

# THE OFF OUR BACKS REPORT

A STUDY INTO ANTI-LESBIAN VIOLENCE

A REPORT IN THE STREETWATCH SERIES

A report by the Lesbian and Gay Alliance  
A project of the Gay and Lesbian

Anti-Violence Project  
Rights Lobby Inc.

THE  
OFF OUR BACKS  
REPORT

A STUDY INTO ANTI-LESBIAN VIOLENCE  
A REPORT BY THE STREETWORKERS

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## FOREWORD



**T**his is the first Report published in Australia that looks solely at the nature of violence against lesbians. The Off Our Backs Report clearly shows that the survivors involved in the study were attacked because of hatred of their perceived lesbianism. It is clear evidence of anti-lesbian violence in the community. Violence against gay men and racial violence are

examples of hate crimes within our society. However, the issue of violence against lesbians has not been specifically addressed even though it is another example of hate related crime. This Report fills a serious gap in the knowledge we require to rid our society of such crimes. The Report will serve as a valuable tool in eradicating the invisibility of anti-lesbian violence. Lesbians are not a recognised sub-culture in our society, in the way that gay men are, but we cannot allow violence against lesbians to go unnoticed or unchecked. The Government has committed itself to adopting measures to counteract the phenomenon of hate crimes. The recommendations within this Report need to be closely examined with a view to their implementation, because it is only through informed action that solutions can be found. This Report is an important initial step in achieving that aim.

**Clover Moore** M.P. (MLA)  
Member for Bligh



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# INTRODUCTION

In a society in which women are defined in relation to men - as somebody's wife, daughter or girlfriend - it is hardly surprising that lesbians are rendered all but invisible to the world at large. In a world where heterosexuality is not just the norm, but actively prescribed, and where same-sex relationships have no legal or social standing, lesbians, if acknowledged at all, are institutionally confined to single status and defined merely as women without men. Assumed to be either looking for a man or to have become bitter through a failed (heterosexual) relationship, we are portrayed as unhappy, lonely, tragic. We are seen as "available" and are expected to welcome the advances of men, no matter how intrusive or insensitive, any time, anywhere. Verbal abuse is a daily reality.

It is a common experience for women out alone, or with other women, to be harassed by men asking to join them or asking them out. Where such approaches are rebuffed, no matter how politely, men will often turn abusive. "What are you, a lesbian or something?" is a common taunt. Considered an insult, the term "lesbian" in these situations has little to do with an accurate assessment of a woman's sexual orientation, since an affirmative reply is usually met with incredulity, even hostility. Rather, it is synonymous with a woman's assertion of her own autonomy and independence, and a man's resentment of that assertion. Should a woman state that she is indeed a lesbian, she is likely to be derided, insulted, threatened or physically attacked.

Violence against women was, until comparatively recently, an unrecognised phenomenon. Domestic violence, though frighteningly commonplace, was not discussed and was considered a private matter between a man and "his wife". Polite society averted its eyes and closed its ears and privately blamed the woman. Similarly, women were to blame for rape & sexual abuse: it is only in the last few years that a woman's dress & sexual past have not been automatically viewed as contributing factors, even by the legal system.

While the silence has finally been broken, with many books & articles written about the systematic abuse of women in their homes, on the streets and in the workplace, few if any of these have addressed the specific issue of violence against lesbians. The Off Our Backs survey was a response by the Gay & Lesbian Rights Lobby to the continuing silence surrounding anti-lesbian violence.

The picture which emerges from the Off Our Backs Report is one of punishment of lesbians for their sexual autonomy. All of the participants in the survey felt that it was their lesbianism over & above their gender which motivated their attackers & prompted the assault(s). The findings contained in the Report mirror what is already known about the wide-ranging nature of violence against women, (i.e. that women's behaviour is regulated and controlled by a system of rewards and punishments), and it is clear that lesbianism is perceived to merit a particularly vicious response. Lesbians dare to live outside the direct control of men and we must therefore forfeit our right to be treated with respect and human decency, and it is not only perpetrators who maintain this attitude. Witnesses to such attacks appear to agree - assistance was offered in only 18% of cases.

While anti-lesbian violence equates only partially to violence against women, neither is it a mirror-image of violence against gay men. Gay men are primarily attacked singly or in pairs, by gangs of young men in one-off street-based assaults (*Streetwatch Report*, GLRL, 1990). Yet almost half the lesbians surveyed in Off Our Backs reported a single attacker. And while the biggest single group (45%) of attacks were still street-based, one-third of the respondents experienced on-going campaigns of harassment and 35% of incidents occurred at the woman's home or place of work or study.

Lesbians are subject to the dual oppressions of homophobia and sexism which may be further combined with other forms of persecution such as racism, thus creating a composite climate of hatred and violence. In

determining measures to counteract anti-lesbian violence, it will be necessary, therefore, to take all of the relevant factors into account.

Systemic violence against any group, whether motivated by sexism, homophobia or racism must not be tolerated by society. A clear signal must be given by government, the media and the schools, that anti-lesbian violence is no longer acceptable. Only then can we hope that the threats and the violence will stop.

*Carole Ruthchild*

Co-convenor GLRL 1989 - 1992

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## BACKGROUND

This Report was initiated by the Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby Inc. (GLRL) following the publication of the Streetwatch Report, a Study into Violence against Gay Men and Lesbians (1990). Only 6% of respondents were lesbians so a clear picture of violence against lesbians was not obtained from that report. The "Off Our Backs" Report is a follow-up to Streetwatch and concentrates on the nature of anti-lesbian violence in the community. This study clearly demonstrates that survivors were attacked because of hatred of their perceived sexual orientation and not solely because of gender.

The survey questionnaire was distributed to lesbian groups and venues in the early months of 1991, before the establishment of the Lesbian and Gay Anti-Violence Project. Survey respondents were therefore self-selected completing the questionnaire and returning the completed form to GLRL.

One of the difficulties of this method of data collection and survey administration is that it requires respondents to complete and return the questionnaire without follow-up. This may explain the low response rate, but also highlights the targeted group, lesbian survivors of violence, as distinct from lesbians in general. A substantial amount of quantitative data was obtained which provides a clear and concise description of the nature of anti-lesbian violence.

The total number of respondents was 42, and the sample includes lesbians of diverse ages who live throughout the metropolitan area. The Report contains components detailing the characteristics of survivors, incidents and assailants and also examines post assault actions.

## REAL LIFE STORIES

The statistics and results of this survey do not convey the human suffering and pain experienced by survivors. Therefore, in order to add a different perspective, the following cases have been documented.

Five men yielding a broken bottle attacked a 23 year old lesbian in the street; outside a lesbian venue. The assailants stated that the right man would make her straight. The survivor sustained serious lacerations but did not contact the police or medical services, fearing further victimisation.

A 22 year old lesbian, whilst walking with her partner, was verbally harassed by a man yelling abuse such as "dirty fucking dyke". He then punched her to the face, causing concussion. Her partner contacted the police and was told a car was on its way to assist. Following a 2 hour wait, the women gave up contacting the police further.

While working, a 31 year old lesbian was verbally harassed following a staff social she had attended with her partner. She lodged a grievance complaint with senior staff but was told management could do nothing as she had 'brought it all' on herself. Following two months of harassment, she resigned from her employment.

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.

A small group of lesbians were drinking in an inner city pub, when a group of men approached them offering to buy them drinks and offering to dance. The lesbians declined the offer and asked the men to leave them alone. The men continued to harass them and one asked if they were "lezzos". After the women identified as "dykes", the men became violent, pushing them around. A bar tender called the police but the men fled from the pub once it was known the police had been called. The assailants were not apprehended, although the lesbians were able to produce a good identification profile.



