Homophobia in Kensington & Chelsea

A local survey examining homophobic abuse and the reporting of such incidents to the police

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Contents

1 Executive summary

Aims of the project

This research project consisted of a survey of a convenience sample of 165 gay, lesbian and bisexual adults who live and work in Kensington & Chelsea (K&C). It asked respondents about their experiences of homophobic abuse in the borough and whether these were reported to the local police. Reasons for low reporting rates were established and a series of strategies designed to counteract non-reporting presented for feedback. Finally, the questionnaire asked about the ways with which individuals thought, felt and behaved towards the risk of homophobic abuse—for example, did they fear the prospect of abuse in their everyday lives or did they behave in certain routine ways to decrease the likelihood?

Experiences of homophobic abuse

Levels of experiences of abuse were high amongst the convenience sample. Sixty five per cent had experienced some form of abuse in K&C and fifty per cent had witnessed an incident occurring in the borough. Verbal abuse was the most common, followed by threats of violence and actual violence respectively.

The risk of homophobic abuse: thoughts, feelings and behaviours

- About one-fifth of the sample felt it very likely that they would experience homophobic abuse in K&C.
- Around one-eight reported that they thought about the possibility ‘often’ or ‘always’. Respondents reported that these thoughts were commonly accompanied with feelings of anger and concern, with fear less frequently experienced.
- One tenth said that worries about abuse affected their everyday life ‘extremely’.
- Two behavioural strategies were common:
    - avoiding the public expression of sexual identity--fourty per cent said that they ‘always’ avoiding kissing or holding hands in public; and
    - avoiding certain situations (particular locations or going out at certain times of the day)—just under half said they ‘sometimes’ avoided certain places or going out at certain times of the day.

Reporting homophobic abuse to the police

Respondents were asked to describe the most severe incident they had experienced or witnessed. Only one quarter of those who did so had reported this incident to the police. Of these, only half were satisfied with the way in which they were treated. The most frequent reasons for not reporting were:

- feeling that the police would not do anything;
- feeling that the police could not do anything;
- expecting a negative reaction from the police; and
- feeling that the incident was not serious enough.

Strategies to improve reporting rates

Respondents were presented with four strategies and asked whether each would increase their inclination to report an incident in the future. Two were particular popular:

- reporting the incident to a gay or lesbian officer; and
- sending a 'self reporting form' to a specialist hate crime unit.

Recommendations

This research report recommends the above two strategies to increase reporting rates to the K&C police. Both these strategies combine a change in the nature of the interaction during the reporting process with a public commitment that the incident will be dealt with by people dedicated to the issues involved. Respondents presumably felt that dealing with a gay or lesbian officer would ensure that the interaction involved an individual being sensitive to the issues involved. Similarly, a self reporting form provides the option of anonymity. Perhaps the two could be successfully combined through the sending of self reporting forms to a gay or lesbian officer within the station rather than a specialist hate crime unit.

Finally, these strategies can only succeed if the availability of these methods of reporting are effectively advertised. This must be done within the context of the communication of a genuine commitment from the police that they understand and take seriously these issues.

2 Introduction

This research was commissioned by FUSION - Working Towards A Safer And Fairer Community. This group is dedicated to fighting 'hate crime' - that is crime against an individual or a group, based solely on their race, colour, creed, their sexual orientation or vulnerability. It also aims to find ways of supporting the victims of those crimes. FUSION is being spearheaded by the Kensington & Chelsea Gay & Lesbian Community & Police Liaison Group, which was set up in the summer of 1999. The aim of the group is to gain a greater understanding of the fears of the gay & lesbian community in Kensington and Chelsea, establish the extent of under-reporting of crime and find ways of addressing those concerns.

The results of this survey should be seen very much in context with two pieces of national research carried out over the last ten years. The first was a postal survey by the National Advisory Group / Policing Lesbian & Gay Communities (NAGS). This group forms the largest informal network working on lesbian and gay community safety issues in the UK. Their research examined levels of homophobic crime and community confidence towards the police service (Wake *et al*. 1999). Questionnaires were distributed as an insert in two national magazines and distributed to NAG members and lesbian and gay community organisations across the UK (response rate of 2.2%). It found that not only were levels of homophobic incidents high amongst respondents; confidence in reporting such experiences to the public was also very low. The development of police anti-homophobia policies and the introduction of specialist police-lesbian/gay community liaison officers were seen as positive moves by respondents, particularly with respect to reporting.

The second piece of research was carried out in 1994 by Stonewall (Mason & Palmer, 1996). This used a similar sampling strategy, inserting the questionnaire into national gay publications and sending it to lesbian and gay mailing lists throughout the country. This received an 8.4% response rate. It focussed on experiences of homophobic violence, harassment and verbal abuse and behavioural strategies to avoid such incidents. Again, it found high levels of abuse and routine avoidance measures that ‘contribute significantly to the lack of visibility of lesbians and gay men in public life’ (p.2).

This research was a local survey of residents of and visitors to K&C. It focused upon experiences of homophobic abuse and a range of emotional and behavioural responses to the risk of abuse. It also explored whether respondents reported the most severe incident they had experienced or witnessed to the local police. If they had not, respondents were asked whether a series of reasons why applicable. Finally, four strategies designed to increase the inclination to report were presented for feedback. The data obtained will be used to feed into policing strategy, as part of a wider move to tackle hate crime and improve community relations and confidence.

Whilst the research sought to gather data from lesbians, gay men and bisexuals, it should be noted that 91% of respondents were gay men.

3 Methodology

Obtaining representative samples of lesbians, gay men and bisexuals is difficult because there is no information on which such a sample could be based—a substantial number of lesbians and gay men are not out and the Census does not collect information on same sex households. A convenience sample was therefore implemented, with 9,000 questionnaires distributed throughout the borough. These were left in restaurants, pubs, shops and local community facilities (see appendix A for further details). In total, 165 completed questionnaires were returned, giving a response rate of 1.8%. It is important to establish that the data obtained must not be treated as representative of the respective population of Kensington & Chelsea (K&C). This is not to devalue the quality of the information obtained—it is rather to be realistic about its scope and generalisability.

