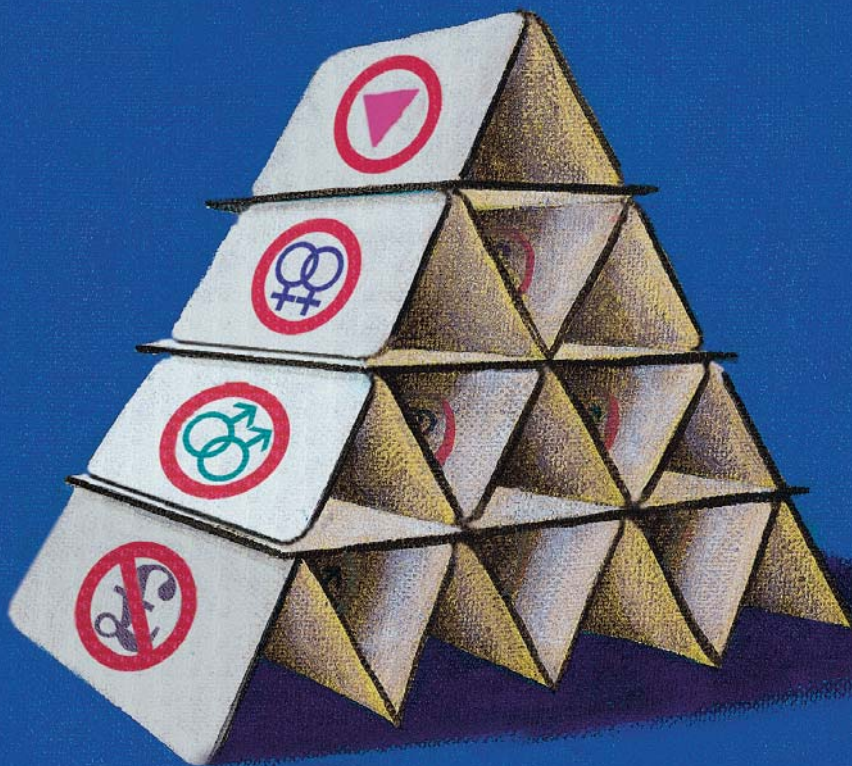




POVERTY

lesbians & gay men



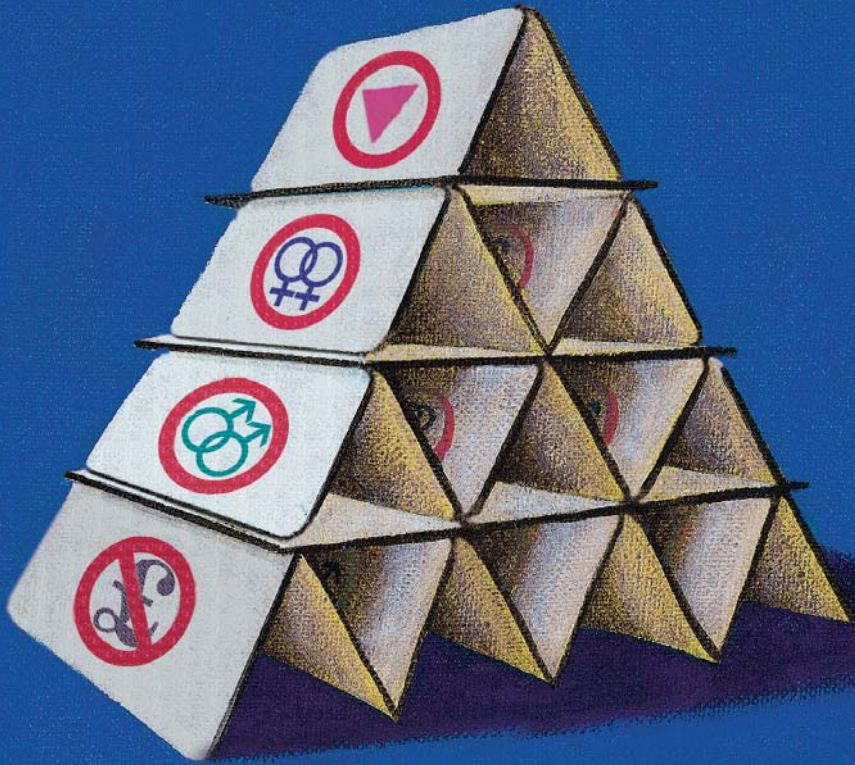
THE ECONOMIC & SOCIAL EFFECTS OF DISCRIMINATION

Gay and Lesbian Equality Network and NEXUS Research Cooperative



POVERTY

lesbians & gay men



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We would like to thank all those who made this groundbreaking project possible. The thinking behind the project has been developing since the mid-1970s, when the first lesbian and gay community organisations were established and links were developed with other movements for social change.

Many people, too numerous to mention, have contributed to this project and we would like to thank them. In particular, we would like to thank the researchers Eoin Collins, Ide O'Carroll and Patricia Prendiville for their meticulous work, and also for their considerable amount of unpaid extra work. The project would not have been possible without the enthusiastic support of the lesbian and gay community, especially the respondents, and the support and encouragement of both the Combat Poverty Agency and Nexus Research Co-operative.