# 1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The main findings of the **Off Our Backs** survey are summarised as follows:

## ***Nature of Attacks***

- 1.1 14 (33%) survivors reported the harassment and violence as being ongoing.
- 1.2 38 (91%) survivors were verbally and/or physically or sexually assaulted.
- 1.3 7 (29%) survivors who reported being physically/sexually assaulted sustained serious injuries requiring medical treatment and 8 (33%) survivors sustained other injuries such as lacerations or severe bruising.

## ***Time and Location of Incidents***

- 1.4 8 (19%) incidents occurred at or after an organised Mardi Gras event.
- 1.5 19 (45%) incidents occurred in the street, and 17 (39%) occurred whilst at work or in other public areas.
- 1.6 11 (27%) incidents occurred between 6:00 am. and 6:00 pm.
- 1.7 25 (59%) incidents occurred between 6:00 pm. and 3:00 am

## ***Characteristics of Survivors***

- 1.8 40 (96%) identified as being white Australian.
- 1.9 41 (98%) identified as lesbian.
- 1.10 16 (38%) survivors were aged between 30 - 39 and 20 (48%) were between 20 - 29, with 29 being the average age.

## ***Characteristics of Assailants***

- 1.11 37 (88%) involved males only and in 4 (10%) cases both men and women were present, with women either observing or contributing to the verbal abuse of the survivor.
- 1.12 16 (38%) assailants were known to the survivor.
- 1.13 8 (19%) incidents involved 5 or more assailants and 13 (31%) incidents involved between 3 to 5 assailants.
- 1.14 13 (31%) assailants were aged between 21 and 25 and 10 (23%) incidents involved assailants aged between 16 and 20 and 12 (29%) were aged 30 and over.

## ***Reason for Assault***

- 1.15 42 (100%) survivors stated they felt they were attacked because they were lesbian or perceived to be lesbian.
- 1.16 In 31 (74%) incidents the assailants spoke to the survivor, of which 26 (84%) used specific anti-lesbian abuse.
- 1.17 Robbery occurred in no incidents. The NSW Police Report found robbery in only 6% of cases.

## ***Witnesses***

- 1.18 27 (65%) incidents were observed by witnesses, of which only 5 (18%) resulted in intervention.

### ***Immediate Post Assault Action***

- 1.19 In 13 (31%) incidents the survivors felt physically able to fight back and in 12 (29%) incidents protective action was possible.

### ***Post Assault Action***

- 1.20 18 (42%) survivors contacted friends and/or lovers, only 4 (10%) reported the incident to police, and 2 (4%) sought the services of a counsellor.
- 1.21 The NSW Police Report indicated that while only 5% of victims (sic) of verbal abuse reported the incident to Police, 39% of victims (sic) of physical assault reported the incident to Police.

### ***Reports to the Police***

- 1.22 Of the who did not report to the police, 10 (24%) felt nothing could be done, 8 (19%) cited no women police officers available as the reason for not reporting, 4 (10%) incidents involved alleged police abuse, and 15 (35%) believed police would not take the report seriously.
- 1.23 Of the 4 lesbians who did report to the police, 2 (50%) identified themselves as lesbian to the police. Both of these believed this negatively affected the service they received to a significant extent.
- 1.24 The NSW Police Report found that 67% saw the Police as neutral, supportive or very supportive, while 33% saw the Police as unsupportive or very unsupportive.

### ***Police Gay/Lesbian Liaison Officers***

- 1.25 33 (78%) survivors were previously aware of the police gay and lesbian liaison officers.
- 1.26 The NSW Police Report found that 91% were aware of the more central Police Gay/Lesbian Client Group Consultant.

### ***Knowledge of GLRL***

- 1.27 35 (84%) survivors were aware of GLRL.

## 2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

### 2.1 LEGISLATIVE CHANGE

**We recommend that:**

- 2.1.1 The Anti-Discrimination Board Act 1977 be amended to include a new ground of complaint of vilification based on perceived or actual lesbianism/homosexuality and to create a new criminal offence of serious vilification based on perceived or actual lesbianism/homosexuality, on the lines of the 1989 Amendment regarding racial vilification.
- 2.1.2 The Anti-Discrimination Act 1977 as it relates to homosexuality be amended to include all forms of education, both public and private.
- 2.1.3 Section 9A of the Anti-Discrimination Act 1977 be amended to include lesbianism/homosexuality within the Equal Opportunity in Public Employment provision.
- 2.1.4 Legislation should be introduced by the NSW Government relating to hate-crimes, requiring courts to take into account a motivation of prejudice in the process of sentencing.

### 2.2 ATTORNEY GENERAL

**We recommend that:**

- 2.2.1 The views of the NSW Government on the rights of all to be protected from vilification, harassment, discrimination and violence should be formally drawn to the attention of all magistrates and judges.
- 2.2.2 The Attorney General ensure sufficient funds and staff are available to enable the Anti-Discrimination Board to implement a campaign, in conjunction with major private and public sector employers, to counter anti-lesbian and anti-gay harassment and violence in the workplace.

### 2.3 POLICE

**We recommend that:**

- 2.3.1 The NSW Police Service amend their crime reporting forms to insert a prejudice related category with sub divisions to include gender, lesbianism and homosexuality.
- 2.3.2 Information regarding prejudice related crimes be published as part of the monthly crime report statistics.
- 2.3.3 The NSW Police Service publish their report into anti-lesbian violence undertaken by the Gay and Lesbian Consultant, at the 1991 Lesbian Conference.
- 2.3.4 That the Police Commissioner ensure that there are female police officers in every police station in NSW.
- 2.3.5 Appropriate training into anti-lesbian harassment and violence be given to a nominated officer at every police station in NSW.
- 2.3.6 Equal gender representation be taken into account when nominating Police Gay and Lesbian Liaison Officers at police stations.

2.3.7 The NSW Police Service develop and implement a recruitment strategy to ensure that the service personnel adequately reflect the composition of contemporary Australian society.

2.3.8 In conjunction with the NSW Anti-Discrimination Board, the NSW Police Service initiate an in-service education program for constables in awareness of the needs of lesbians.

## 2.4 EDUCATION

### **We recommend that:**

2.4.1 The Department of School Education develop an anti-homophobia policy.

2.4.2 Teaching staff be provided with in-service training to counteract negative attitudes towards lesbians by school students, both inside and outside the classroom.

2.4.3 Counselling staff be provided with in-service training, in order to be able to deal with both the problems faced by young lesbians at school as well as issues surrounding anti-lesbian harassment and violence.

## 2.5 HEALTH

### **We recommend that:**

2.5.1 The NSW Health Department recognise the special needs of survivors of anti-lesbian violence and provide adequate resources and funding to women's and community health centres to meet these needs.

2.5.2 The brief of the Injury Prevention Program of the Health Promotion Unit be extended to include hate-crimes as well as street violence.

2.5.3 The NSW Health Department and the casualty departments of the major inner-city hospitals conduct a pilot survey to ascertain the number of admissions that are a direct result of hate-crimes and street violence.

2.5.4 The NSW Health Department recognise the central role of the Lesbian and Gay Anti-Violence Project in combating anti-lesbian and anti-gay violence.

2.5.5 The NSW Health Department make a commitment of funding to the Lesbian and Gay Anti-Violence Project.

2.5.6 The Health Department provide the Lesbian and Gay Anti-Violence Project with adequate resources and funding to implement specific campaigns to counter anti-lesbian violence.

## 2.6 HOUSING

### **We recommend that:**

2.6.1 The Women's Supported Assistance Program of the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program establish lesbian specific services for homeless women resulting from anti-lesbian harassment and violence.

