

Violence Prevention Today

No. 2 Violence Against Lesbians and Gay Men

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As noted in the report of the National Committee on Violence, *Violence: Directions for Australia* (1990, Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra, p. 42), there has been little research on the issue of bias-related violence, particularly violence based on sexual preference. However, *Violence against Lesbians and Gay Men* indicates the prevalence of this worrying form of violence and suggests preventive strategies. The removal of bias against lesbians and gay men is the basis for preventing violence against this section of the community.

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Director

In Sydney in 1991 a gay man was beaten to death by a group of young men, most of whom were still at school. Having decided to "beat up a fag" they found his phone number on a toilet wall in a park and deliberately encouraged him to come to the park, where they bashed him to death (Birmingham 1991).

Three men who lived next door to a lesbian couple, subjected the women to a four month period of verbal and physical harassment. The harassment included threatening phone calls and graffiti attacks. The women felt nothing could be done to stop the harassment and did not seek assistance (The Lesbian And Gay Anti-Violence Project 1992).

In Adelaide in January 1993 attacks were made by gangs of men on two Adelaide nightclubs. Groups of between 8 and 14 men entered the premises and began shouting "you're all f. . . poofers" among other abuse. They assaulted people at random and caused damage at both premises (Brother Sister 1993).

Crimes of hate are perpetrated against all "minority" groups in Australian society. An appreciable proportion of the population are

abused, threatened or assaulted at some time during their lives because of their race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, or sexual preference: not to mention the victimisation of women, a category which is usually, and perhaps mistakenly, excluded from discussions of hate crime. The root of much prejudice is the inability to tolerate difference and those who are prejudiced against one group of people tend to be prejudiced against others as well. Accordingly, there is likely to be considerable overlap between the perpetrators of violence against religious, ethnic or racial groups and the perpetrators of violence against lesbian women and gay men (Ehrlich 1990).

Anti-lesbian/gay violence is one form of *hate crime*. Hate crime refers to crime, most commonly violence, motivated by prejudice, bias or hatred towards a particular group of which the victim is presumed to be a member¹. As such, hate crime is generally directed towards a class of people; the individual victim is rarely significant to the offender and is most commonly a stranger to him or her. Finn & McNeil (1988) point to the symbolic character of hate crime when they define it as words or actions designed to intimidate an individual because of his or her race, religion, national origin, or sexual preference. Thus hate crime represents a greater challenge for the

¹For the purposes of this paper the terms *hate crime* and *bias crime* will be treated as being inter-changeable.

criminal justice system than crimes which do not involve prejudice because it is intended to intimidate all other people who belong to the same grouping as the victim; the fear it generates can victimise whole sections of society.

Violence against lesbians and gay men is often random and brutal. A powerful message of hatred and intolerance is sent to all lesbians and gay men whenever someone is attacked because of their sexual preference. Violence is considered to be anti-lesbian or anti-gay when its victims are chosen because they are believed to be homosexual (Harry 1990). All lesbians and gay men are at risk, as well as heterosexuals who may be *perceived* to be homosexual. Anti-lesbian/gay violence ranges from murder and assault through to abuse and harassment.

Recent research has uncovered a disturbing level of such violence in Australia (GLAD 1991; GLAD forthcoming) and there is evidence to suggest that it is escalating (NSW Anti-Discrimination Board 1992). The severity of anti-lesbian/gay violence has been recognised in overseas jurisdictions. For example, an investigation into hate crime commissioned by the United States Department of Justice concluded that lesbians and gay men may be the most-often victimised groups in that country (Finn & McNeil 1987). Yet, in Australia, hate crime against the lesbian and gay population has received very little public attention: an absence of concern which signifies the widespread degree of anti-homosexual bias in our society. Research, debate and prevention strategies generated by the lesbian and gay communities are notable exceptions.

The advent of the HIV/AIDS virus has added a new dimension to anti-lesbian/gay sentiment: giving many attackers an excuse for venting their biased attitudes and deep-seated loathing (Comstock 1991). Thus HIV/AIDS has been used to rationalise discrimination and violence against gay men in particular.