Of the 165 completed questionnaires, 93% of those received were from males. Figure 1 presents the age distribution. The age distribution was fairly broad. Sixty five per cent were between the ages of 25 and 44.

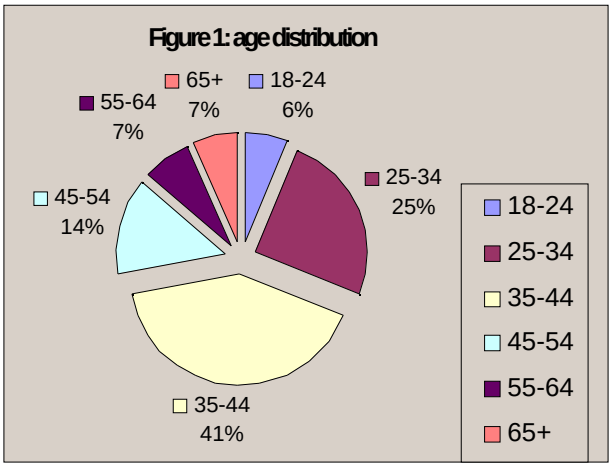


Figure 2 (overleaf) shows the complete ethnic origin breakdown. In terms of ethnic origin, half of the respondents described themselves as either ‘white’ or ‘British white’, with a quarter identifying themselves as simply ‘British’. The majority of those remaining referred to themselves as either ‘European’ or from specific countries on the European continent.

Figure 2: ethnic origin distribution (self-descriptions)

Ethnic origin	Frequency	Percent
White	43	26.1
British - not race specific	39	23.6
British - white	38	23.0
European*	25	15.2
Australasian	4	2.4
Irish	4	2.4
British - non-white	2	1.2
North American	2	1.2
South American	2	1.2
Asian	2	1.2
Russian	1	0.6
Total completed	162	98.2
Missing	3	1.8
Total	165	100

*****either described simply as 'European' or from specific countries on the continent

65% of respondents were residents of Kensington & Chelsea and 72% spent 'all' or 'most' of their time in the borough. Of those who live in the borough, 51% had been there less than 10 years. Figure 3 shows the overall postcode distribution, with the map used to classify postcodes in appendix B.

Figure 3: postcode of residence distribution

Postcode	Frequency	Percent
SW above Thames	81	49.1
W within 5 miles	44	26.7
W 5<10 miles	11	6.7
SW below Thames	10	6.1
E	8	4.8
NW	2	1.2
Other	2	1.2
N	1	0.6
SE	1	0.6
Total completed	160	97.0
System missing	5	3.0
Total	165	100

The vast majority of the sample (91%) was gay (see figure 4).

Figure 4: sexuality

Sexuality	Percent
Gay	91%
Lesbian	4%
Bisexual	4%
Other	1%
Total completed	98%
System missing	2%
Total	100%

Figure 5 shows how open people felt they were about their sexuality. Only four per cent of respondents responded between zero and two on this question. The scale ranged from 'not "out" at all' (zero) to 'completely "out"' (nine). Seventy seven per cent replied between seven, eight or nine.

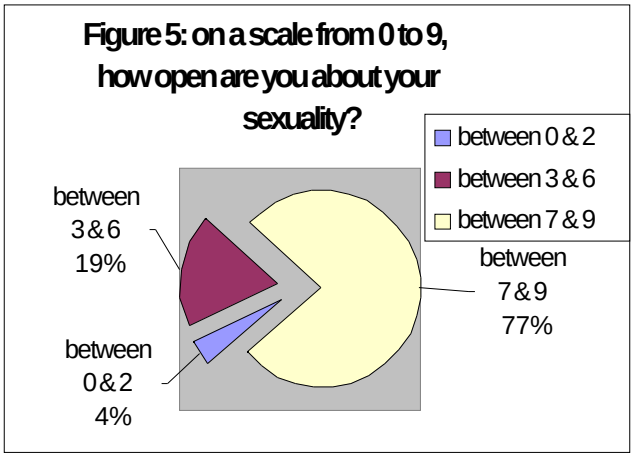
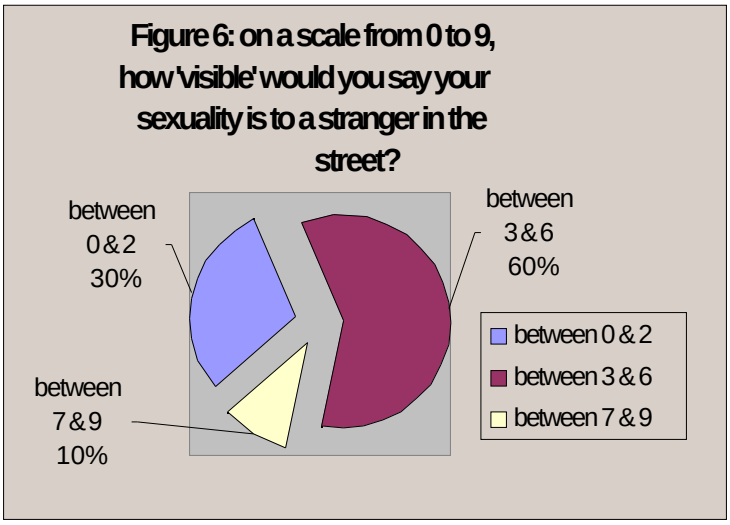
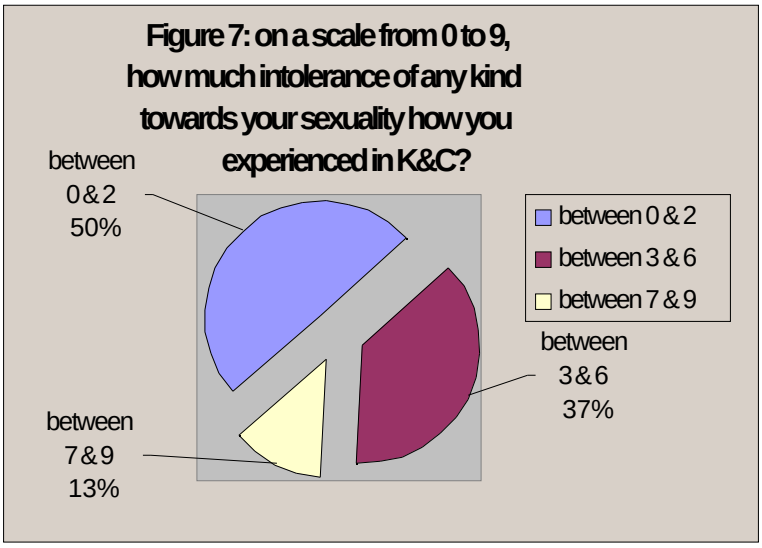


Figure 6 shows how ‘visible’ respondents felt their sexuality was to a stranger in the street. The scale ranged from ‘not at all visible’ (zero) to ‘very visible’ (nine). Here, 30% responded with a number between zero and two and 10% between seven and nine.