## 2.7 WOMEN'S CO-ORDINATION UNIT

### **We recommend that:**

2.7.1 The Women's Co-ordination Unit hold regular consultations with the lesbian communities to determine

their specific needs and with a view to drawing attention to lesbian issues.

## **2.8 YOUTH**

### **We recommend that:**

- 2.8.1 The Youth Sector Training Council and the Youth Action Policy Association, in consultation with the Lesbian and Gay Anti-Violence Project develop a kit for youth agencies on countering anti-lesbian and homophobic violence in youth-focused services.
- 2.8.2 The Youth Sector Training Council and the Youth Action Policy Association initiate a program of in-service sessions for youth workers to make them aware of issues relating to violence against lesbians.

## **2.9 COMMUNITY PROGRAMS**

### **We recommend that:**

- 2.9.1 The Lesbian and Gay Anti-Violence Project develop violence prevention strategies specifically relating to violence against lesbians through a process of consultations with lesbians, and lesbian and general women's services.
- 2.9.2 The Lesbian and Gay Anti-Violence Project implement lesbian-targeted violence prevention campaigns.

## **2.10 PRIVATE SECTOR**

### **We recommend that:**

- 2.10.1 The Confederation of Australian Industry and other peak business bodies develop policy guidelines for their members on countering anti-lesbian harassment and violence in the work place.

## **2.11 ACTU**

### **We recommend that:**

- 2.11.1 The Australian Confederation of Trade Unions (ACTU) establish a working party to address anti-lesbian violence and homophobia in the work place.

## **2.12 NATIONAL ANTI-LESBIAN AND GAY VIOLENCE INQUIRY**

### **We recommend that:**

- 2.12.1 The Federal Minister for Justice convene a meeting with representatives of Lesbian and Gay organisations within Australia with the view to initiating a national inquiry into violence incited by homophobia.
- 2.12.2 The Australian Institute of Criminology and the Criminology Research Council fully fund research projects into the nature, incidence, causes and remedies of violence against lesbians.

## **2.13 LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

### **We recommend that:**

- 2.13.1 Sydney City Council, South Sydney City Council and Leichhardt Council implement strategies to reduce anti-lesbian violence and homophobic violence in their local government areas.

# OFF OUR BACKS

## 3.0 *Characteristics of Survivors*

### 3.1 *Sexuality*

98% identified as lesbian (see Table 1).

**Table 1**

<b>Sexuality</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>% of Total</b>
Lesbian	41	98%
Bisexual	1	2%

### 3.2 *Age*

The youngest participant was 15, the eldest 49 and the average age of survivors was 29 years. 60% of survivors were aged between 25 and 39 and 33% between 15 and 24 (see Table 2). Respondents were younger than those in the Streetwatch Report where 72% of survivors were aged between 25 and 39 and the average age was 32.

**Table 2**

<b>Age in years</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>% of Total</b>
15-19	3	7%
20-24	11	26%
25-29	9	22%
30-39	16	38%
40-49	2	5%
Not stated	1	2%

### 3.3 *Ethnicity*

Table 3 shows 96% of survivors identified as being white Australian.

**Table 3**

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>% of Total</b>
White Australian	40	96%
European	1	2%
Asian	1	2%

## 4.0 *Nature of Incidents*

In a third of cases, survivors reported the harassment and violence as being ongoing and involving multiple incidents (see Table 4). This differs from the *Streetwatch Report* which showed the nature of violence against gay men to be of a one-off nature and situational, i.e. primarily street-based. Other studies have confirmed this result. The U.S. Social Indicators study in Chicago (1987) showed that 35% of lesbians surveyed had been verbally harassed and 13% physically assaulted on an ongoing basis. The U.S. National Lesbian Health Study (1989) also found that 58% of lesbians had been either verbally or physically assaulted more than once.

**Table 4**

<b>Nature of Incident</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>% of Total</b>
Single Incident	28	67%
Harassment ongoing	14	33%

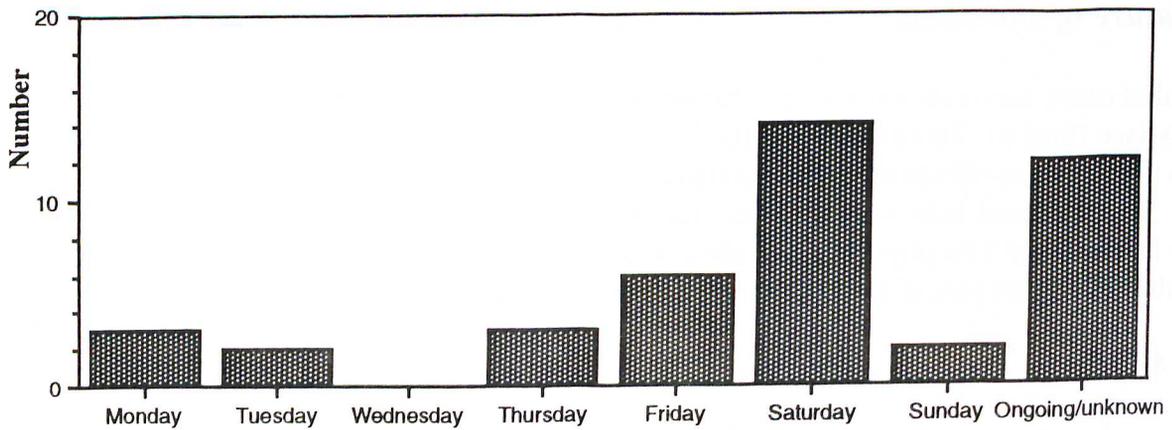
## 5.0 *Time and Location of Incidents*

### 5.1 *Day of the Week*

47% of incidents occurred on Friday or Saturday, with Saturday recording the highest number of incidents (see Table 5). The rest of the incidents were fairly evenly distributed throughout the week, with the exception of Wednesdays. Our survey's findings are thus similar to those of the *Robb Report* and the *Streetwatch Report*, which both showed a peak on weekends. **Off Our Backs** results differ, however, in that a greater proportion of survivors reported violence as being ongoing and occurring in varied environments such as the workplace and the home, and it could therefore be expected to occur throughout the week.

**Table 5**

<b>Day of the Week</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>% of Total</b>
Monday	3	7%
Tuesday	2	5%
Wednesday	0	nil
Thursday	3	7%
Friday	6	14%
Saturday	14	33%
Sunday	2	5%
Ongoing/Not Stated	12	29%



**Figure 1** Day of the week

### 5.2 *Time of the Day*

It was demonstrated that an escalation occurred in the incidence of attacks as the day progressed, peaking between 9 pm and midnight (28%). This is consistent with both the Streetwatch Report and the NSW Police Report<sup>1</sup> which showed 34% and 30% of incidents occurring between 9 pm and midnight, respectively.

However, the results of the 'Off Our Backs' survey do differ in the percentage of incidents which occurred during daylight hours, i.e. 6 am to 6 pm, (27%, as compared to 17% in Streetwatch). This again may be attributed to the nature of anti-lesbian harassment and violence (see Table 7B).

**Table 6**

Time of the Day	Number	% of Total
6 am - 12 noon	2	5%
12 noon - 3 pm	4	10%
3 pm - 6 pm	5	12%
6 pm - 9 pm	5	12%
9 pm - 12 midnight	12	28%
12 midnight - 3 am	8	19%
3 am - 6 am	nil	nil
Ongoing/Not Stated	6	14%

1: The NSW Police Service Report into Anti-Lesbian Violence and Harassment, undertaken at the 1991 National Lesbian Conference by the Police Gay and Lesbian Consultant. At the time of the publication of **Off Our Backs**, this report was yet to be published.

