

LESBIANS ON THE LOOSE

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FREE

DYKE ATTACK FIGURES RELEASED

A report on anti-lesbian violence compiled by the Lesbian and Gay Anti-Violence Project shows a large proportion of attacks on lesbians are part of ongoing harassment by someone known to the victim. In a report due to be released in early May it is revealed that 25% of women who responded to the *Off Our Backs* survey conducted by the Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby between December '90 and June '91 knew their assailant. Of all the attacks on the 45 respondents 25% were verbal, 25% physical and 50% both physical and verbal. 50% of the women were attacked by groups of three or more men and 50% of the assaults were serious, i.e. needed medical treatment. A significant proportion of attacks occurred around Mardi Gras events. Only 10% of respondents reported their assaults to the police, the main reasons being that there were no women liaison officers to report to in their area, they thought the police would be homophobic or that nothing would be done. 10% of the incidents were of police abuse. The women that did report were happy with the service they received from the police.

Project co-ordinator Kerrie Cheers says the statistics have taken a long time to compile due to funding and time problems. In the meantime the *Count and Counter* campaign has been collecting statistics via personal interviews that will be added to the *Off Our Backs* data. Some of these interviews reveal frightening stories such as a woman who was nearly bashed to death by a group of fundamentalist Christians after public speaking at the Domain. She has since been harassed by the group, has had to move house and change jobs. Kerrie has also received reports of lesbian streetworkers being verbally and physically abused. A group of lesbians and gay men in a Housing Commission block in Darlinghurst found a knife planted blade up after they were told to take their AIDS virus elsewhere.

Kerrie has set up a consultative committee to compile the report - similar to Streetwatch - and make recommendations. These are expected to include a resource manual for government departments, health care centres, educational institutions etc.; and encouragement for lesbians to report harassment and attacks. Kerrie would particularly like to find out more about rape against lesbians who she suspects go to Rape Crisis Centres.

The Anti-Violence Project is currently waiting for government funding and provided it is received Kerrie plans to run a campaign similar to Streetwatch, focused on dykes, and a one-day forum to receive community input.

A survey similar to *Off Our Backs* was conducted by a social work student at the Lesbian Conference. The survey had

many more respondents - 329 - but also contains many similarities in its findings. It aimed at establishing levels of lesbian violence, and although it's likely that crime victims were more likely to complete the survey than others, it found that in the last 12 months 72% of women had experienced verbal harassment, 40% physical intimidation, 15% physical violence, 10% sexual assault, 13% domestic violence, 20% property damage and 28% had experienced no harassment or assault. The survey also hints at lesbian domestic violence in that 85% of domestic violence attacks involved female perpetrators. Levels of reporting to the police varied according to the offence, but it was only in a majority of property offences that reports were made. 28% of people who didn't report felt negatively about police while 48% thought the offence wasn't serious enough or that the police couldn't do anything. Of those that did report, 33% found the police unsupportive.

These results are now in the hands of Sue Thompson, Police Gay & Lesbian Consultant, who supplied them to LOTL.

One of the more encouraging findings of the *Off Our Backs* survey was that 35% of women physically attacked fought back. If that's the option you'd prefer and you'd like to learn self-defence the Anti-Violence Project will conduct self-defence classes for lesbians and gay men on 4-5 April at Darlinghurst. Cost is \$25/15 concession. For more information call Kerrie Cheers 360 6650. For those that live out west Blacktown Women's and Girls Health Centre will run lesbian only classes in May and June for the same price. For further details call Robyn McGrath at the centre on 813 2070.

Frances Rand



Older women march at IWD

Photo: Dianne Fairweather

inside...iwd...annie ling...coogee pool...mardi gras photos...

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