recognition of the improvements in the work of the PSNI in building relationships with the LGB organisations. However, there was also an agreement that this work was only at the beginning and in particular there was a need to extend an understanding and awareness of LGB issues and homophobia throughout all sections of the police service. This would need to be done within the police training programme. A start could be made in increasing the level and quality of training on homophobia and LGB issues in training for new recruits to the PSNI. This should be done in consultation and conjunction with the LGB organisations.

- 8 **Increasing Awareness Of Homophobia Among Local Authorities.** There was an assertion of the positive role that local authorities and other statutory bodies could or should play in raising awareness of homophobia, responding to homophobic harassment and building links with local LGB groups and individuals. This might be particularly significant in areas outside Belfast and Derry Londonderry, where there is little public support for or representation of LGB people.
- 9 **The Issue Of Homophobic Bullying Should Be Raised Within And Through The Education System.** This recommendation includes recognising the need both to respond to a specific problem – homophobic bullying – and also the desirability of utilising the curriculum and the education system to raise awareness of a whole range of general issues around sexual orientation, discrimination and respect for diversity and difference. Many people felt that the issue of homophobia had to be addressed at a very early age and the school system was the obvious place for this. However, issues related to homophobia should also be raised in Colleges of Further and Higher Education and within the curriculum of teacher training.
- 10 **Schools Should Be Required To Record Cases Of Homophobic Bullying.** All schools are now required to have an anti-bullying policy. In developing such policies schools should take into account the widespread nature of homophobic bullying. As part of this process schools should be required to record all cases of bullying and where possible to identify the nature of that bullying. This information should be supplied to the Department of Education on an annual basis.
- 11 **Provision Of Greater Levels Of Policing And / Or Surveillance In And Near LGB Social Venues.** There was some demand for the provision of more safety and security in and around LGB social venues. Some people favoured more street patrols by police officers while others preferred the idea of CCTV cameras. These options should be explored by the PSNI, local authorities and the LGB organisations. Discussions should also include managers of LGB venues to explore how they can contribute to increasing safety in and near such locations.

**12 Provision Of More Support For Victims Of Homophobic Incidents.**

There was also clearly a need to be sensitive to the needs of the victims of homophobic harassment and to provide a broader range of support services. This could be done through extension of the existing help-line services, by working through bodies such as Victim Support or the Citizens Advice Bureaux or through the development of new programmes from within the LGB sector.

**13 Increase Awareness Of Issues Of Personal Safety And Self-Protection Within The LGB Community.** There is also clearly a role for the LGB groups to work in conjunction with other relevant bodies such as the police and the social venues to develop a strategy to raise awareness of personal safety issues and to develop an information or training programme for people within the LGB communities.

**14 Increase Resourcing For LGB Organisations and LGB Issues.** Many of these recommendations will require greater activity from within the LGB organisations and the broad LGB constituency. This will need to be resourced. Apart from the Rainbow Project the LGB organisations are largely run on voluntary labour and are poorly resourced, and this limits their capacity to be pro-active in raising issues pertinent to them and to responding to policy developments. Over recent years greater recognition has been given to the increasing ethnic diversity in Northern Ireland and greater resources have been made available to the minority ethnic groups and communities. Similar acknowledgement of LGB issues needs to be made by the devolved administration and local funding bodies and more funding needs to be made available for this constituency.

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## Appendix

### Age of Respondents

	Number	%
Under 16	1	0.5
16-20	29	15.6
21-30	72	38.7
31-40	53	28.5
41-50	19	10.2
51-60	9	4.8
60+	3	1.6

### Religious Background

	Number	%
Roman Catholic	103	55.4
Church of Ireland	24	12.9
Presbyterian	23	12.4
None	7	3.8
Methodist	5	2.7
Church of England	3	1.6
Jewish	3	1.6
Baptist	2	1.1
Salvation Army	2	1.1
Atheist	2	1.1
Agnostic	1	0.5
Buddhist/Humanist	1	0.5
Church of Christ	1	0.5
Church of God	1	0.5
Church of Scotland	1	0.5
Free Presbyterian	1	0.5
Fruit	1	0.5
Mixed RC/Protestant	1	0.5
Pagan	1	0.5
Pentecostal	1	0.5
Quaker	1	0.5
Secular Education	1	0.5

### Neighbourhood Make-up

	Number	%
Mainly Catholic/Nationalist	71	38.2
Mainly Protestant/Unionist	49	26.3
Significantly Mixed	58	31.2
Not Sure	8	4.3

### Where do you live?

	BT	Number	%
Belfast	1-17	80	43.5
Derry Londonderry	47-48	37	20.1
North Down	18-23	15	8.1
Newtownabbey/Mid-Antrim	36-43	13	7.0
Ballynahinch/Lisburn	24-28	9	4.9
South Armagh/South Down	30-35	7	3.7
North Coast	51-56	5	2.6
Armagh/Craigavon	60-66	4	2.0
East Tyrone	45 & 71	4	2.0
West Tyrone	78-82	4	2.0
Fermanagh	74, 92-93	3	1.8
Not Given		5	2.6

### Living Situation

	Number	%
With Parents	57	30.6
Alone	51	27.4
With a Partner	43	23.1
With Friends	17	9.1
With Other Tenants	11	5.9
Live with Children	10	5.4
Other Accommodation	3	1.6
Live with Wife	1	0.5

**Employment Status**

	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>
Full Time	92	49.5
Student	51	27.9
Part Time	20	10.8
Unemployed	16	8.6
Long Term Sick	11	5.9
Self Employed	7	3.8
Retired	3	1.6
Disabled	1	0.5
Other	2	1.1

**Educational Qualifications**

	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>
No Formal	11	5.9
O Level / GCSE	39	21.0
A Level or equivalent	39	21.0
NVQ / BTEC	25	13.4
HND / Degree	65	34.9
Other	7	3.8

**Average Earnings**

	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>
Less than £4,999	58	31
£5,000 - £9,999	33	18
£10,000 - £14,999	34	18
£15,000 - £19,999	24	13
£20,000 - £24,999	26	14
£25,000 - £29,999	7	4
Over £30,000	4	2

The issue of homophobic violence came to the fore in late 2002 as a result of the murders of Ian Flanagan and Aaron McCauley in Belfast. However, the issue is a much more widespread and varied subject than such cases of violent assault might suggest. Homophobic harassment involves attacks on lesbian, gay and bisexual men and women, as well as on people perceived to be lesbian, gay, bisexual or simply different. It includes diverse forms of physical assault, harassment, verbal abuse and bullying. It takes place in people's homes, in the street, in the workplace, in schools and in social settings. Homophobic harassment can have a pernicious effect on the victim's sense of self, their confidence and their health.

This report draws upon police data, on the findings of a survey and from interviews with members of the lesbian, gay and bisexual communities to provide detailed information on the scale and impact of homophobic harassment in Northern Ireland. It reviews the current responses of a number of statutory bodies and makes a broad range of recommendations that would represent positive steps in developing an effective response to counter what has been described as 'the last acceptable prejudice'.



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