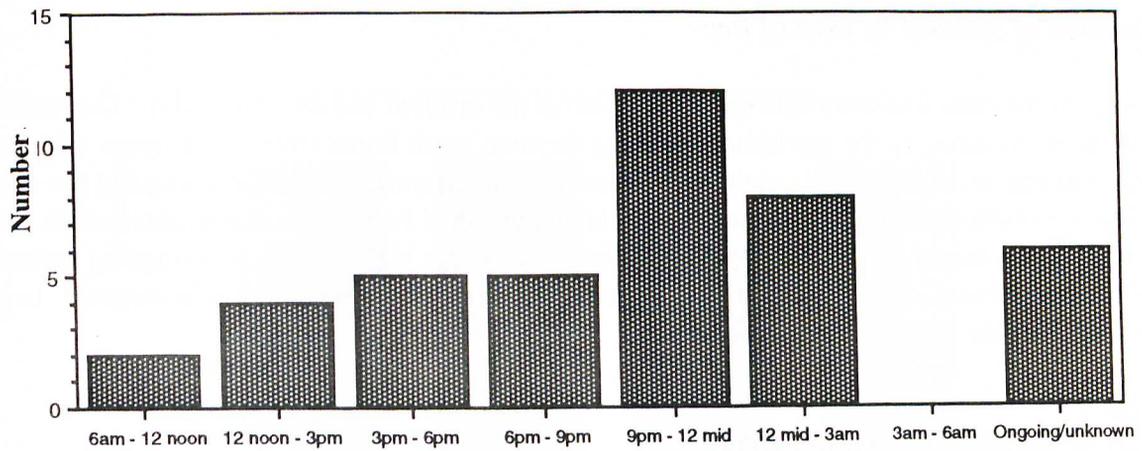


Figure 2 Time of the Day

### 5.3A Location of Incident

Table 7A below shows that 45% of incidents occurred in the street. This is similar to the unpublished report by the NSW Police Service into anti-lesbian violence and slightly less than Streetwatch (52%), highlighting the differences between Streetwatch and this survey. **Off Our Backs** shows 14% of attacks occurred in the woman's home and 21% of incidents occurred at her place of employment or study. This is markedly different from the findings of the Streetwatch Report, which showed only 1.5% of respondents were attacked at home.

Table 7A

Location of Incident	Number	% of Total
The Street	19	45%
Place of Work/Study	9	21%
Bar/Club	7	17%
Private Residence	6	14%
Beach	1	2%

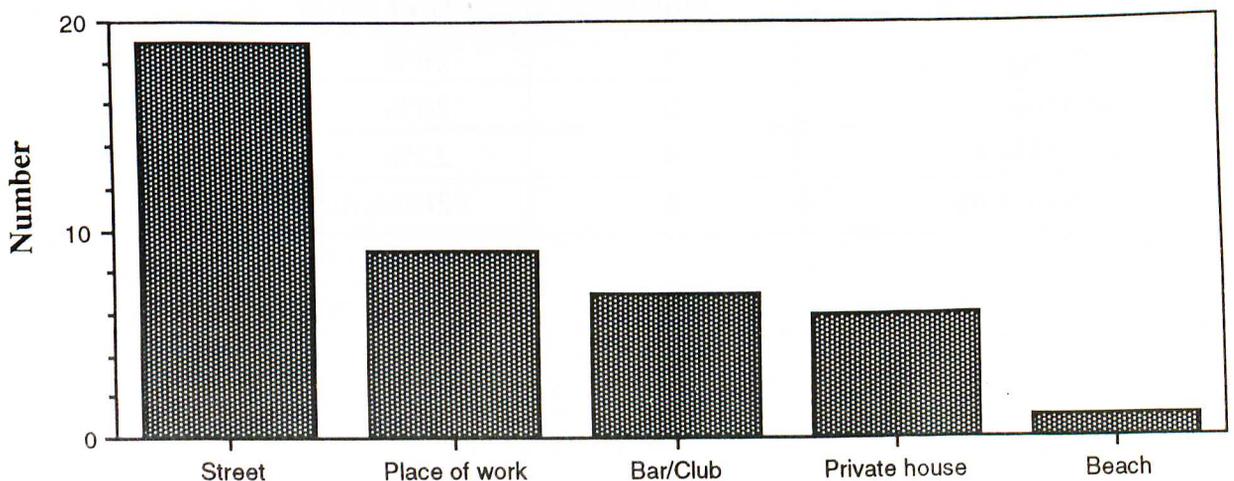


Figure 3 Location of Incident

### 5.3B Location of Incident by Time of Day

Table 7B shows the cross tabulation between the location of the incident and the time of day. The results show that harassment occurring in the workplace is during daytime work hours (89%). Survivors who reported incidents occurring on the street or at a club/venue, show that violence occurs in the evening and late afternoon (95%). This is consistent with both Streetwatch and the unpublished Police Report into anti-lesbian violence. An important dimension of anti-lesbian violence is illustrated by the high incidence of ongoing violence and harassment by neighbours. 83% of lesbians reporting violence by neighbours stated it to be ongoing. here were no reports of domestic violence (see section 11.4).

**Table 7B**  
**Location of Incident by Time of Day**

	Street		Home		Club		Beach		Work		Total No.
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
6 am - 6 pm	1	5%	1	17%	nil		1	100%	8	89%	11
6 pm - Midnight	15	79%	nil		2	29%	nil		nil		17
Midnight - 6 am	3	16%	nil		5	71%	nil		nil		8
Ongoing	nil		5	83%	nil		nil		1	11%	6
<b>TOTAL</b>	19	100%	6	100%	7	100%	1	100%	9	100%	42

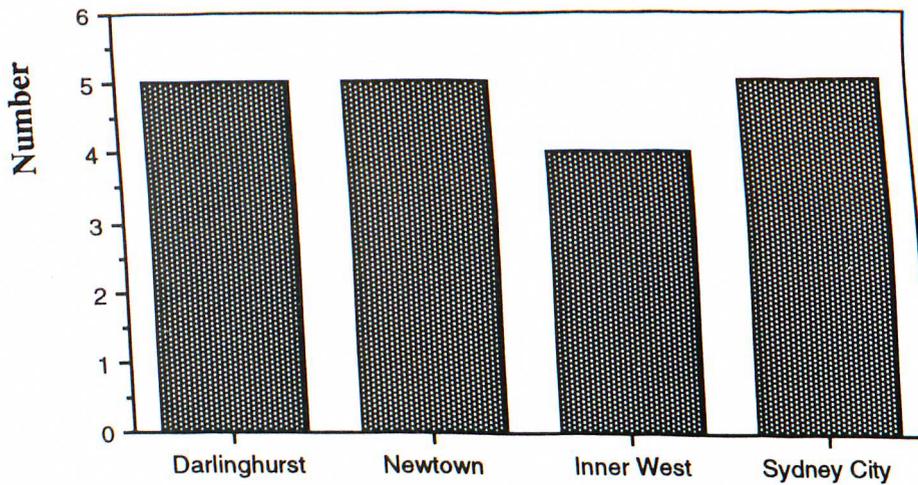
### 5.4 Street Location

Research has shown that gay defined neighbourhoods experience higher incident rates of anti-gay violence than other areas because of the greater concentration of perceived available targets for attackers in the area (Harry 1990).

This study confirms this finding given that Darlinghurst, Newtown and the Inner West are all areas within Sydney in which a high proportion of lesbians live, work and socialise. However, the fact that 26% of attacks occurred in Sydney City demonstrate the prevalence of anti-lesbian violence beyond lesbian-defined areas.

