

Anti-gay violence: summary

The Ministries of Justice and OCW (Education, Culture and Science) asked MOVISIE to perform a survey of current literature discussing anti-gay violence. What is, and is not, known about this topic? What is the situation like in the Netherlands, and how does it compare with four neighbouring countries? How can we work to curb the incidence of anti-gay violence?

Reporting anti-gay violence | Reliable information about anti-gay violence is scarce. In practice, it appears to be nearly impossible to record clear, concise information on anti-gay discrimination. Descriptions and definitions in official police data and victim questionnaires are incredibly varied. In addition, information gleaned from victim questionnaires is not a scientifically sound basis for analysis. The available information contributes to the following picture of the nature and frequency of these incidents.

Official police data | Since 2008, the Netherlands has used a standard police form for reporting discriminatory incidents or hate crimes. As part of this standardization policy, the police also issue annual summaries of anti-gay violence. By November 2008, the police had recorded 1512 discriminatory incidents for 2008, of which 150 (10%) were directed at homosexuals. This figure is much higher than in previous summaries, such as the OM (Public Prosecutor)'s racism monitor. Gay victims of homicides are not nationally recorded as such. The four other countries studied besides the Netherlands (Belgium, Germany, the United Kingdom and Sweden) each have widely disparate levels of reporting.

What victim questionnaires reveal | Victims of anti-gay violence often do not file an official report. Many gays, however, appear to be repeated victims of anti-gay incidents. A significant percentage of those surveyed has experienced discriminatory violence at least once (around 70%), in recent years (between 15-20%) or in the past year (10-12%). In 70% of the incidents, it was a matter of verbal abuse; 20% concerned intimidation, vandalism or (threatened) physical assault; 10% of the cases involved (more serious) physical violence. The majority of anti-gay violence occurs in public places. There is virtually no data available for violence against transgendered people or lesbians.

What we know about the perpetrators | The scant research on perpetrators of anti-gay crimes focuses solely on one specific group: young men who physically assault gay men in public places. These men are certainly not always troubled youth, and often are guilty of other crimes, such as vandalism, theft, breaking and entering, robbery or assault. Anti-gay violence may comprise part of a rite of passage to acquire 'manly' status. An important motive is aversion to homosexuality, where the perpetrators specifically disapprove of: anal sex, effeminate behaviour, visible display of homosexuality, and the idea they might be viewed as a lust object. Little is known about perpetrators of other forms of anti-gay violence.

Prevention | Preventative projects targeting anti-gay violence do exist, though these have not been scientifically designed and implemented. Most of these projects emphasize stopping undesirable situations before they arise (primary prevention). For example, there is a national policy to strengthen monitoring in schools. There are also policy directives for increasing safety, mandatory reporting and registration obligations, and prevention programmes at schools. However, the actual application of these measures is voluntary, variable and vague. In addition there are numerous projects at schools to foster acceptance of homosexuality and to combat discrimination. The results are disappointing at best, due to a lack of funding, continuity, direction and vision. There are positive examples to be seen in Nijmegen, Rotterdam and Amsterdam, where schools have chosen to implement structural long-term projects.

Anti-gay violence as a punishable offense | Anti-gay violence is a form of discrimination. In the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, the United Kingdom and Sweden, laws and regulations on punishable discrimination offenses – thanks to European treaties – run strongly parallel when it comes to racism or anti-immigrant hatred. Laws specifically governing anti-gay actions are less in line with one another. However, the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany and Sweden do declare anti-gay discrimination to be a punishable offense. The United Kingdom is currently drafting legislation on this. In all five countries, except Germany, the law explicitly cites sexual orientation as unacceptable grounds for discrimination.

Conclusions | Reporting and recording anti-gay violence is useful, but the question is whether it provides anything more than extra work for the police. 'Sexual citizenship training' in the educational system, geared

toward social functioning and respect for others, may help contribute to a solution. The emphasis here should then be placed on defining masculinity and femininity; casual sex, health, AIDS, and the exploitation of young girls by pimps, as well as the positive side of sexuality. The penal approach should only be applied at the very end of an entire series of measures.