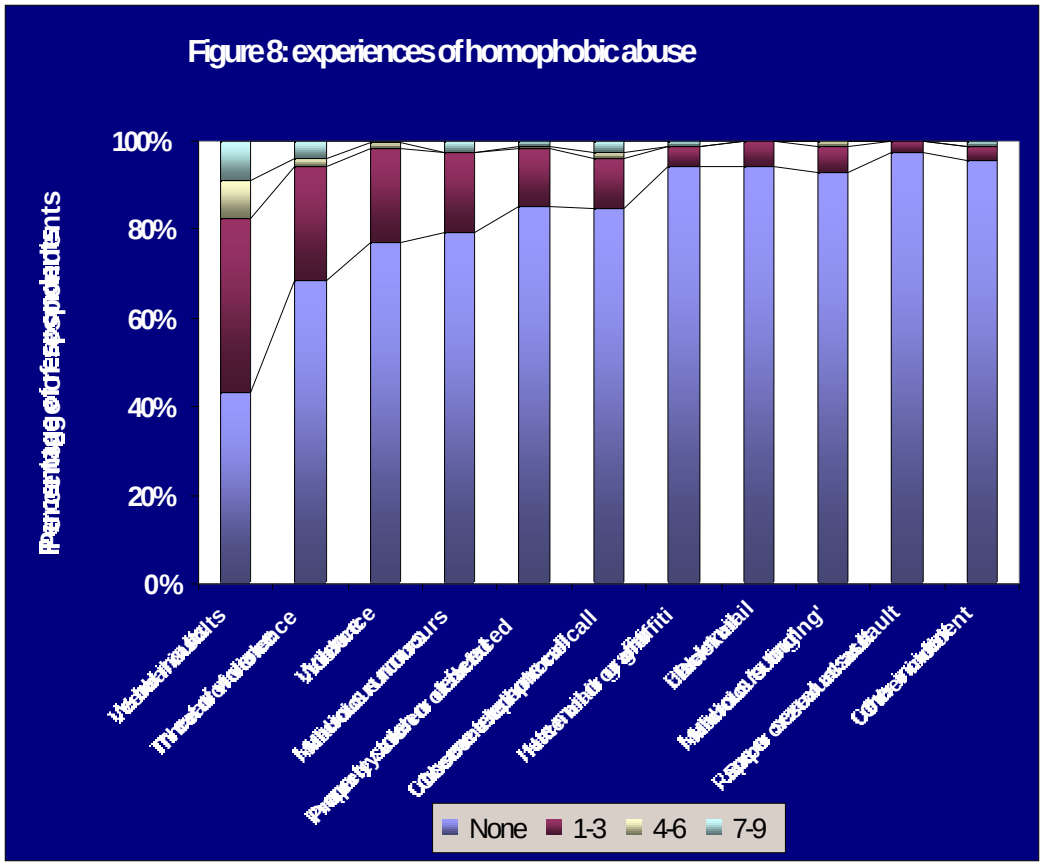
4 Experience of homophobic abuse

Figure 7 presents overall levels of intolerance towards sexuality that respondents have experienced in K&C. The scale ranged from 'none at all (zero) to 'a huge amount' (nine). Fifty per cent of individuals responded between zero and two, indicating little or no intolerance experienced. Conversely, around one-eight of the sample indicated that they had experienced a great deal.

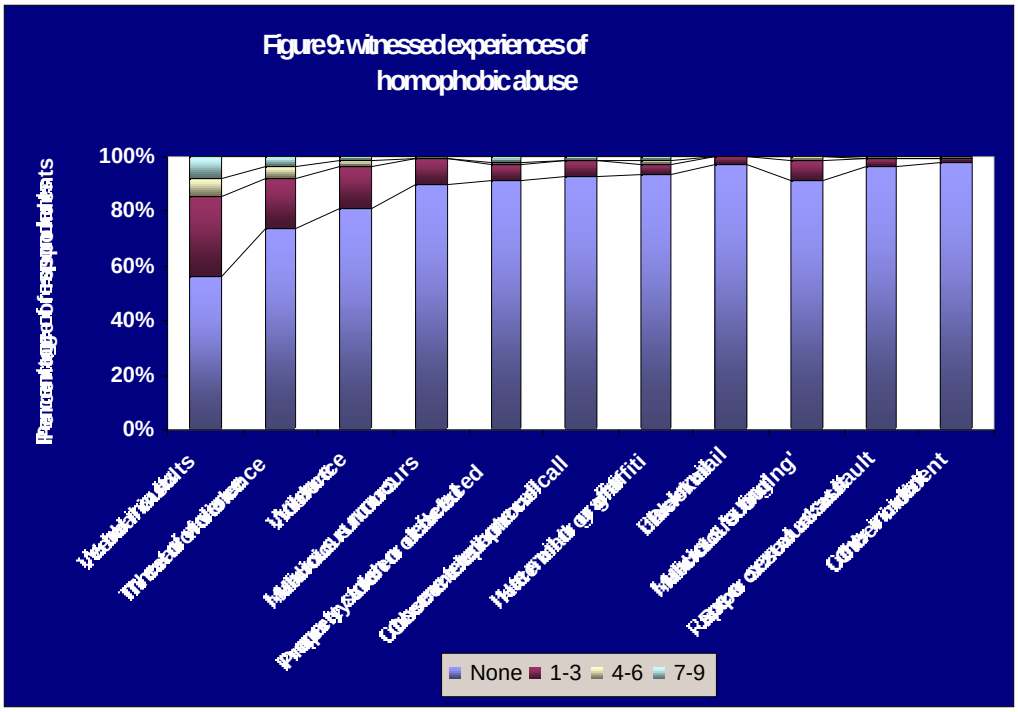


The survey asked respondents about their experience of a range of different homophobic incidents. Overall, one-third of the sample had not experienced any such events in K&C and half had not witnessed any. These figures did not vary between residents and non-residents. However, the older respondents got the less likely they were to have experienced or witnessed abuse in the borough.