**Table 8**

Street Location	Number	% of Total
Darlinghurst	5	26%
Newtown	5	26%
Inner West	4	22%
Sydney City	5	26%



**Figure 4** Street Location

### 5.5 Particular Event

19% of survivors reported assaults occurring at a Mardi Gras event, such as during or after the Mardi Gras Parade. Clearly, lesbians are extremely visible - and therefore easily identifiable - at such events.

**Table 9**

Particular Event	Number	% of Total
Mardi Gras	8	19%
Not Stated	34	81%

### 6.0 Witnesses

#### 6.1 Alone or with Others

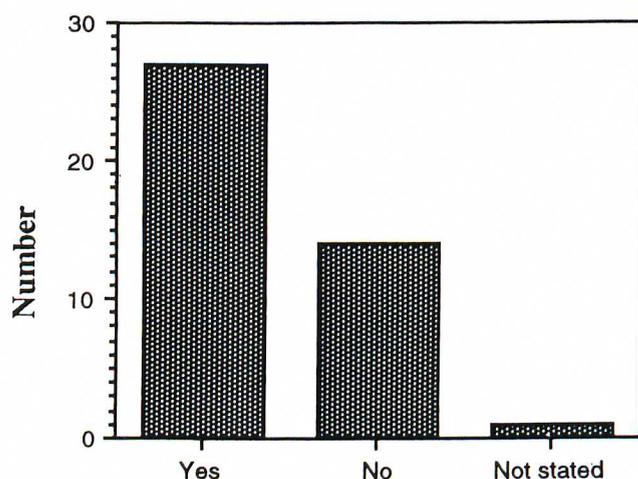
It is evident that incidents were more likely to occur when survivors were with others, rather than this acting as a deterrent. (see Table 10). Lesbians who were accompanied by others at the time of the attack were most at risk when the survivor was with one other person (see Table 11) and when that other person was a lover/partner. This may be explained in part by the fact that being with a partner is likely to identify the women concerned as lesbians.

**Table 10**

Accompanied	Number	% of Total
With Others	25	60%
Alone	17	40%

**Table 11**

Number of Others	Number	% of Total
1	18	72%
2	3	12%
3	1	4%
4 or more	3	12%



**Figure 5** Witnesses to the attack

## 6.2 *Witnesses to the Attack*

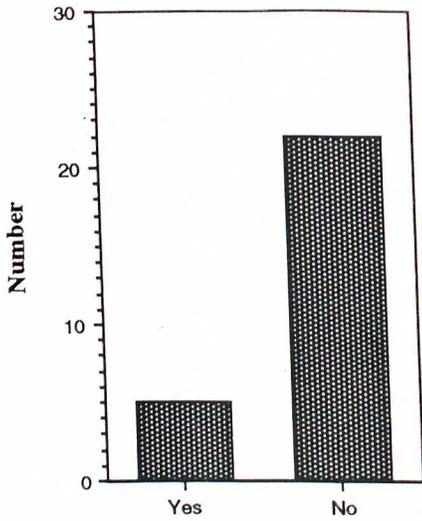
Table 12 highlights the fact that assailants were not deterred by the presence of witnesses. Only 18% of witnesses attempted to intervene and help the survivor; showing both the overt and covert aspects of anti-lesbian violence in our society (see Table 13). In the Streetwatch Report, 41% of witnesses attempted to help the survivor.

**Table 12**

Witnesses	Number	% of Total
Yes	27	65%
No	14	33%
Not Stated	1	2%

**Table 13**

Assistance Offered	Number	% of Total
Yes	5	18%
No	22	82%



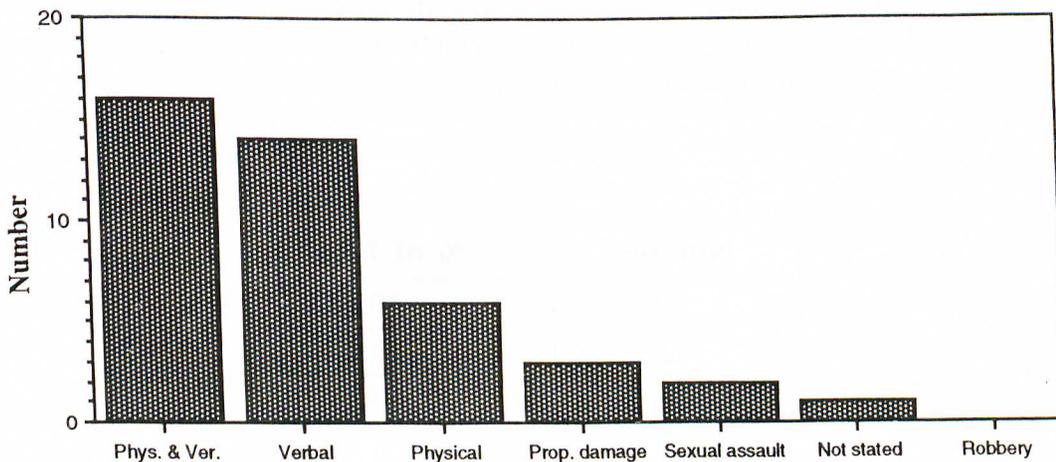
**Figure 6** Assistance Offered

### 7.0 Nature of Attack

57% of survivors reported physical or sexual assault and a further 34% were subject to verbal abuse. No incidents involved robbery. (see Table 14). These results are similar to those found in the NSW Police Report, where it was shown only 6% of incidents involved theft and 70% of respondents experienced some degree of harassment and/or violence. Given that the majority of incidents involved anti-lesbian verbal abuse and taunts, violence against lesbians is clearly hate related.

**Table 14**

Nature of Attack	Number	% of Total
Physical and Verbal	16	38%
Verbal	14	34%
Physical	6	14%
Damage to Property	3	7%
Sexual Assault	2	5%
Not stated	1	2%
Robbery	0	nil



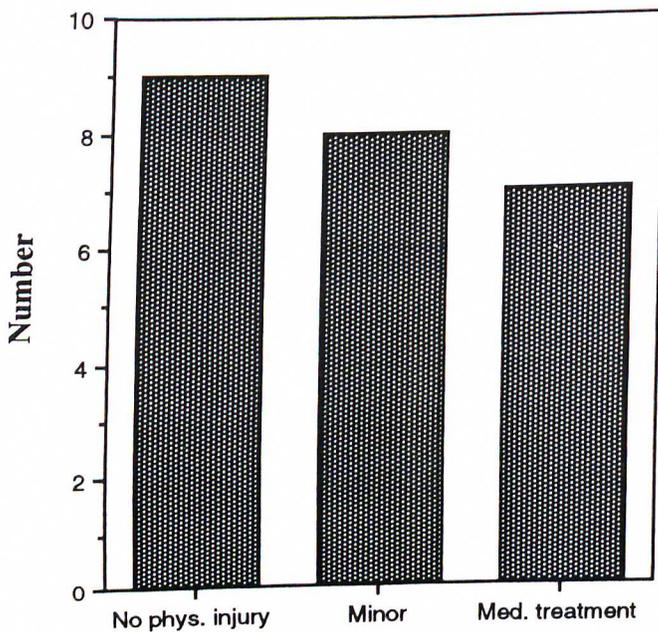
**Figure 7** Nature of attack

## 8.0 *Physical Injuries Sustained*

Of the 57% of lesbians who reported physical or sexual assault, 29% sustained serious injuries, such as broken bones and severe lacerations. 33% reported minor injuries such as cuts and bruising (see Table 15).