This paper will present current research findings on the prevalence and nature of anti-lesbian/gay violence and consider potential prevention strategies. However, it is

not possible to understand such violence without examining the cultural context in which it is committed and perpetuated.

Prevention measures which fail to take into account the paramount role played by the Australian cultural climate in the perpetration of this violence will be unable to achieve more than a superficial impact.

CULTURAL CLIMATE

The Streetwatch Implementation Advisory Committee (1992), a committee constituted by government and community representatives in New South Wales, concludes that anti-lesbian/gay violence is a problem with its roots in the way in which Australian society views homosexuality. Homosexuality is ridiculed, feared, despised and surrounded by myth. The Committee states,

While the fact that violence is a crime and not acceptable is generally understood by most young people, gay bashing is often not perceived in the same way. It is as though by hiding the existence of homosexuality and silencing informed discussion about it, we've allowed young people the freedom to believe that violence against gay men and lesbians is condoned. Gays are considered acceptable targets (p.4).

In Australian society non-heterosexual forms of behaviour and identity are denigrated, stigmatised or denied. Negative attitudes towards lesbians and gay men are the rule rather than the exception. While there are some indications that extreme prejudice is becoming less widespread, as recently as 1989 an Australia-wide survey found that many Australians did not believe that lesbians and gay men have a right to equality with other members of our society. For example, 54 per cent of Australians believed that homosexual couples should not receive the same level of social rights and benefits as heterosexual couples; 47 per cent believed that it should not be illegal to discriminate against a person because they are

homosexual; and 38 per cent still believed that homosexual acts in private should be illegal (Roy Morgan Research 1989).

More extensive survey work undertaken in the United States reveals that, in 1987, 82 per cent of the population believed homosexuality to be "always wrong" or "almost always wrong". The New York State Governor's Task Force on Bias-Related Violence (1988) reports that one of the most alarming findings in their youth survey was the openness with which young people expressed aversion and hostility towards lesbians and gay men. Students were quite emphatic about their dislike for lesbians and gay men, frequently making violent, threatening statements. The strongest negative reaction towards any minority group was directed towards lesbian women and gay men.

The belief system which allows homosexuality to be stigmatised, denigrated or ignored is known as *heterosexism*. Violence against lesbians and gay men is seen to be a logical, albeit extreme, extension of the heterosexism which pervades our society (Herek 1990). Like racism and sexism, heterosexism is sustained and perpetuated through societal customs, institutions and individual attitudes and behaviour. Accordingly, Herek (1990) asserts that heterosexism is like the air we breathe: ubiquitous and barely noticeable.

Cultural heterosexism is evident in religious, legal, medical and media institutions throughout contemporary society and history. In a multitude of ways these societal institutions have contributed to a cultural climate where homosexuality has been outlawed and condemned or rendered invisible or problematic (Blumenfeld 1992; Herek 1990; Wotherspoon 1991). While there is no denying that each of these institutions has recently begun the process of de-problematising homosexuality, our cultural climate is still very much one where homosexuality is condemned and at best, barely tolerated.

This cultural climate provides the necessary ideological support for individual attitudes of prejudice.

These attitudes vary along a continuum ranging from acceptance, to tolerance, to aversion, and finally, to fear and hatred. Extreme feelings of fear towards homosexuality, which tend to manifest in abhorrence, are known as *homophobia*.²

Habits of prejudice are believed to be communicated within the family and people frequently develop attitudes similar to those who are primarily responsible for their socialisation (Ehrlich 1990; State Governor's Task Force on Bias-Related Violence 1988). Thus Herek (1990) states that children learn what is acceptable and desirable, and what is *queer* at a very young age. While a young person's family may facilitate the development and transmission of prejudice, larger social forces legitimate certain groups as appropriate targets for the expression of prejudice. Thus the maintenance and expression of anti-gay prejudice is possible primarily because it is in keeping with social norms (Ehrlich 1990). This prejudice is the basis of violence against lesbians and gay men.

