
Final Report: Homophobic incidents and LGBT safety in the City of Edinburgh



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INTRODUCTION

In a study commissioned by the then Scottish Office Home Department, Morrison & Mackay (1998)¹ found that, from a sample of 300 gay men (246 were interviewed, and 54 completed self-report questionnaires), over half (57%) had experienced harassment in the preceding twelve months with 24% reporting having been the victims of a violent incident. The majority of incidents took place near gay venues or in street locations. Just over one third of victims of violent assault reported the incident to the Police. At the time, Morrison & Mackay (1998) characterised the under-reporting of these assaults as stemming from negative appraisals of police officers by gay men, though there was an acknowledgement that relations between the Police Force and the gay community were improving, and better reporting and recording systems were prioritised to encourage more victims to come forward.

Purpose of present study

The present study occurred some nine years after Morrison and Mackay's report, and focused once again on the experiences of members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community (LGBT) living in the City of Edinburgh. The central aims of the study were to determine the rates of anti-LGBT incidents occurring in the city across a one-year and five-year period, the number of reports made to the Police, and the locations where LGBTs feel least safe in the city.

METHOD

Data for this study was collected over a three-week period using a short questionnaire distributed to customers of LGBT friendly bars

and clubs. Each participant who agreed to participate received a pack containing information about the nature of the study, a consent withdrawal form² and, following completion of the questionnaire, a debriefing sheet.

Survey instrument

The survey instrument consisted of a series of questions (one side of A4 only) addressing experiences of intolerance across a one-year and five-year period. Questions focused on incidents such as *physical assault, sexual assault, robbery/theft, vandalism* and *domestic violence*. Participants were asked to estimate the number of times they had experienced one or more of the acts cited above, and the location(s) where it/they took place. Locations included *home, a friend's or acquaintance's home, the street, park, pub/club, public sex environment (PSE; toilet or cruising area), bus/train, or other*. Subsequently, participants were also asked to rate Lothian and Borders Police on the following items when working with LGBT community members: *sensitivity, approachability, and understanding*. Each item was scored as follows: *very good* (1), *good* (2), *average* (3), *quite poor* (4), and *very poor* (5). Thus, **higher** scores indicate **poorer** performance. Finally, participants were asked to indicate any areas within the city where they felt unsafe or at risk from violent or threatening behaviour. These areas were then mapped against Lothian and Borders Police Division 'A' (City of Edinburgh) local policing areas: Central and North; East and South; and West and Pentlands.

¹ Morrison, C., & Mackay, A. (1998). *The experience of violence and harassment of gay men in the City of Edinburgh*. Crime & Criminal Justice Research Findings No. 41, pp. 1-8.

² The withdrawal form provided each participant with a numerical identifier. To withdraw consent, a participant needed only to contact one of the authors by telephone or e-mail and quote the identifier. No other information was necessary.

Participants

Over a period of three weeks, 210 questionnaires were collected from members of the LGBT community. Of those, six were excluded from the analyses due to missing data, leaving a sample consisting of 150 participants who identified as male (average age 24.5 years; range 18-51 years), and 54 who identified as female (average age 23 years; range 18-41 years).

RESULTS

Overall, 26% of participants (29% of males; 17% of females) reported having experienced one or more incidents (described above) because of their sexual orientation.

In terms of ever having experienced one or more incidents of *physical assault, sexual assault, robbery, theft, vandalism, or domestic violence* results indicated that 14% had experienced an incident once in their lifetime, 8% had experienced two incidents, and 4% had experienced three or more incidents.

Table 1 provides a summary of reports of incidents occurring in the last twelve months, and the last five years.

Table 1: Sex differences in reports of anti-LGBT incidents over the last twelve months and the last five years.