**Table 15**  
**Seriousness of Physical Injury**

Physical Injury	Number	% of Total
No physical injury	9	38%
Minor	8	33%
Hospitalised/medical treatment	7	29%



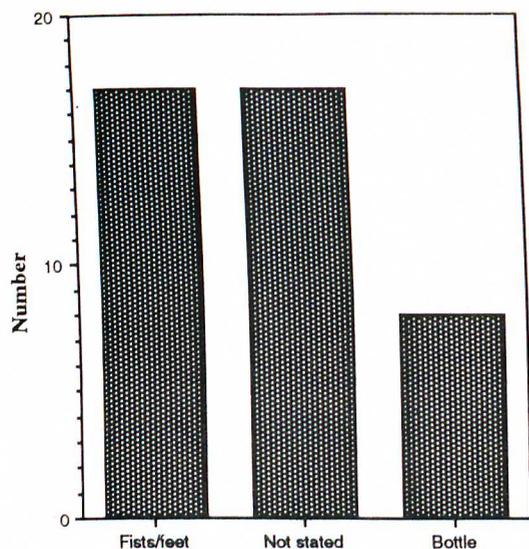
**Figure 8** Physical Injury

## 9.0 *Weapons Used*

In 40% of cases, survivors did not state whether a weapon was used in the attack, but 40% of lesbians reported assaults involving fists and feet. A broken bottle was used in 8 cases (20%). It was reported that broken bottles were used predominantly in street based attacks. (see Table 16).

**Table 16**  
**Weapons Used**

Weapon	Number	% of Total
Fists/Feet	17	40%
Not Stated	17	40%
Bottle	8	20%



**Figure 9 Weapons used**

## 10.0 *Motivation For Attack*

### 10.1 *Spoken to by Assailants*

In the majority of incidents (74%), the assailants spoke to the survivor (see Table 17).

**Table 17**

Spoken to by Assailants	Number	% of Total
Spoken to by Assailants	31	74%
Not Spoken to by Assailants	10	24%
Not Stated	1	2%

### 10.2. *Verbal Abuse*

Of the 31 cases in which survivors were spoken to by assailants, anti-lesbian abuse featured in 84% of the cases reported. Common taunts were “fucking lezzo” and “fucking dyke” (see Table 18). There was also abuse such as “all you need is a good fuck” and/or “I’m the man for you”.

These results highlight the misogyny involved in anti-lesbian violence. Our society is seen to publicly condemn violence against women, despite privately condoning it, i.e. the continuing high incidence of rape and domestic violence. The nature of the verbal abuse demonstrates the hostility which is directed at lesbians and suggests that lesbians’ sexual indifference towards men is a primary motivation for attacks.

**Table 18**  
**Type of Verbal Abuse**

Type	Number	% of Total
Anti-lesbian	26	84%
Other	5	16%

### 10.3. *Attacked Because Lesbian*

All of the survivors reported that they felt they were attacked because they were lesbians (see Table 19) or that the assailants perceived them to have been lesbian.

**Table 19**  
**Attacked Because Lesbian**

	<b>Number</b>	<b>% of Total</b>
Yes	42	100%

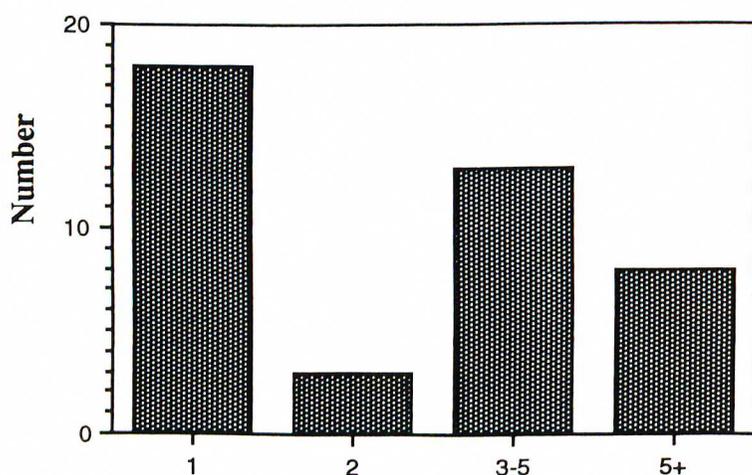
### 11.0 *Characteristics of Assailants*

#### 11.1 *Number of Assailants*

Table 20A shows 43% of survivors were attacked by one assailant and 50% by 3 or more assailants. A cross tabulation (see Table 20B) of the number of assailants by the location of the incident shows the trend of anti-lesbian violence. Of those lesbians reporting incidents at work or study, 78% of cases involved one assailant, 63% of street based incidents involved 3+ assailants and 83% of cases in the home were perpetrated by one assailant.

**Table 20A**

<b>Number of Assailants</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>% of Total</b>
1	18	43%
2	3	7%
3-5	13	31%
5+	8	19%



**Figure 9** Number of Assailants

**Table 20B**  
**Location of Incident by Number of Assailants**

	Street		Home		Bar/Club		Beach		Work/Study		Total
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.
1	4	21%	5	83%	2	29%	nil		7	78%	18
2	3	16%	nil		nil		nil		nil		3
3-5	10	53%	1	17%	1	14%	1	100%	nil		13
5+	2	10%	nil		4	57%	nil		2	22%	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>42</b>

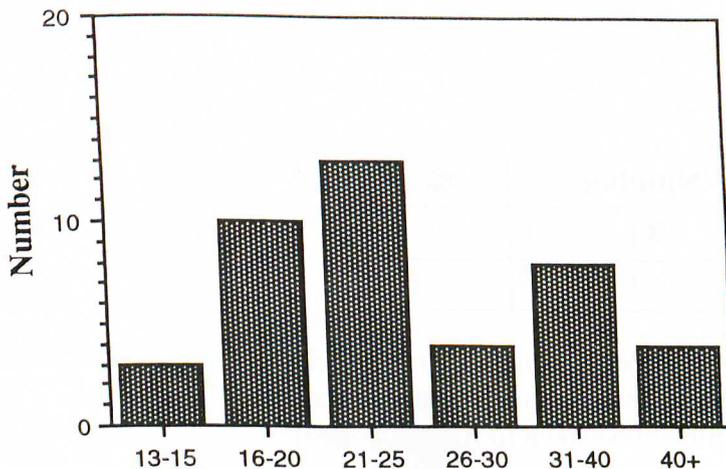
**11.2 Age of Assailants**

The profile of the assailants' ages show that the majority were young people (61%) (see Table 21) aged between 13 and 25 years. However, assailants were not exclusively young: 29% were aged over 30.

The results of this question show a difference in the age group of assailants from that reported in Streetwatch. Since co-workers and neighbours are responsible for a significant proportion of attacks, the age spread is to be expected.

**Table 21**  
**Age of Assailants**

Age	Number	% of Total
13-15	3	7%
16-20	10	23%
21-25	13	31%
26-30	4	10%
31-40	8	19%
over 40	4	10%



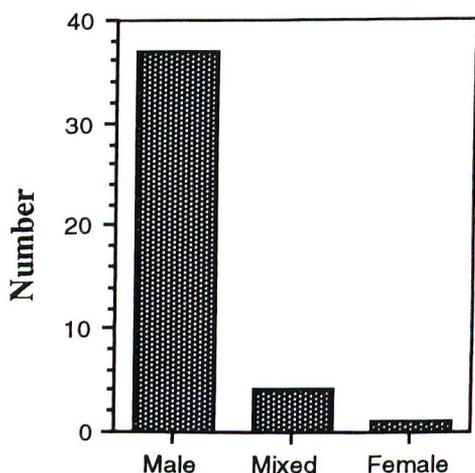
**Figure 10** Age of Assailants

### 11.3 Sex of Assailants

98% of attacks involved men. Of these 10% also involved women as observers or contributors to verbal abuse. Survivors reported only 1 case which solely involved women.