Perpetrator motivation

While heterosexism and homophobia provide the foundations for anti-lesbian and gay prejudice they do not, on their own, explain the commission of the violence. The chief perpetrators of anti-lesbian/gay violence are males. To understand why anti-lesbian/gay violence is selected over other violent or non-violent acts it is necessary to consider gender roles and expectations in modern western society. Harry (1990) argues that in many male adolescent groups young males are constantly pressured to prove their commitment to the male gender role. Thus, in the "rather primitive" eyes of the male adolescent, sexual and violent acts are the two major means through which they can prove their male commitment. Bashing gay men is a

nearly ideal solution to the status needs of the immature male: it is immediate; it provides direct and corroborated evidence of one's virility; it involves minimal risk of arrest or injury; and it is sexual because it reaffirms one's commitment to sexuality exclusively in its heterosexual form. Thus the victim serves, both physically and symbolically, the sexual status needs of the offender. Groups of young men who wish to boost their "masculinity" in each other's eyes may seek out gay men to assault. Alternatively, anti-gay violence may be committed in the course of other recreational violence (Comstock 1991). Anti-gay violence allows the young male to affirm who he is by demonstrating who he is *not*. Quite clearly the value of this affirmation relies on heterosexist assumptions which dictate that it is undesirable to be homosexual.

As the section below on Characteristics of Violence indicates, perpetrators of this form of violence tend to be young, adolescent males. However, there appear to be some important differences between anti-lesbian and anti-gay violence. Anti-lesbian violence which is committed by older men, men acting alone, or men who are acquainted with the woman (Lesbian and Gay Anti-Violence Project 1992) cannot be adequately understood in the context of adolescent male aggression and group behaviour. Violence against lesbians must also be understood as a form of retribution for women who refuse to conform to a conventional "feminine" gender role: a role which presupposes heterosexuality and reproduction. A strong belief in the sexual entitlements of heterosexual men and the subordinate status of women appears to motivate some men to attack lesbian women on the basis of the women's apparent rejection of their "appropriate" role. Thus a study into anti-lesbian violence in New South Wales concludes that lesbian women are actually being punished for their sexual autonomy (Lesbian and Gay Anti-Violence Project 1992).

Sexual norms and expectations are based upon gender conventions. These conventions prescribe roles, virtually from birth, for our sense of what is "masculine" and what is

"feminine" in thought, image and behaviour (Harry 1990). Thus the victim may be dehumanised for having violated gender norms. Perpetrators are so convinced of the superior nature of heterosexuality that violation of this norm is considered justification for punishment (Ehrlich 1990).

PREVALENCE OF ANTI-LESBIAN/GAY VIOLENCE

Violence against lesbians and gay men is not a new phenomenon. In recent history the most notorious and systematic example of such violence was the Nazi extermination of homosexuals in Germany from 1935 to 1945 (Comstock 1991). In Australia the increased visibility of lesbians and gay men in the years following World War II brought with it ever-escalating incidents of violence. Both the public and the police stand accused of such violence (Wotherspoon 1991).

A recent Australian study, undertaken by Gay Men and Lesbians Against Discrimination (GLAD forthcoming), surveyed 1,000 lesbians and gay men in Victoria in order to determine the degree of violence and discrimination experienced as a direct consequence of sexual preference. The major results of this survey, in relation to violence, reveal that:

- 70 per cent of women and men have experienced physical abuse, threats of violence or verbal abuse in a public place;
- 36 per cent of women and 39 per cent of men reported being threatened with violence;
- 11 per cent of women and 20 per cent of men reported being assaulted;
- 12 per cent of women and 18 per cent of men reported being harassed by the police, including 6 per cent of men and 2 per cent of women who reported being physically assaulted by the police.

²The term *homophobia* has recently gained popular usage to denote the wide range of anti-homosexual feelings, behaviours and institutional practices referred to here as heterosexism. In this paper *homophobia* will be used in its traditional sense to refer to an extreme hostility towards homosexuality.

The survey concludes that verbal abuse and bashing are part of being gay or lesbian and being in a public place (GLAD forthcoming; GLAD 1991).

The GLAD survey documents public violence only. While gay men are most likely to be victimised in the street, there are indications that lesbian women may experience higher rates of violence in less public locations. For example, research undertaken by the Lesbian and Gay Anti-Violence Project in New South Wales found that a third of attacks against lesbians occur at the woman's home or place of work or study (Lesbian and Gay Anti-Violence Project 1992). In addition, Australian and overseas research suggests that violence and abuse by family members is also a problem, particularly for young lesbians and gay men (Barbeler 1991-92; Hunter 1992).