Figure 8 presents the numbers of respondents who had experienced a range of homophobic incidents in K&C. It also indicates the number of times individuals had suffered each category of abuse. Each column provides the percentage of individuals who had experienced each incident 0, 1-3, 4-6 or 7-9 times. Reading from left to right, the most common types of incident experienced were verbal insults, threats of violence, actual violence, malicious rumours and property stolen or defaced. Overall, 57% of respondents had experienced verbal insults. Thirty one per cent have been threatened with violence, 23% have suffered violence, 20% have been victims of malicious rumours and 15% have had property stolen or defaced.



A similar pattern is found with respect to homophobic incidents which respondents have witnessed occurring to others. Figure 9 presents the results in a graphical form.



The most common categories of homophonic incidents witnessed by respondents in K&C were verbal insults, threats of violence and actual violence. Overall, 44% of respondents who answered this series of questions have witnessed others experiencing verbal insult, 26% have witnessed others being threatened with violence, 19% have witnessed others suffering violence, 10% have witnessed others had malicious rumours spread about them and 9% have witnessed others having had their property stolen or defaced.

The questionnaire also asked respondents to describe the most serious incident they had experienced or witnessed. Figure 10 (overleaf) provides frequencies of categorisations of these responses.

Figure 10: categorisations of the most serious incident described by respondents

Category	Number of respondents
Verbal insults	24
Physical violence	18
Threatened or intimidated with violence	13
Witnessed others being physically attacked	6
Other direct experience	6
Witnessed others had verbal insults directed	5
Blackmail	2
Obscene or threatening phone call	1
Hate mail or graffiti	1
Property damaged or defaced	1
Total	77
Missing	88
Total	165

As with the reports of the total number of homophobic incidents experienced, individual descriptions of single events also tended to be of verbal insults, actual violence or the threat of violence. Some examples of these descriptions will add some colour to the figures and graphs. The following ten descriptions were picked out at random using a number generator and have been reproduced in full.

'Attacked by car full of young men when returning home late at night'
Not reported.

'Was verbally abused with friend by street drunk as coming out of gay bar'
Not reported.

'Kicked to the ground, completely out of the blue, from behind'
Reported to the police – satisfaction not rated but would report again if suffered similar experience.

'Held up at knife point & mugged - can't state that this was homophobic in all certainty'
Reported to the police – 'not very' satisfied with the way it was dealt with but would report again if suffered similar experience.

'Some black guys were beating up people with a stick to every gay guy in Holland Park'
Not reported.

'Threats of death and being burned out of home by someone who I had repeated to the police for harassment on many occasions'
Reported to the police – 'fairly' satisfied and would report again.

'Being abused by two non-white people who assumed rightly or wrongly that all queers should die of aids etc etc'
Reported to the police – satisfaction not rated but would report again if suffered similar experience.

'An incident in side street off Kings Road. An Asian man hit the car I was in and gave verbal and physical abuse. Other people in the street chastised him'
Reported to the police – 'fairly' satisfied and would report again.

'Threatened to be beaten up if did not stop being affectionate with boyfriend'
Not reported.

'Being verbally abused by two police officers (male and female) just for walking along Old Brompton Street on the opposite side to the Coleherne'
Not reported but would report if experienced similar incident again.

The perpetrators of a large majority of these incidents were young males (the descriptor of 'youth' was often used). Very rarely did they involve just one single male—groups of between three and seven men were most common.

Of particular concern must be experiences of homophobia from the police themselves. The last description reproduced above was not an isolated one. Respondents also related the following incidents:

'Before Carnival 1990 I was walking up Portobello (heavily policed) holding hands with another man. A police officer shouted 'shirt-lifter' at me. I made a complaint to the Police Complaints Authority, but they were unable to act because I did not get the officer's number'

'Was thrown against a wall by police in Earls Court, on "suspicion" of me, a professional gay man, of causing an attack – bollocks. Police did apologise for mistaken identity'
Not reported

'Police assault on patron of gay pub who refused to "move on" whilst standing on pavement at closing time (Coleherne)'
Not reported – 'pointless exercise'

5 Reporting of homophobic incidents

5.1 Reporting to the police

A series of questions was asked in relation to reporting the most serious incident respondents had experienced or witnessed in K&C. Seventy-six of the 165 respondents gave a description of the most serious incident (overall, 102 had experienced a homophobic incident and 77 had witnessed one). Of these individuals, 18 respondents reported the incident to the police and four to other groups (the gay press, youth club worker, a private detective and a housing officer).

All of these were direct experiences of abuse rather than the witnessing of incidents occurring to others. Half were of these were experiences of physical violence, a quarter were threats of violence, and the remainder were verbal insults, property damaged or defaced and witnessing actual violence.

Figure 11 presents the levels of satisfaction with the way in which the police dealt with respondents. Nine of the 16 respondents were 'fairly' or 'very' satisfied, leaving the remaining 7 'not very' or 'not at all'.

Figure 11: satisfaction with the way in which the police dealt with respondents

Satisfaction category	Frequency
Very satisfied	6
Fairly satisfied	3
Not very satisfied	4
Not at all satisfied	3
Total completed	16
Missing	2
Total	18

Thirty-four of the 76 respondents who described the most serious homophobic incident in K&C reported that they would report it to the police if they were to experience a similar incident in the future. This is perhaps a little surprising considering only 18 individuals reported the incidents to the police in the first place. Figure 12 (overleaf) presents the full data on this question.

Figure 12: if respondents were to experience a similar incident to that described in the future in K&C, would they report it to the police?