<i>Type of Incident</i>	<i>M (%)</i> <i>n=150</i>	<i>F (%)</i> <i>n=54</i>
Last 12 months		
- physical assault	15 (10)	4 (7)
- sexual assault	2 (1)	4 (7)
- robbery/theft	8 (5)	2 (4)
- vandalism	3 (2)	1 (2)
- domestic violence	0	0
Last 5 years		
- physical assault	36 (24)	4 (7)
- sexual assault	10 (7)	4 (7)
- robbery/theft	8 (5)	2 (4)
- vandalism	6 (4)	3 (6)
- domestic violence	8 (5)	4 (6)

The results indicate that approximately one quarter of participants who identify as male have been victims of a physical assault in the last five years, and 15% have been victims of an assault in the last year. Rates of sexual assault are notably higher for women in the last year (4) when compared to men (2), although more men have

reported sexual assaults over the past five years (10).

The locations where these incidents took place were considered next and, as the data in Table 2 indicates, over the last twelve months streets and pubs/clubs were the primary 'hot spots'. Only two males reported having been physically assaulted in PSEs and neither reported these assaults to the Police (see Table 3)

Table 2: Incident locations (last 12 months only)

N.B. zero ('0') scoring items are removed

<i>Type of Incident</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>
Physical assault³		
- home	1	2*
- friend's home		1
- street	7*	4*
- park	3*	1
- pub/club	6*	
- PSE	2	
- bus/train	1	
- other	1	
Sexual assault		
- home		2
- street	1	2
- other	1	
Robbery/theft		
- home	2	1
- friend's home	1	
- street	3	1
- park	1	
- other	1	
Vandalism		
- street	1	0
- pub/club	2	
- other		1

* one person, multiple incidents

A key measure of the success of Lothian and Borders Police in gaining the confidence of the LGBT community is the number of incidents that are formally reported for investigation. Table 3 (overleaf) provides a summary of data for the last twelve months. On average, the results indicated that in the last year 44% of incidents have been formally reported to the Police (19% for males, and 68% for females). According to

³ For physical assault, figures are greater than those reported in Table 1, as this data includes information on victims who experienced more than one incident (denoted by asterisk).

Morrison and Mackay, in 1998 the number of victims of violent attacks who reported those incidents to the Police was 37%⁴.

Table 3: Rates of reporting incidents to the police over the last twelve months

Type of Incident	Number of incidents	Report? Yes (%)
Physical assault		
- male	15	4 (27)
- female	4	3 (75)
Sexual assault		
- male	2	0
- female	4	2 (50)
Robbery/theft		
- male	8	4 (50)
- female	2	1 (50)
Vandalism		
- male	3	0
- female	1	1 (100)

Table 4 provides a summary of the number of incidents reported over the last 5 years.

Table 4: Rates of reporting incidents to the police over the last five years

Type of Incident	Number of incidents	Report? Yes (%)
Physical assault		
- male	36	13 (36)
- female	4	2 (50)
Sexual assault		
- male	10	4 (40)
- female	4	2 (50)
Robbery/theft		
- male	8	7 (88)
- female	2	0
Vandalism		
- male	6	1 (18)
- female	3	2 (67)
Domestic violence		
- male	8	4 (50)
- female	4	1 (25)

⁴ Unfortunately questions relating to other incidents were not recorded in the same way as violent attacks, and therefore it is difficult to determine the effect of any changes in policing strategy with respect to the LGBT community.

Overall, over the last five years, on average 42% of incidents have been reported to the Police (46% for males, and 38% for females).

In terms of sensitivity, approachability and understanding, Lothian and Borders Police were generally rated “good” to “average”, with victims of one or more incidents likely to rate the Police “average” rather than “good” (see Table 5).