Research into anti-lesbian/gay violence has been ongoing in the United States for a number of years and the results of this research offer support for the Australian data, which is still sparse. Berrill (1992) reviews 21 surveys which have investigated anti-lesbian/gay violence in the United States. Although survey results varied, the median proportion of lesbians and gay men who had experienced verbal harassment was 80 per cent; 44 per cent reported threats of violence and 17 per cent had been physically assaulted. In addition, 33 per cent of survey respondents reported being chased or followed; 24 per cent had been pelted with objects; 19 per cent had experienced vandalism; and 13 per cent had been spat upon.

Much less is known about the prevalence of anti-lesbian/gay homicide. Whilst such murders have been reported in Australia, it is not possible to know the exact numbers involved. The Lesbian and Gay Anti-Violence Project in Sydney estimates that at least 12 such murders have occurred in New South Wales since 1990 (*The Age*, 6 February 1993). In the United States a total of 15 homicides reported to the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force during 1989 were classified by police or local organisations as unambiguously anti-gay or lesbian (National Gay and Lesbian Task

Force 1990). An additional 45 homicides were categorised as "gay related", which means that the sexuality of the victim appears to have been a relevant factor but motivation was uncertain and anti-gay prejudice was not clearly manifest. It has been noted that anti-lesbian/gay murders are often marked by extreme brutality. The Director of Victim Services at a New York City hospital observed that ". . . attacks against gay men were the most heinous and brutal I encountered. They frequently involved torture, cutting, mutilation, and beating, and showed the absolute intent to rub out the human being because of his [sexual] preference" (Berrill 1992, p.25). This observation is consistent with the characteristics of some of the known murders of gay men in Australia (*see* Birmingham 1991).

Characteristics of the Violence

A New South Wales study, which sampled predominantly male victims, has revealed that the perpetrators of violence are usually male (94 per cent). They tend to be young, with 83 per cent estimated to be under 25 years of age, including 43 per cent less than 20-years-old. The perpetrators most commonly act in groups and are usually strangers to the victim (93 per cent). The victim may be alone but often he is in the company of friends or acquaintances (Cox 1990). This study, undertaken by the Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby, also found that gay men are most likely to be attacked in the street or other public places such as a park; street incidents are primarily in areas known to be gay. The majority of incidents occur between 9 pm and 3 am and involve no weapon, apart from fists and feet. In 51 per cent of cases surveyed the victim did not report the incident to the police. Again, these results are fairly consistent with overseas research findings (Berrill 1992; Comstock 1991; Harry 1990).

Due to the greater amount of research into violence against gay men it has frequently been assumed that anti-lesbian violence exhibits

the same characteristics. Evidence is emerging, however, which suggests that although there are consistent commonalities between anti-lesbian and anti-gay violence there may also be major differences between the two. Documenting anti-lesbian violence is more difficult because there are many instances where lesbian women are unable to tell whether violence they experience is due to their particular status as a lesbian or forms a part of more general violence against women as a whole. However, a small amount of research has focused on experiences of specific anti-lesbian violence and, as indicated above, has found that a greater proportion of incidents occur at the woman's home or place of work. In a New South Wales study of lesbian women who had all experienced some form of victimisation, one-third reported ongoing campaigns of harassment. Thirty-eight per cent of the assailants were known to the woman (Lesbian and Gay Anti-Violence Project 1992). Thus lesbians appear less likely to be attacked by strangers than gay men. But as Comstock (1991) points out, they are still more likely than heterosexual women to experience stranger violence. Forty-three per cent of the women surveyed in this study were attacked by a lone assailant and 50 per cent by three or more. Only 10 per cent of the incidents were reported to the police. Approximately two-thirds of perpetrators were estimated to be between 13 and 20-years-old, but 29 per cent were believed to be over thirty. These results suggest that although most anti-lesbian violence is perpetrated by groups of young males unknown to the victim, a considerable proportion of the violence has characteristics which are rarely evident in violence against gay men. Further research is required to confirm the generality of these findings.