Intentions	Frequency
Would report it to the police	34
Would not report it to the police	29
Total completed	63
Missing	11
Total	74

Fifty-four respondents described a serious incident that had occurred in K&C but indicated that they had not reported it to the police. The reasons given for this are the next topic. Fifty-two respondents responded to the question relating to why they had not reported the incident. Figure 13 presents the number of times the following reasons were cited.

Figure 13: reasons cited for not reporting the incident to the police

Reason	Frequency
felt the police would not do anything	31
felt the police could not do anything	28
expected a negative reaction from the police	24
felt the incident was not serious enough	23
concerned about the retribution from the attackers	17
dealt with the incident yourself	14
were not confident enough to report the crime	10
felt that abuse is what you have to accept as being part of being gay	14
by reporting, other people would find out you're gay (family/employer)	7
would have been charged with a crime yourself	6
other	3
Total completed	52
Missing	2
Total	54

The two most frequent reasons cited were 'felt the police would not do anything' and 'felt the police could not do anything'. The next two most frequent reasons were 'expected a negative reaction from the police' and 'felt the incident not to be serious enough'. A look at the relationship between answers to three key reasons indicate that thinking the incident not to be serious enough did not increase the likelihood of thinking that the police could not do anything. However, thinking the incident not to be serious enough did decrease the likelihood of thinking that the police would not do anything.

Of the 24 individuals who expected a negative reaction from the police, 21 of them also cited that they felt the police would not do anything. Similarly, five of these 24 individuals also felt that they would have been charged with a crime themselves (overall, only six respondents cited this as a reason).

Figure 14 presents the reasons given by those 24 people who suffered verbal abuse and did not report it. Twelve respondents felt that it was not serious enough, another 12 feeling that the police would not do anything and a further 11 feeling that the police could not do anything.

Figure 14: reasons cited for not reporting to the police an incident of verbal abuse

Reason	Frequency
felt the incident was not serious enough	12
felt the police would not do anything	12
felt the police could not do anything	11
concerned about the retribution from the attackers	6
expected a negative reaction from the police	6
dealt with the incident yourself	5
felt that abuse is what you have to accept as being part of being gay	5
were not confident enough to report the crime	4
By reporting, other people would find out you're gay (family/employer)	2
would have been charged with a crime yourself	1
other	1
Total completed	24
Missing	0
Total	24

Figure 15 presents the same data for those 13 people who experienced threats of violence but did not report it. Again, three reasons were common: feeling the incident not to be serious enough; feeling the police would not do anything about it; and feeling that the police could not do anything about it. However, a particular concern is the five respondents who indicated that they expected a negative reaction from the police.

Figure 15: reasons cited for not reporting an incident to the police where respondents were threatened with violence

Reason	Frequency
felt the incident was not serious enough	5
felt the police would not do anything	5
expected a negative reaction from the police	5
felt the police could not do anything	4
dealt with the incident yourself	3
felt that abuse is what you have to accept as being part of being gay	3
would have been charged with a crime yourself	1
other	1
Total completed	13
Missing	0
Total	13

Of the 18 individuals who experienced violent attack and did not report it to the police, the most commonly cited reasons for not doing so were feeling the police would not do anything, expecting a negative reaction from the police and being concerned about retribution from attackers (see figure 16 overleaf). Compared with verbal abuse and the threat of violence, two reasons for not reporting are of note: 'retribution from the attackers'; and 'feeling not confident enough to report the crime.'

Figure 16: reasons cited for not reporting to the police an incident of physical violence

Reason	Frequency
felt the police would not do anything	6
expected a negative reaction from the police	6
were concerned about the retribution from the attackers	6
were not confident enough to report the crime	4
felt the police could not do anything	4
would have been charged with a crime yourself	2
felt the incident was not serious enough	1
by reporting, other people would find out you're gay (family/employer)	1
felt that abuse is what you have to accept as being part of being gay	1
Total completed	18
Missing	0
Total	18

Finally, figure 17 presents the reasons cited for not reporting incidents that respondents had witnessed (five of which involved verbal insults and six of which involved physical assault) to the police.

Figure 17: reasons cited for not reporting an incident where the respondent witnessed verbal abuse or actual violence

Reason	Frequency
felt the police could not do anything	4
dealt with the incident yourself	4
felt the incident was not serious enough	3
felt the police would not do anything	3
expected a negative reaction from the police	3
felt that abuse is what you have to accept as being part of being gay	2
were concerned about the retribution from the attackers	2
would have been charged with a crime yourself	2
by reporting, other people would find out you're gay (family/employer)	2
were not confident enough to report the crime	1
Total completed	11
Missing	0
Total	11

5.2 Solutions to low rates of reporting homophobic abuse

The final part of this section focuses on strategies to increase the inclination to report homophobic abuse to the police. Four ideas were presented to respondents for them to indicate whether each would make them more inclined to report (see figure 18 overleaf). Out of 56 respondents who described the most serious incident, 38 said that reporting it to a gay or lesbian police officer would have made them more inclined to report. Twenty nine individuals said that sending a 'self reporting forms' to a specialist hate-crime unit was a good idea, 21 with remaining totally anonymous, and 12 with reporting to a third party. The type of incident experienced does not affect the sort of idea that respondents feel would make them more inclined to report to the police.

Figure 18: agreement with ideas that might increase the inclination to report to the police

Idea	Number
could have reported the incident to a gay or lesbian police officer	38
could have filled in a ”Self Reporting Form” which you could send directly to a unit within the police station which specialises in tackling hate crimes	29
could have remained totally anonymous (although the crime could not be solved without a ’victim’, it would make the police more aware of problems in the community)	21
could have reported the incident to someone else other than a police officer, away from your station, with the understanding that they would pass on the details to the police on your behalf	12
other	5
Total completed	56
Missing	0
Total	56

The five ‘other’ ideas are reproduced in full below:

'If the press would not be informed'

'They and K&C in general were supportive of gays in the Borough'

'It’s not so much the police as going to court - the attackers defence would put a gay 'on trial', like rape victims were. They would go into my private life and previous minor gay offences. They would make the attackers "good boys" and the usual guff about gays provoking an attack'

'They had been un-corrupt'

'VIA HIV/AIDS agency only!'