**Table 22**  
**Sex of Assailants**

Sex	Number	% of Total
Male	37	88%
Mixed	4	10%
Female	1	2%



**Figure 11** Sex of assailants

### 11.4 Perceived Sexuality of Assailants

The majority of women (98%) believed their assailants to be heterosexual (see Table 23).

**Table 23**  
**Perceived Sexuality of Assailants**

Sexuality	Number	% of Total
Heterosexual	41	98%
Don't Know	1	2%

It is clear from Tables 22 and 23, that incidents of violence which occurred in the home were not domestic in nature, i.e. between lesbian couples, since 98% of assaults involved males and 98% were presumed to be heterosexual. It is important to note that this should not be taken to suggest domestic violence does not occur amongst lesbian couples, but that this was not a feature of this survey.

## 11.5 Assailant Known to Survivor

The Streetwatch Report showed that only 6% of assailants were known to survivors. **Off Our Backs** identified that 38% of assailants were known to survivors (see Table 24). Since Table 7A shows that 35% of respondents stated that violence occurred at work or at home, it is to be expected that a similar percentage of survivors would know their assailants.

**Table 24**  
**Assailant Known to Person**

	Number	% of Total
Yes	16	38%
No	26	62%

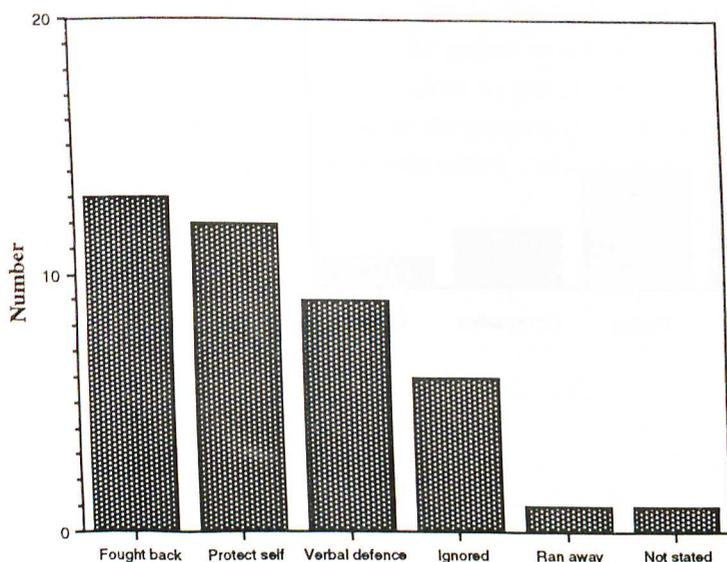
## 12.0 Post Assault

### 12.1 Post Assault Action

31% of lesbians felt physically able to fight back, whilst 29% stated the only action they could take was to protect themselves. A further 22% of survivors felt they were able to verbally defend themselves (see Table 24A).

**Table 24A**  
**Action Taken**

Action Taken	Number	% of Total
Fought back	13	31%
Protect self	12	29%
Verbal defence	9	22%
Ignored assault	6	14%
Ran away	1	2%
Not Stated	1	2%



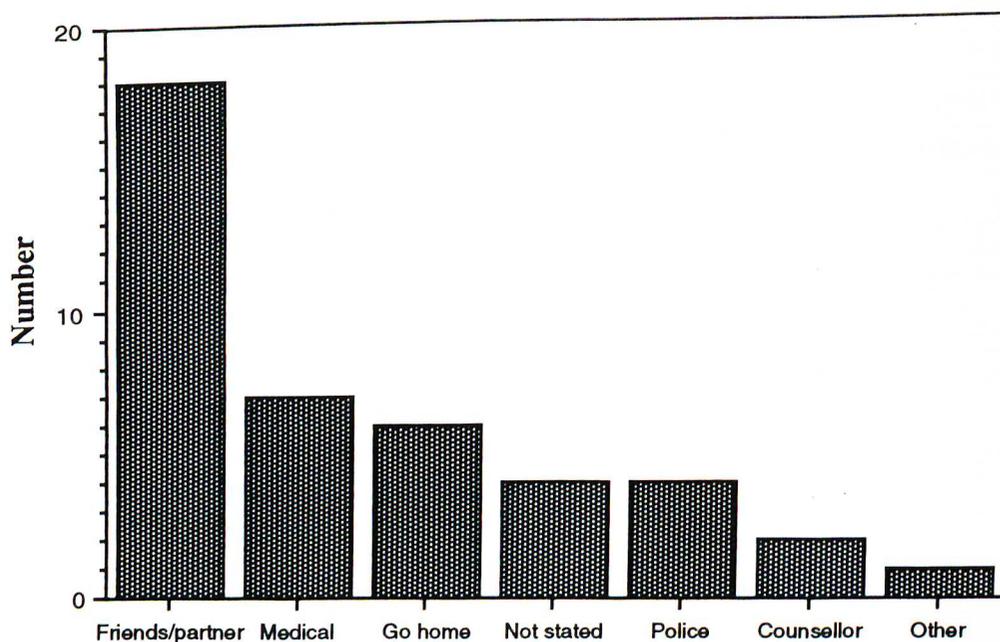
**Figure 12** Action taken

## 12.2 Post Assault Support

In 42% of cases survivors received support following the attack from their partner/friends. 17% of lesbians sought medical attention but only 10% reported to the police. These figures are of concern considering 17% of attacks involved serious physical injury. Table 25 also shows that only 5% of survivors sought the support services of a qualified counsellor. This is not dissimilar to Streetwatch where 7.5% contacted a counsellor and highlights a possible apprehension on the part of lesbians to contact general service providers, despite their willingness to report attacks to a lesbian/gay organisation such as GLRL. While almost half the lesbians found support from friends and/or partners, those lesbians who do not have close friends or lovers may well be in urgent need of lesbian specific services.

**Table 25**  
**Post Assault Support**

	Number	% of Total
Friends/Partners	18	42%
Medical	7	17%
Go Home	6	14%
Not Stated	4	10%
Police	4	10%
Counsellor	2	5%
Other	1	2%



**Figure 13** Post Assault Support

### 13.0 *Reporting to Police*

Only 10% of lesbians reported the incident to the Police (see Table 26), yet 33% of lesbians reported the attacks as being ongoing (Table 4) and of the 57% of lesbians who reported physical or sexual assault, 29% sustained serious injuries (Table 15). The NSW Police Report states "few respondents reported the incident to the Police, even in cases of violent attacks".

The NSW Police Report stated that while only 5% of victims (sic) of verbal abuse reported to the Police, 39% of victims (sic) of physical assault reported to the Police. The NSW Police Report recognises the serious nature of this situation and recommends that "major work needs to be done to ensure all victims (sic) feel able to approach the Police".

**Table 26**  
**Reports to Police**

	<b>Number</b>	<b>% of Total</b>
No	37	88%
Yes	4	10%
Not Stated	1	2%

#### 13.1 *Service Provided by Police*

Two of the lesbians who reported to the police received helpful service and in neither case did the police ask if the attack was anti-lesbian related.

The other two women identified as being lesbian and both reported that they felt this negatively affected the service they received from the police.