While Australian and overseas research suggests that gay men experience higher rates of physical, as opposed to verbal, abuse than lesbians, this may be explained by a number of factors. These include the greater visibility of gay men, especially in gay identified areas of large cities; the fact that women sometimes modify their behaviour to

avoid victimisation; and, as indicated previously, the high level of violence against women generally makes it difficult for lesbian women to determine the motive in many instances of victimisation (Berrill 1992; von Schulthess 1992). It is also important to note that overseas research indicates that lesbians are subject to higher rates of verbal harassment by family members than gay men and report greater fear of violence (Gross, Aurand & Addressa 1988).

Trends

As already stated, there are indications that violence against lesbians and gay men is escalating. The New South Wales Anti-Discrimination Board (1992) has noted the increase in reports of HIV and AIDS related discrimination and crimes against gay men. These are commonly situations where gay men are used as scapegoats for others' fear and prejudice towards the virus.

Research conducted in the United States points to an increase in anti-lesbian/gay violence generally. In their 1988 study of bias crime Finn & McNeil state that "a largely spontaneous wave of homophobic violence seems to be sweeping the nation" (p.3). Police departments have noted increases in the number of anti-gay crimes reported, as have gay and lesbian organisations across the United States. Although changes in reporting and recording practices could be responsible for some of this escalation, recent research by Dean, Wu and Martin (1992) demonstrates that the increase is indeed genuine. Their longitudinal study of the incidence of anti-gay violence and discrimination concludes that young men are at the greatest risk of violence. As a group they experience higher rates of victimisation than their older counterparts did when they were young. Thus gay men who were aged 18 to 24 in 1990 experienced six times more violence than did gay men who were aged 18 to 24 in 1985. Unfortunately, anti-lesbian violence has not attracted the same detailed level of analysis.

Police Violence

It has never been illegal for lesbian acts to take place between consenting adults. Male homosexual acts, however, have only been decriminalised fairly recently in some jurisdictions (*see* section on Decriminalisation). Nevertheless, relations between the police and the lesbian and gay communities are poor. Lesbians and gay men report disturbing levels of harassment, entrapment and violence by police (Cox 1990). In the GLAD survey 24 per cent of lesbians and 35 per cent of gay men report problems ranging from inadequate or inappropriate responses on a matter unrelated to sexuality, through to harassment and actual violence by the police (GLAD forthcoming; GLAD 1991). Australian research suggests that only 10 per cent of lesbians and 48 per cent of gay men report violence perpetrated against them (Cox 1990; Lesbian and Gay Anti-Violence Project 1992). Indeed, police in the United States have suggested that lesbians and gay men are the least likely of any group to report crimes against them (Finn & McNeil 1988).

The Impact of Violence upon the Victim

It has been suggested that hate violence has a greater impact on its victims than do many other forms of victimisation (Ehrlich 1990). The character of victim responses to anti-lesbian/gay violence include psycho-physiological indicators of increased stress such as higher levels of depression and withdrawal, increased sleep difficulties, anxiety, and loss of confidence. For some lesbians and gay men violence may reinforce existing vulnerabilities regarding their sexuality (Ehrlich 1990; Garnets, Herek & Levey 1992). Ehrlich reports that a large number of victims report serious interpersonal difficulties. Many lesbians and gay men do not disclose their sexuality to family, friends or workmates, or only to a select minority of these. In order to receive support from others a victim must disclose his or her sexuality, a disclosure which may become more difficult and more stressful following the attack.

Verbal harassment or abuse may appear to be a trivial offence but, like racial abuse, anti-lesbian/gay abuse can be used by prejudiced people as a way of insisting that the lesbian and gay population remain in a subordinate position. Vilification operates as a reminder of the ever-present threat of physical violence. Thus verbal assault "... challenges the victim's routine sense of security and invulnerability, making the world seem more malevolent and less predictable" (Garnets, Herek & Levey 1992, p.215). Verbal abuse and the threat of physical assault play a huge role in restricting the behaviour of many lesbians and gay men. These restrictions include such practices as avoiding certain areas, dressing a certain way and not being physically demonstrative in public; that is, "passing" as heterosexual. Such restrictions and avoidance strategies reduce the level of control that many lesbians and gay men are able to exercise over their lives.

