

# Rights lobby says lesbian bashings are on the rise

By ANNE HOWELL

Lesbians are increasingly being attacked and even raped for simply being lesbians, according to the co-convenor of the Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby, Ms Jane Clements.

Several incidents in which lesbians have been attacked in inner-city suburbs have been reported to the Gay and Lesbian Counselling Service since it began a monitoring service earlier this month.

One instance involved four men attacking four women with broken bottles outside a hotel in Rozelle three weeks ago. Two of the women were hospitalised after the incident, and are recovering at home.

Ms Clements said the women are now reluctant to go outside their homes since the attack.

She said the incidents have happened in Newtown, Leichhardt, Rozelle and Annandale — areas where lesbians socialise.

She said the attacks tend to happen after a womens' night at a pub, often because the regular male customers are incensed that these

women have taken over their territory.

"Often the assault on lesbians is of a sexual nature," she said.

Ms Clements said the male attackers seem to be offended that these women were not sexually interested in them, thinking they could convert them to heterosexuality through forced intercourse.

"Even when there is no direct sexual attack, the abuse accompanying assault will be sexual," she said.

While gangs of men go out on "poofter bashing" missions, lesbian bashing is a more spontaneous occurrence, she said.

Ms Clements conceded that sometimes it was difficult to tell if a lesbian was being bashed because she was a lesbian or just because she was a woman.

In a campaign named Streetwatch, the counselling service is collating information about the bashings to see if patterns can be detected in the behaviour of offenders.

They are to give this information to the Gay Liaison Unit of the

Police Community Relations Bureau, and the Anti-Discrimination Board.

Ms Clements said: "We aim to improve relations with police and hope to give them more understanding of the violence perpetrated against gays and lesbians. Perhaps then they will have more sympathy."

She said if it was known that incidents of violence towards lesbians were happening regularly in certain neighbourhoods, patrols should be stepped up in those areas, but that this had not happened yet.

"If a spate of muggings of little old women were happening in certain areas, they [the police] would act straight away."

The co-ordinator of the Gay Liaison Unit, Mr Fred Miller, said he had received no reports of bashings directed at lesbians, despite the two hotlines set up in the past three years to register such complaints.

"It is difficult to get lesbians to talk on matters such as this, and by keeping quiet they are doing themselves a disservice," he said.