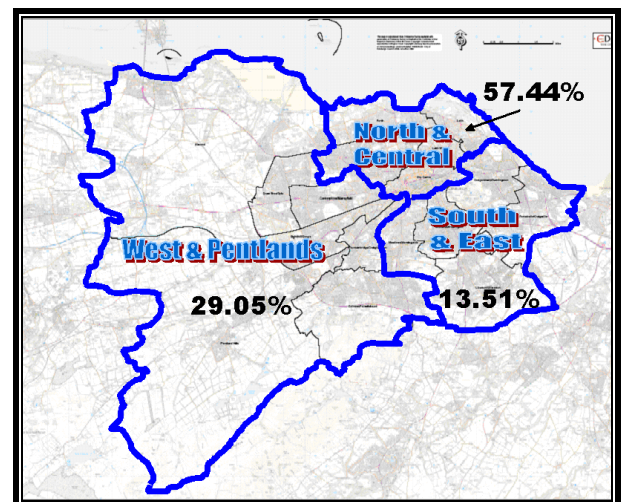
Table 5: Rating Lothian and Borders Police

Item	Mean Score	Significance
Sensitivity		
- non-victim	1.69	$p = .05$
- victim	2.20	
Approachability		
- non-victim	1.71	$p = .01$
- victim	2.51	
Understanding		
- non-victim	1.68	$p = .01$
- victim	2.51	

Note: Scale used: very good (1), good (2), average (3), poor (4), and very poor (5)

We also looked at those areas within the city that were identified as unsafe by participants (see Figure 1). Over 57% of participants indicated that they perceived areas within the North and Central LPA to be the most unsafe with Leith (21%), Lothian Road (14%) Cowgate (12%) and the City Centre (12%) being rated most unsafe.

Figure 1: LPAs and perceived lack of safety



29% of participants indicated that they perceived areas within the West and Pentlands LPA to be unsafe (Wester Hailes and Sighthill were the most cited areas of concern). Finally,

within the South and East LPA, participants indicated that there were no particular areas of concern. Outside Division 'A', Niddrie was identified as an area of particular concern.

Finally, we asked participants what improvements they would like to see with respect to Police officers working with the LGBT community. The five most frequently cited suggestions are provided below:

- More education about LGBT issues;
- Increased presence in areas of concern;
- More publications about the Police and its work with the LGBT community;
- Alternative methods of reporting incidents;
- Greater liaison with the LGBT community.

DISCUSSION

The results from this study demonstrate that there continues to be an under-reporting of incidents perpetrated against LGBTs in the City of Edinburgh. In the last five years, our sample indicated that, despite the fact the 26% (53) of participants had been a victim of one or more incidents of *physical assault, sexual assault, robbery/theft, vandalism, or domestic violence*, less than half had been reported to the Police. In the last year, proportionally more women than men were willing to report incidents to the Police, although it must be acknowledged that rates of victimisation were significantly lower for women than for men.

Overall, Lothian and Borders Police personnel were rated between 'good' and 'average' in terms of their *sensitivity, approachability and understanding* when dealing with members of the LGBT community. However of concern to us is the fact that participants who had been victims of one or more anti-LGBT incidents rated police personnel less favourably than non-victims, and this requires further consideration.

It is clear that members of the LGBT community do not perceive the changes Lothian and Borders Police have made in terms of developing a more positive approach to working with the LGBT community, and we would suggest that there is a need for a significant public relations exercise to be undertaken. Indeed, two of the top five suggestions demonstrate that LGBTs are not aware of the diversity work carried out by the Police already, or schemes such as remote reporting. While we do not discount that more education about LGBTs may be necessary for police personnel; greater liaison with community

leaders (including bar and club owners) is necessary to find ways of changing current perceptions.

It is not surprising to find that areas of the city where LGBTs feel least safe are primarily located around the city-centre where the majority of gay and gay-friendly venues are located. As noted in the suggestions made by our participants, a *visible* police presence in these areas may stem some of their negative perceptions. Almost 30% of LGBTs identified residential areas such as Wester Hailes and Sighthill as unsafe, and further work is necessary to understand the issues LGBTs face in these areas.

It is of note that we have very little evidence of physical or sexual assault, or robbery in PSEs, and this is most likely to be the result of the method of collecting data which was, in hindsight, inappropriate for this kind of sensitive information.

In summation, this study provides some evidence for the work that still needs to be done to build a successful relationship between Edinburgh's LGBT community and Lothian and Borders Police.

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