PREVENTION

Victims of hate violence are chosen because they are perceived to be members of a particular group, not because of who they are as individuals. This is a significant difference between hate violence and most other forms of interpersonal violence (Berk, Boyd & Hamner 1992; Hamner 1992). Lesbians and gay men do not have equal status with heterosexual members of society. The inferior status accorded to homosexuality is the foundation for prejudicial attitudes and the subsequent violence which flows from these sentiments. Violence prevention measures must start by removing the anti-homosexual bias in Australian society.

The most effective means of preventing anti-lesbian/gay violence is to challenge prejudicial attitudes towards homosexuality and to deconstruct hierarchical and repressive notions of gender. To do this we must begin to acknowledge that heterosexism is a system which affects all of us adversely. We must dismantle the assumptions that there is something wrong, immoral or sinful about homosexuality. We must

tackle the myth that a homosexual lifestyle is in some way inferior to that of the heterosexual. In particular, we must eradicate the association of maleness with masculinist concepts of aggression and violence. Simultaneously, we must challenge the assumption that womanhood equates with heterosexual availability. In short, we must remove the belief that lesbians and gay men are acceptable targets for ridicule, harassment, abuse or assault. Violence will fail to serve a function for the perpetrators if the prejudicial attitudes undergirding such violence are no longer supported by societal norms or by religious, legal and political doctrines.

There are a variety of ways in which prejudicial attitudes can be tackled. Changes can be brought into place which improve the status of lesbians and gay men in our society and which send the all-important message that prejudice and violence are unacceptable. In addition, some of the potential strategies discussed below represent immediate violence prevention measures, including interventions in the legal system to ensure that the needs of lesbians and gay men are addressed. Evaluation of all anti-violence strategies will be crucial in order to assess the most effective means of prevention.

Decriminalisation and Anti-Discrimination Legislation

Law reform can send a powerful message to the community. A situation where homosexual practices between men are illegal is clearly incompatible with serious attitudinal change and the eradication of prejudice. Most jurisdictions in Australia have decriminalised homosexual acts between consenting adults with the exception of Tasmania, where homosexual acts are still a criminal offence.

Legislation which makes it unlawful to discriminate on the basis of sexual preference makes a statement to the general community that same-sex relationships are a legitimate and acceptable way of life and that discrimination on the basis

of sexuality will not be tolerated. Australian and overseas research has revealed that discrimination in employment, education, housing and the provision of goods and services is a significant problem for lesbian women and gay men (Blumenfeld 1992; GLAD forthcoming; GLAD 1991; Gross, Aurand & Addressa 1988). Currently five jurisdictions in Australia offer some form of legislative protection and remedy against discrimination. However, in Victoria, Tasmania and Western Australia it is still lawful to discriminate against people on the basis of their perceived sexuality. This situation should be remedied through the inclusion of sexual preference in existing anti-discrimination legislation.

The federal Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission has the power to inquire into and attempt to conciliate complaints of discrimination against lesbians and gay men in employment throughout Australia. However, the effectiveness of this is greatly weakened by the absence of enforcement provisions. No federal legislation exists which enforces sanctions against lesbian and gay discrimination in areas of education, health, housing or the provision of goods and services. Federal legislation (*Disability Discrimination Act 1992*) provides remedies for people discriminated against on the basis of HIV/AIDS status, association or imputed status. This provides some redress for the increasing numbers of gay men who experience discrimination due to HIV/AIDS prejudice and also denounces discriminatory attitudes and practices amongst the general community.

Anti-vilification legislation is an additional means of providing redress against vilifying speech or actions and signals a refusal to tolerate the public denigration of lesbians and gay men. The New South Wales Anti-Discrimination Board (1992) asserts that anti-gay violence has been encouraged by public vilification of gay men, and of gay men with HIV infection in particular. Although the enactment of anti-vilification legislation is currently being debated in New South Wales, to date no Australian state has actively opposed public

vilification of homosexuality through the enactment of such legislation.

Further legislative reforms, such as the legal recognition of same-sex relationships, play an important role in legitimising lesbian and gay lifestyles. Countries such as Denmark and Norway have already provided this form of legal and social recognition.