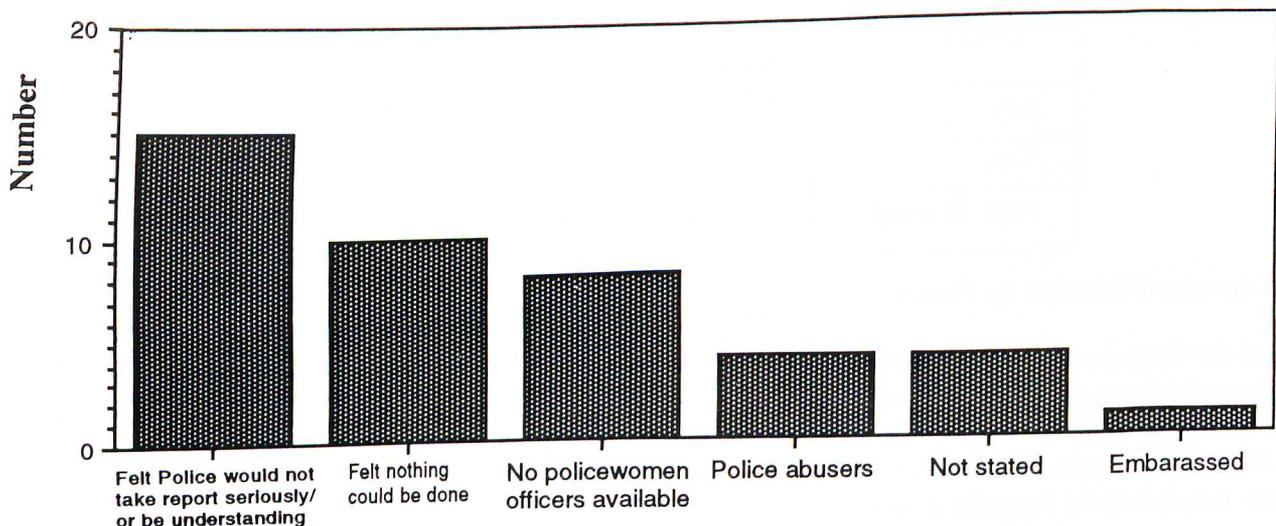
The NSW Police Report found that 67% saw the Police as neutral, supportive or very supportive, while 33% saw the Police as unsupportive or very unsupportive.

#### 13.2 *Reasons Given for Not Contacting Police*

In Table 27, the majority of women (35%) did not report to the police because they felt the police would either not take the report seriously or the police would not be understanding. A further 24% felt nothing could be done by the police. It was indicated that lesbians did not report simply because they felt nothing could be done, but because they expected that the police would manifest some degree of anti-lesbian bias. Survivors also cited that they did not report the incident to police because there were no women police officers available (19%) and 10% alleged that police were the perpetrators of the abuse. This figure is similar to the Philadelphia Lesbian and Gay Task Force Report (1988) which showed approximately 15% of incidents involved alleged police abuse.

**Table 27**  
**Reasons for not Contacting Police**

	Number	% of Total
Felt Police would not take report seriously/ or be understanding	15	35%
Felt nothing could be done	10	24%
There were no women police available	8	19%
Police were abusers	4	10%
Not Stated	4	10%
Felt embarrassed	1	2%



**Figure 13** Reasons for not contacting the police

### 13.3 Knowledge of Police Gay/Lesbian Liaison Officers

Table 28 shows a high level of knowledge (78%) among survivors of the existence of police gay and lesbian liaison officers. This contrasts significantly with the 10% who reported incidents to the police (see Table 26).

The NSW Police Report stated that 91% were aware of the more central Police Gay/Lesbian Client Group Consultant.

**Table 28**  
**Knowledge of Police Gay/Lesbian Liaison Officers Before Survey.**

	Number	% of Total
Yes	33	78%
No	4	10%
Not Stated	5	12%

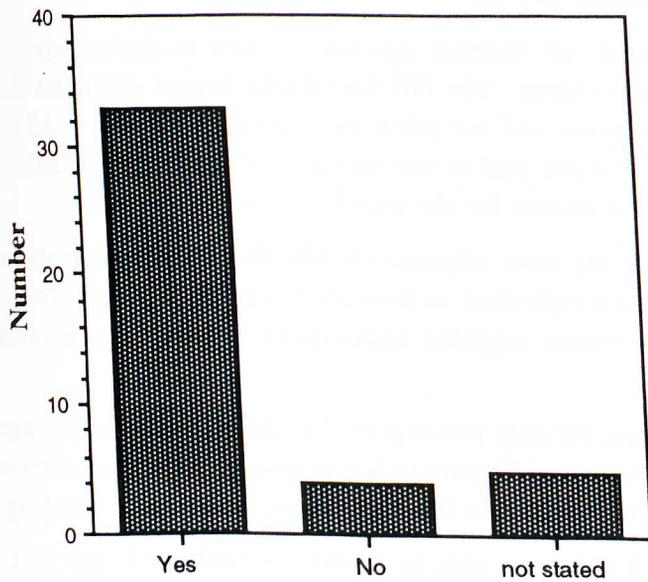


Figure 14 Knowledge of Police Gay/Lesbian Liaison Officers before Survey

14.0 *Knowledge of Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby Before Survey*

Table 29 shows that 84% of respondents were aware of the Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby (GLRL).

Table 29  
Knowledge of GLRL Before Survey

	Number	% of Total
Yes	35	84%
No	7	16%

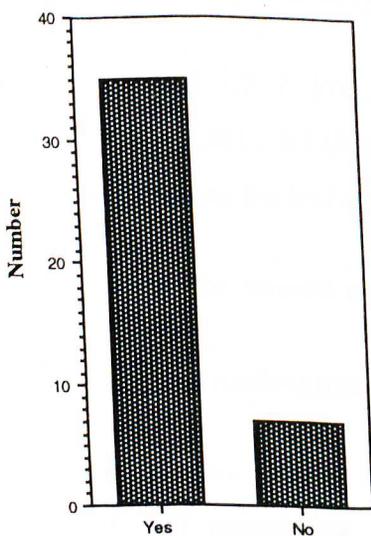


Figure 14 Awareness of GLRL before survey

## CONCLUSIONS

This study has provided a unique insight into the nature of violence against lesbians in our society and reinforces the results of prior surveys into anti-lesbian violence. The **Off Our Backs** Report highlights that lesbians are attacked as a result of their perceived lesbianism and not solely because of their gender. All the woman believed they were attacked because they are lesbians and in the majority of incidents anti-lesbian verbal abuse was a feature of the attacks. Theft was not a motive for the attacks within this report.

Gay men are often attacked on the street by groups of young men, whereas the **Off Our Backs** Report shows that lesbians are almost equally at risk of an attack from an individual as they are from larger groups. This is compounded by the fact that a third of survivors experience ongoing harassment and that this is often perpetrated by neighbours and co-workers.

A significant proportion of women sustained serious injuries, yet only 10% reported to the police. It is clear then that the majority of lesbians did not feel confident of receiving an adequate police response, with many of them citing a belief that the police would not take the report seriously and/or that they would not be understanding.

A positive result of this survey was that many lesbians felt they were able to defend themselves or fight back, and it is clear that partners and friends provide important post assault support. Lesbians are often invisible in our society and it is ironically clear that a greater degree of visibility tends to result in violence and hatred.

While this report does not claim to measure the full extent of anti-lesbian violence, it clearly exposes the severity of the issue. Any attack against a lesbian is clearly aimed at the lesbian community as a whole. It is an attempt to intimidate lesbians into remaining inside the closet of invisibility and silence. Anti-lesbian violence must be recognised for what it is: a tool of oppression and a method of punishment for disobeying and living outside society's rules. As such, it is an issue for society as a whole and can only be countered by a concerted effort to break down prejudice and ignorance, and by the provision of culturally appropriate services for lesbians. As Ruthchild (1992), states "the issue of anti-lesbian and anti-gay violence will only begin to be dealt with when policy makers and opinion-formers of our society acknowledge and take responsibility for its existence".

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