

Homophobic Crime in London Press Release

Official records of homophobic crime incidence are not adequate

- The incidence and nature of homophobic crime in London have never been systematically recorded or analysed. Police records only account for incidents that are actually reported as homophobic, either by victims themselves or 3rd party witnesses. This does not tell us about crime that is reported but not identified as homophobic, or homophobic crime that goes unreported to the police.

A study by Stormbreak, a specialist lesbian and gay market research agency, shows homophobic crime in London to be widespread

- To fill in this important gap in information, Stormbreak, a specialist research agency in lesbian and gay issues, conducted a survey in 2003/4 amongst 521 members the London lesbian and gay community.
- The research uncovered that as many as 45% of lesbian and gay Londoners had at some point experienced a homophobic crime.
- Whilst for 39% of London gays this had amounted to verbal abuse only, 20% (or 1 in 5) had been victims of an actual physical assault.
- The large majority (72%) of lesbian and gay Londoners also knew of friends or acquaintances who had experienced homophobic crime.
- Consequently, it is not surprising that most lesbian and gay Londoners were found to take some form of preventative action in the course of their daily lives to avoid homophobic attack.
- Homophobic crime rates do not appear to be declining; 28% (more than 1 in 4) of lesbian and gay Londoners had experienced a homophobic crime in the past year.

Most homophobic crime is not reported to the police

- Most homophobic crime goes unreported. Only 1 in 3 homophobic crime victims had reported an incident to the police. Of those who had reported an incident, 1 in 4 did not feel they had been able to identify it as homophobic to the police. On a positive note, the majority of those who had, found the police sympathetic towards them (even if this still leaves a substantial minority who had not found this to be the case).

Perceived police ineffectiveness and poor attitudes towards lesbian and gay people are barriers to reporting homophobic crime

- The main reason for not reporting homophobic crime was because the incident had been considered insufficiently serious. Commonplace verbal abuse, for example, was hardly ever reported. This suggests that the London lesbian and gay community simply puts up with insults, threats and ridicule in public and (as often identified) in the workplace as a fact of everyday life. Perceived police ineffectiveness to solve crime, negative attitudes towards lesbian and gay people and (the related) fear of disclosing homosexuality to the police have also emerged as main barriers to reporting homophobic crime.

Commentary

Tony Hoare, managing director of Stormbreak, made the following comments on the survey findings:

Whilst London is probably the easiest part of the UK where it is possible to be 'out', the majority of gay people living in the capital still feel they have to guard against homophobic attack.

It comes as almost no surprise that experience of verbal abuse is so commonplace; but it is a real indictment that substantial numbers of Londoners have been physically attacked just for being gay.

Recent police efforts and gestures towards the gay community, particularly the establishment of dedicated lesbian and gay liaison officers, are appreciated. However, it is apparent that additional bridge building needs to be undertaken to encourage reporting on homophobic crime.

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