Education

School education programs have been strongly recommended by all Australian and overseas investigations into this problem (Berrill & Herek 1992; Cox 1990; GLAD 1991; New York State Governor's Task Force on Bias-Related Violence 1988). Two main approaches are required. The first involves the provision of course content which provides accurate information about homosexuality and which affirms positive images of lesbians and gay men (Cox 1990). The New South Wales *Streetwatch Report* recommends that this strategy should also include in-service training for teaching and counselling staff to counteract negative attitudes towards lesbians and gay men.

Specific programs to counter homophobia have also received endorsement. In 1990 such a program was implemented in a New South Wales school where a group of students had been charged with the murder of a gay man and the level of overt homophobia was high. The program involved a one-day intensive session devised to challenge and counter anti-lesbian/gay sentiment among students. It was judged to be successful by those involved (Michels 1991). Specific programs such as this are recommended for countering attitudes which justify and encourage violence against lesbians and gay men.

Schools throughout Australia are beginning to educate students about prejudice but often fail to address anti-lesbian/gay prejudice or violence, thereby perpetuating the myth that some minority groups are acceptable targets for bigotry and violence. The introduction of school material on homosexuality is often

controversial but educational institutions can no longer ignore their responsibility to provide course material which challenges judgmental attitudes and discriminatory behaviour.

The Streetwatch Implementation Advisory Committee Report (1992) also recommends that tertiary training courses for relevant professionals such as teachers, health workers, social workers and psychologists should include appropriate segments on homosexuality, homophobia and anti-lesbian/gay violence.

The Media

Violence against lesbians and gay men is consistently ignored by the mainstream media. While this may be due to the under-reported character of the crime and the hesitancy of many lesbians and gay men to approach the media for fear of reprisals, the media still has a responsibility to report on the crime of anti-lesbian/gay violence. As Berrill and Herek (1992) note, the systematic reporting of this form of hate violence identifies the problem for the public and assists in the development of policies. It also plays a role in redefining social norms that currently permit or encourage anti-lesbian/gay violence and other forms of victimisation.

The Criminal Justice System

The ability of the criminal justice system to deter by imposing harsh penalties has been an issue of controversy for decades. However, to begin to deter anti-lesbian/gay violence the criminal justice system must treat such violence seriously. Hamner (1992) argues that this could be achieved by ensuring that the costs of such violence outweigh the benefits. One means which will allow the courts to take a stronger stance against anti-lesbian/gay violence would be to increase the penalties for the offence. Thus it has been proposed that convictions for hate crimes should attract more severe penalties than if the crime was not motivated by prejudice. For example the NSW Anti-

Discrimination Board (1992) has recommended that legislation be introduced which requires courts to take account of prejudice and increase the penalty accordingly. Finn & McNeil (1988) argue that increasing the penalty conveys an official message to the public that hate violence is a serious offence, not a harmless prank.

The Police

Considerable work will be required to enhance relations between the police and many members of the lesbian and gay communities. Unless this relationship is improved it is likely that the reporting rate of anti-lesbian/gay violence will continue to remain low. Under-reporting of anti-lesbian/gay violence hinders the formation of an accurate picture of this violence. It also stands in the way of perpetrator convictions and contributes to the assumption that anti-lesbian/gay violence can be committed with impunity and mild sanction from the criminal justice system.

The task of improving police and lesbian/gay relations has begun in some jurisdictions. One approach adopted in Victoria has been to establish a police-gay/lesbian liaison committee. Such action is an essential beginning but needs to go much further. The New South Wales police department, for example, has appointed a client consultant (who is not a police officer) to provide a link between the lesbian and gay communities and the police department. Local police/community meetings have been set up in inner city areas of Sydney. Advertising campaigns have been enacted to encourage reporting and to identify the stations with "gay-sensitive" officers. There are early indications that the advertising campaign has led to an increase in the level of reporting and confidence in the police (Streetwatch Implementation Advisory Committee 1992).

Other strategies adopted by the New South Wales police, in conjunction with lesbian and gay communities, have included foot patrols around lesbian and gay venues and the introduction of a mobile police station in a lesbian and

gay identified area of Sydney. The New South Wales police initiated a temporary special task force to investigate unsolved gay murders, and have introduced a segment on lesbian and gay issues in the training academy (Streetwatch Implementation Advisory Committee Report 1992).