6 Perceptions of risk, emotions and precautions

6.1. Thoughts, feelings and behaviours

This final section looks at a range of different appraisals of and responses to the possibility of experiencing homophobic abuse in K&C. These are divided into three conceptually distinct categories—cognitive, emotional and behavioural. The cognitive component relates to:

- respondents' perceptions of the extent to which homophobic abuse is a problem in K&C;
- their estimates of the likelihood that they themselves will experience it; and
- the frequency with which they think about this risk.

Emotional responses to the risk of homophobic abuse relate to:

- whether they feel more or less vulnerable in K&C compared to the rest of London;
- the frequency with which they feel angry, concerned and afraid when they think about the possibility of experiencing homophobic abuse;
- the degree to which they are afraid, on a day-to-day basis, of experiencing homophobic abuse; and
- the extent to which worries about experiencing homophobic abuse affect their everyday lives.

Finally, behavioural responses to the risk of homophobic abuse include: avoiding expressing sexual identity in public; avoiding certain situations at particular times; and not going out alone or at all.

6.2 Thinking about the risk of homophobic abuse

Figure 19 shows the extent to which respondents felt homophobic abuse is a problem in K&C. The scale ranged from 'definitely not a problem' (zero) to 'a very serious problem' (nine). Just over thirty per cent indicated that it was not a problem (a response between zero and two) and 15% that it was a big problem (number between seven and nine).

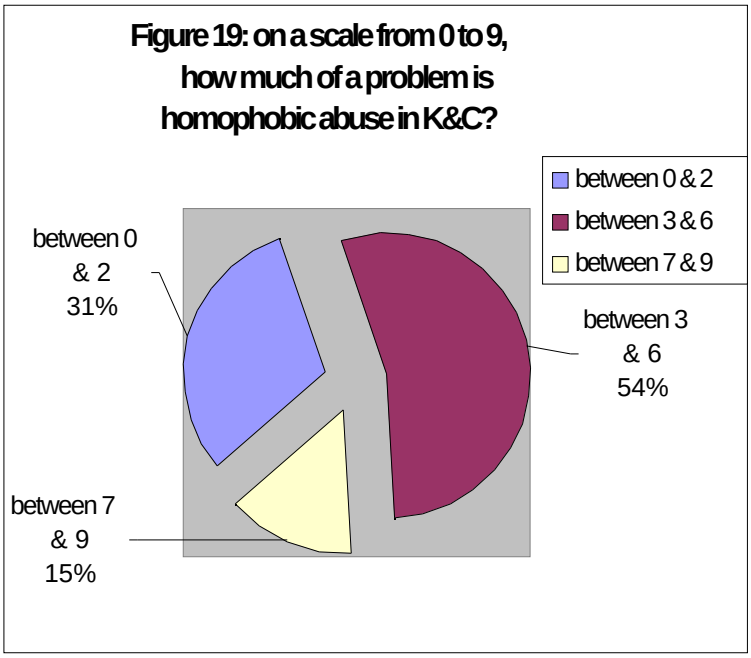
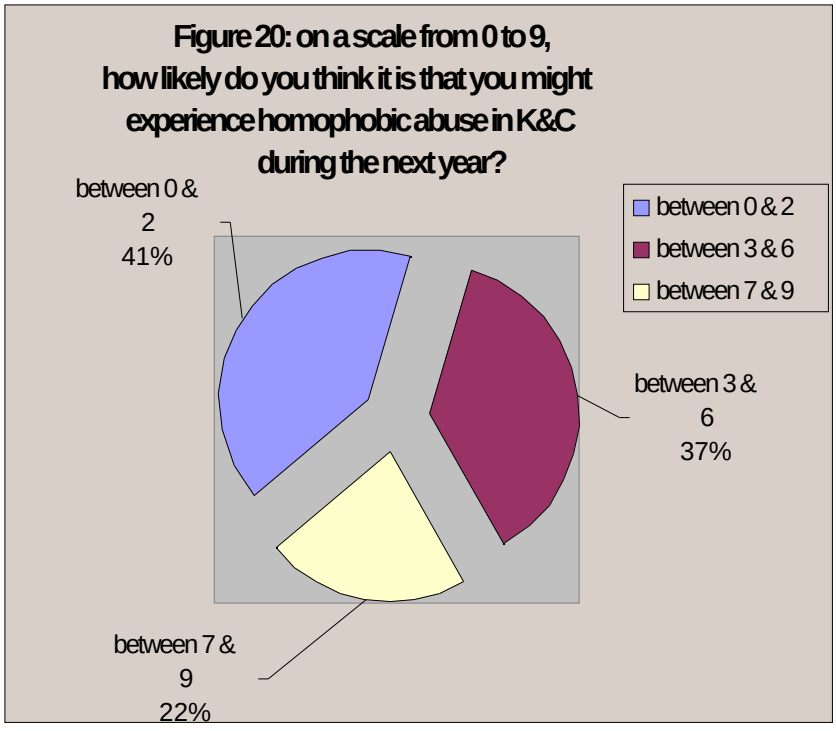


Figure 20 shows a graphical representation of the distribution of estimations of the likelihood of experiencing homophobic abuse in K&C. The scale ranged from 'definitely not going to happen' (zero) to 'certain to happen' (nine). Two-fifths thought it very unlikely to happen (between zero and two), contrasting with one-fifth who thought it very likely (between seven and nine).



Respondents were then asked how often, 'on a day-to-day basis', they thought about the possibility of experiencing homophobic abuse in K&C (see figure 21).

Figure 21: frequency with which respondents think about the possibility of experiencing homophobic abuse in K&C

Frequency category	Per cent	Frequency
Never	23%	37
Seldom	32%	52
Sometimes	31%	50
Often	9%	15
Always	5%	8
Total completed		162
Missing		3
Total		165

Fifty five per cent of respondents indicated that they 'never' or 'seldom' thought about this, contrasting with 14% who 'often' or 'always' did.

6.3 Emotional responses to the risk of homophobic abuse

The majority of respondents (60%) felt less vulnerable to homophobic abuse in the borough compared to other areas of London. Thirty three per cent felt the same level of vulnerability, leaving only seven per cent feeling more vulnerable.