The New South Wales Anti-Discrimination Board (1992) recommends that the New South Wales Government, through the Minister for Police, produce a report on the adequacy of the policing of anti-lesbian/gay crimes and recommendations for its improvement. The *Streetwatch Report* recommends that lesbian/gay liaison officers be nominated for every police station in the state and that pilot projects be implemented in selected police stations to establish practices of community policing which will improve service, reporting practices and clear-up rates (Cox 1990).

Prevention strategies of this nature are required in all states of Australia. A number of overseas police departments have made hate crime a priority, thereby demonstrating to the public that they take it seriously. For example, the New York City Bias Incident Investigating Unit was established to investigate and monitor crimes of bias including hate violence against lesbians and gay men. Officers are required to report suspected bias incidents to precinct commanding officers who confirm the motivation and then report the crime to the Bias Unit. Each victim receives a visit from relevant personnel. Police general orders provide detailed procedures for officers to follow in bias crime cases. The unit trains officers, who in turn train other officers (Finn & McNeil 1988). Specific violence units have recently been established by the London Metropolitan Police in areas where gay and lesbian violence has been prevalent. The United States Department of Justice has also established a national hotline for victims of hate crime to lodge a report. The service operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week (National Gay and Lesbian Task Force 1990).

Research and Statistics

Currently in Australia we have no way of knowing how much crime and violence can be categorised as hate crime. Accurate and complete data are needed to understand the severity, pattern, and location of hate crime. This information would assist in the introduction of useful measures to combat violence through the identification of target areas, potential victims and likely perpetrators. Some information has already been gathered by lesbian and gay organisations, but further research is required to generate a more complete picture. Questions of racial, ethnic and class differences should be considered in any future research on anti-lesbian/gay violence.

One means of ensuring that some rudimentary data is gathered on a systematic basis is to require the collection of data for a specified number of years on crimes reported to the police that manifest evidence of prejudice based on sexual preference and other characteristics such as race and religion. In 1990 the United States government recognised the severity of hate crime by enacting federal legislation requiring the collection of such data throughout the whole nation (Hate Crimes Statistics Act 1990). Considerable attention must be paid to questions of definition, categorisation and collection for such legislation to be effective. The New South Wales Anti-Discrimination Board (1992) has recommended the introduction of such legislation on a state basis.

Community Prevention and Education Programs

Violence prevention programs by the lesbian and gay communities have been initiated in Australia. The establishment of volunteer street patrols and anti-violence programs are the main approaches adopted so far. In Sydney, for example, organised street patrols in gay and lesbian identified areas have been introduced in an attempt to make the streets safer for lesbians and gay men at night. The Anti-Violence Project of the New South Wales Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby provides

information, advocacy and counselling referral for victims of violence and members of the lesbian and gay communities. They also document cases of violence and implement education campaigns. The project has received financial assistance primarily from the New South Wales Department of Health to facilitate the performance of this and other important work. The long-term operation and expansion of such projects depends upon government commitment and financial support at both the state and federal level.

Members of the gay and lesbian communities need to have access to full information about prejudicial violence, including the prevalence, risks and likely consequences. Such violence needs to be monitored at a community level and appropriate support services provided for the survivors of violence. Undoubtedly, the lesbian and gay communities are best placed to provide these services and to educate their members. Education and support services already occur in some lesbian and gay communities but much of the work undertaken remains unfunded and programs and services are limited because of this. It is crucial that state governments appreciate the need for funding in this area and commence liaison with their lesbian and gay communities to determine the most pressing needs and the most appropriate means of addressing them.

CONCLUSION

Australian society needs to signify its condemnation of all forms of violence motivated by prejudice. Institutions, customs and attitudes which sustain and perpetuate intolerance towards difference among members of our society must change. The elimination of violence against lesbians and gay men centres on the eradication of anti-homosexual bias and rigid gender norms which permeate Australian culture. Measures to achieve this include: education programs; the reform of out-dated legislation; equality of treatment by the criminal justice system; the establishment of

violence prevention programs; and the close monitoring of violence against the lesbian and gay communities.

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