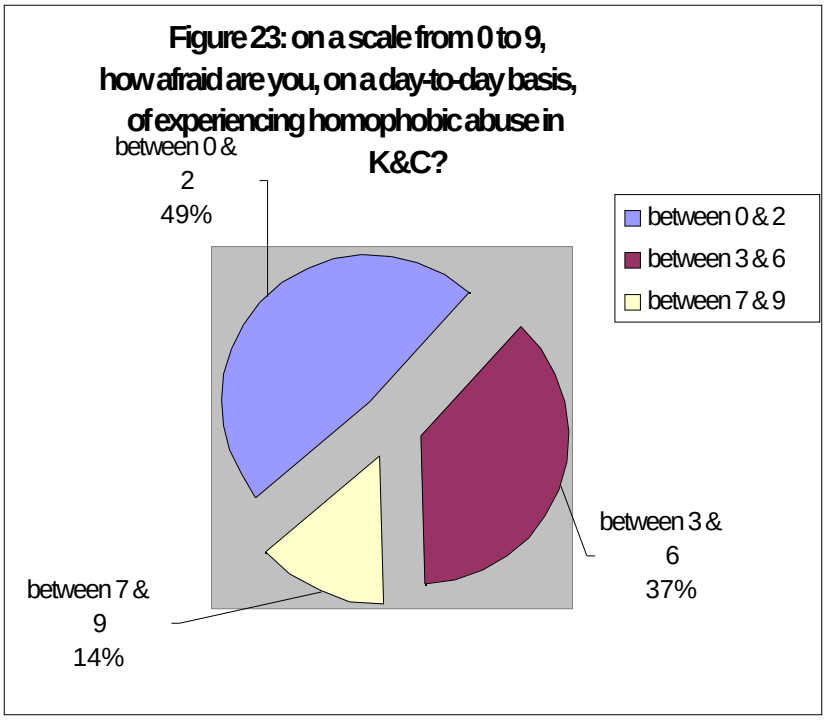
To explore respondents' feelings in response to their perceptions of risk, a series of questions asked how often they felt angry, concerned and afraid when they thought about the possibility of experiencing homophobic abuse in K&C (see figure 22). This needs to be cross-referenced with the amount of times people think about it (see figure 21 above).

Figure 22: frequency with which respondents feel angry, concerned and afraid when they think about the possibility of experiencing homophobic abuse in K&C

Frequency category	Angry: per cent	Concerned: per cent	Afraid: per cent	Frequency
Never	32%	26%	30%	-
Seldom	9%	11%	21%	-
Sometimes	28%	28%	27%	-
Often	13%	19%	11%	-
Always	18%	17%	11%	-
Total completed				160
Missing				5
Total				165

A significant proportion of the convenience sample indicated that they frequently thought about the possibility of experiencing homophobic abuse. And a range of emotions are often experienced when people think about this risk, with anger and concern being more frequent than fear. The structure of this series of questions is a little complicated, but it indicates that about half of the respondents think about this risk 'sometimes', 'often' or 'always' (although it should be noted that only 14% of the sample ticked 'often' or 'always'). And when they do, between 50% and 60% feel 'angry', 'concerned' and/or 'afraid'. Respondents felt afraid slightly less often than they felt concerned or angry (22% 'often'/'always' compared to 35% and 31% for concerned and angry respectively).

The next question asked respondents to assess overall the intensity with which they fear experiencing homophobic abuse in K&C. Using a scale between zero ('not at all afraid') and nine ('very afraid'), respondents were asked, on a day-to-day basis, how afraid they were of experiencing homophobic abuse (see figure 23). Just under half the sample responded that they were not afraid (between zero and two). This contrasts with the 14% who indicated that they were very afraid (between seven and nine).



The final question in this series asked the degree to which worries about homophobic abuse affects their everyday lives. Figure 24 presents the results. Fifty one per cent responded 'not at all' or 'slightly' and 22% 'a lot' or 'extremely'.

Figure 24: extent to which worries about homophobic abuse affect the everyday lives of respondents

Frequency category	Per cent	Frequency
Not at all	30%	49
Slightly	21%	33
Fairly	27%	44
A lot	11%	18
Extremely	11%	17
Total completed		161
Missing		4
Total		165

6.4 Behavioural responses to the risk of homophobic abuse

Respondents were asked the frequency with which they acted in certain ways to avoid homophobic abuse. These can be categorised into three groups:

- not expressing (or hiding) sexual identity in public;
- avoiding certain areas at certain times; and
- the more extreme reactions of never going out alone or at all.

Figure 25 below presents the raw percentages.

Figure 25: frequency with which respondents behave in certain ways to avoid homophobic abuse

Precaution	Never per cent	Sometimes per cent	Always: per cent	Frequency
Avoid kissing or holding hands in public places	14%	45%	41%	-
Avoid other expressions of affection in public places	22%	49%	29%	-
Hide your sexual identity in any other way in public places	33%	52%	15%	-
Avoid telling people you are gay	41%	48%	11%	-
Avoid going to certain places	46%	44%	10%	-
Avoid going out at certain times	65%	29%	6%	-
Do not go out alone	79%	19%	3%	-
Avoid public transport	85%	14%	1%	-
Do not go out at all	92%	7%	1%	-
Total completed				160
Missing				5
Total				165

The three most common strategies to avoid homophobic abuse relate to dampening down (or not strongly expressing publicly) the visibility of sexual identity. For example, 41% of the sample said that they always avoided kissing or holding hands in public places. A sizeable minority of respondents sometimes avoid certain places or going out at certain times. Finally, a small amount sometimes avoids going out alone (19%) or going out at all (7%).

7 Conclusions and recommendations

This research project explored the experiences of homophobic abuse of a convenience sample of residents and visitors in Kensington & Chelsea (K&C). Respondents were asked whether they had experienced or witnessed a variety of homophobic incidents, from physical violence to verbal abuse. Of concern was whether such incidents were reported to the local police and the reasons why this might not be the case. Possible solutions to low reporting rates were explored by presenting four strategies designed to increase the inclination to report to respondents for feedback.

The survey also asked about people's perceptions of risk of homophobic abuse and whether they worried or behaved in different ways because of the possibility of experiencing abuse. How likely did they think it was that they would experience abuse? Did the possibility of experiencing abuse cause them to feel or behave in certain ways? How often did they worry or feel angry about this risk? Did they engage in certain behaviours to reduce the chances of these sorts of incidents occurring?

It is important to emphasise that the convenience sample used in this research is not representative of any population—it does not allow you to infer to gay, lesbian or bisexual residents/visitors to K&C. The sample consisted of 165 adults living, working or visiting in K&C. This represented a response rate of 1.8% from a total of 9,000 questionnaires distributed in a range of different establishments in the borough. Sixty five per cent were residents of the borough and ninety one per cent were gay men. The ages of respondents were evenly distributed.

Sixty five per cent of respondents had experienced some form of homophobic abuse in K&C and 50% had witnessed an incident occurring. Verbal abuse was the most common—just under 60% had experienced this. Threats of violence (31% of respondents) and actual violence (23%) were the next most common experiences. A similar pattern was found for the witnessing of homophobic incidents. The three most common types of events were verbal abuse (44%), threats of violence (26%) and actual violence (19%).

About one-fifth of the convenience sample felt it very likely that they would experience homophobic abuse in K&C in the next year. Around one-eighth reported that, during their everyday life in K&C, they thought about the possibility of experiencing abuse 'often' or 'always'. People generally reported that they felt more angry and concerned than afraid when they thought about the possibility of experiencing abuse. However, one-sixth of the respondents reported that, overall, they felt very afraid of experiencing abuse in the K&C. Similarly, one tenth said that their everyday life was 'extremely' affected by worries about experiencing abuse.

However, the scale of emotional responses to this problem in K&C should be contextualised. Sixty per cent of the sample felt less vulnerable to homophobic abuse in K&C than elsewhere in London. This suggests that respondents feel the problem to be greater outside of the borough than it is inside.

Routine strategies designed to decrease the likelihood of homophobic abuse were common. These can be grouped into two categories. The first involves avoiding the public expression of sexual identity, for example by not kissing or holding hands. This type of precaution, if one can refer to this in such a way, was reasonably common. For example, 40% of the sample said they 'always' avoided kissing or holding hands in public place. The second type of precaution involved avoiding certain situations—particular locations or going out at certain times of the day. Just under half the sample said they 'sometimes' avoided certain places or going out at certain times.

Respondents were asked to describe the most serious incident they had experienced or witnessed. Of the individuals who did so, only one quarter had reported it to the police. Of these, only half were satisfied with the way in which they were treated. The most frequent reasons for not reporting were: feeling that the police would or could not do anything; expecting a negative reaction from the police; and feeling that the incident was not serious enough.

Overall, these results indicate that the majority of the convenience sample has experienced some form of homophobic abuse in K&C. Furthermore, few incidents experienced or witnessed were reported. This was because, firstly, respondents either felt the police *would* not do anything or would react negatively, or secondly that they felt the incident was not serious enough or that police *could* not do anything.

Overall, this research highlights the complexity of the notion of public confidence in the police. It suggests a lack of confidence of a significant proportion of the sample in the police's understanding of and commitment to the issues involved. They expected hostility or apathy during the reporting process and subsequently felt it futile or unproductive. The research also hints at a degree of habituation (or maybe weary resignation) to low-level harassment. These two issues reflect a failure of the police in communicating a genuine understanding of the seriousness of *all* homophobic abuse and a commitment to tackling these issues head-on; at least to a significant minority of this convenience sample.

Two of the four strategies designed to increase the inclination to report were particularly popular with respondents: reporting the incident to a gay or lesbian officer; and sending a 'self reporting form' to a specialist hate crime unit. The key components seem to be the nature of the contact and the degree to which this contact is with individual(s) who self-evidently understand and take seriously these issues.

Successful strategies to increase the inclination to report homophobic abuse should incorporate two issues. Firstly, they should focus upon the nature of the contact with the police when reporting. Secondly, they should go hand-in-hand with the communication of a genuine commitment to deal with homophobic abuse. Providing the opportunity for members of the public to deal with an officer who is gay or lesbian is expected to improve reporting rates (so long as this strategy is effectively communicated). Respondents presumably felt that dealing with such an officer would ensure that the matter would be dealt with seriously and the interaction of the reporting itself would be of a sensitive and personal manner. Similarly, the anonymity of the self-reporting form seems to be a useful option, allowing individuals to choose whether to have personal contact with the police or not (again, so long as this option is effectively communicated). However, the fact that such forms would be sent to a specialist unit that tackles hate crime may well be just as important as the anonymity.

Appendix A: distribution of the FUSION survey

1. 350 copies to Notting Hill Social Council for inclusion 'Link' mag 13/06
2. 300 copies to Chelsea Social Council " " " "
3. 100 copies hand delivered to Streetwise Youth (project for gay men who sell sex) on 15/06 (73700406)
4. 50 copies to the Basement Project (drugs project) on 15/06
5. 10 copies to Health Information Project (drugs project) on 15/06
6. 10 copies to the Blenheim (drugs project) on 15/06
7. 20 copies to Westminster Drugs Project on 15/06
8. 200 copies to Iseult Pilkington at Central Library for distribution on 15/06
9. 20 copies to each G.P surgery in the Borough on 16/06 (Lesley Butler 77253398).
10. 125 to the Queens Head pub.
11. Bromptons pub.
12. The Coleherne pub
13. Clone Zone clothes shop.
14. Three branches of Balaans café/restaurant
15. The Philbeach pub
16. The New York pub.
17. Pop's café.
18. Earls Court gym.
19. Starbucks coffee house.
20. Front Offices at Chelsea, Kensington & Notting Hill police stations.
21. Reception area at Kensington Town Hall
22. The Champion pub.
23. The Kobler clinic at Chelsea & Westminster Hospital.

Members of the gay and lesbian police and community liaison group visited individual venues. The owners were provided with information about the purpose of the survey and given contact details (Community Safety Team). When surveys were provided to one location for internal distribution and a letter was sent to accompany the survey.

Appendix B: map used to classify postcodes