Also in particular, we would like to pay tribute to our fellow co-chair of the Gay and Lesbian Equality Network (GLEN), Kieran Rose. The initiation of this specific project was almost entirely due to his insistence that prejudice and discrimination must inevitably lead to diminished opportunities and impoverished lives, and that research could illuminate this process. Kieran continued to be involved at all stages of the project, contributing endless painstaking work.

While the incidence of discrimination, prejudice and harassment documented in this study is shocking, we trust that it will result in positive action. The carrying out of the research has already led to a significantly improved understanding in our community, and beyond, on issues relating to disadvantage. We are confident that the publication of the study will enhance this understanding further, leading to practical effects.

There is great energy and commitment in the lesbian and gay community to tackle the many problems and avail of the opportunities that now exist. There is also, we believe, an openness at government level and otherwise, to respond imaginatively to these problems and needs in partnership with our community. There is a great opportunity now to develop an ambitious but realistic programme to combat discrimination and disadvantage, which

would significantly improve the lives of lesbians and gay men and lead to greater social cohesion in general.

We hope that the publication and wide circulation of this report will also contribute to the wider public debate on the cause, effects and ways of combating poverty which has been described as “the most important challenge facing our society”. It seems to us that the research has demonstrated new and valuable insights into the mechanisms whereby any discrimination and prejudice must lead to diminished lives.

Christopher Robson, Suzy Byrne
On behalf of GLEN

December 1995

FOREWORD

Introduction

One of the key functions of the Combat Poverty Agency is to promote, commission and interpret research which examines the nature, causes and extent of poverty in Ireland. In undertaking this task, the Agency is particularly concerned to include groups who are marginalised in society, such as the disabled, Travellers and the homeless, whose experiences might otherwise be overlooked. The lesbian and gay community is one such group and this research has successfully broadened our understanding of their experiences as a marginalised group in Irish society.

Since its establishment, the Agency has been particularly aware that poverty and the denial of rights are often closely linked to intolerance, discrimination and racism. This research, therefore, related to the Agency's concern to show the extent to which those living in poverty are progressively excluded from exercising their full rights and responsibilities as citizens, are denied basic social rights and are unable to live with human dignity.

The Agency has also long argued that people experiencing poverty not only have severely restricted access to income but may also have limited access to things like employment, housing, education, health and services. The findings of this research are consistent with our argument that approaches to tackling poverty must be multi-dimensional, integrated and holistic.

Background to the research

In 1992 the Gay and Lesbian Equality Network (GLEN) received a seeding grant from the Agency to develop a research proposal to examine the possible links between discrimination against lesbians and gay men and poverty. The research proposal that followed was accepted by the Agency for funding under its research grants scheme. Some of the reasons for supporting this research were that it had a clear poverty focus, it would address the dynamics by which poverty is created and reproduced, it had a national dimension and would be groundbreaking. No previous research in Ireland, and very little internationally, had examined these issues.

Due to actual and possible harassment and discrimination, the gay popula-

tion in Ireland is largely a hidden one. The study is, therefore, also of interest to the Agency because of the methodological difficulties that it has had to overcome. Time and resource constraints prevented the researchers from gaining access to a random sample of this hidden population. However, they have endeavoured to make the research inclusive and have presented as full and rounded a picture as possible of what it is like to be lesbian or gay in Ireland. The study used a combination of qualitative and quantitative techniques and drew on the findings and methodologies of previous research. Its application of 'snowballing' techniques (i.e. asking each person interviewed for the names of other potential participants) and involving lesbian and gay interviewers in distributing and administering questionnaires are particularly useful examples to other researchers of how to gain access to marginalised or 'underground' groups.

Main findings and policy recommendations

The study set out to explore how discrimination, and the fear of discrimination, impacts on the levels of poverty and exclusion amongst lesbians and gay men and to establish the needs of those most at risk of experiencing poverty. A common stereotype of gay people is that they are highly educated, affluent, organised and male. However, this research has shown that discrimination and prejudice disadvantage lesbians and gay men and exclude them from full participation in society. It affects their lives in terms of their relations with their family and friends, in education and training, in employment and in access to resources such as housing. It may even affect their decision to leave home and traditional support networks in search of greater tolerance of their lifestyle.

While the results of the survey cannot be presented as necessarily representative of the 'gay community' in general, they do offer insights into the levels of discrimination, harassment and even violence suffered by those interviewed and provide a solid ground for the formation of policy-relevant recommendations.

Two of the overall findings to come from the research are particularly relevant to the Agency's work, namely the effects of harassment and discrimination and the experiences of social exclusion. Participants in the research reported problems with harassment, discrimination or prejudice at many stages of their lives – for example, in revealing their sexuality to family and friends; in school, college or while on training courses; in employment

and in gaining access to services. It was interesting that many of those included in this study had not revealed their sexual orientation to others, and particularly in the work place, for fear of rejection. Some respondents had also modified their behaviour or social life to avoid detection. The consequences of being lesbian or gay were profound for some respondents who had either left their education earlier than anticipated, had avoided certain jobs for which they were qualified or had moved jobs to escape or avoid discrimination and harassment. The study justly calls for the introduction of equal status legislation as a matter of urgency, which will help to protect all minority groups.

The second overall finding of particular interest to the Agency concerns the large number of respondents who suffered from social exclusion. Social exclusion occurs when structures or processes exclude people from full participation in the mainstream of society. Again many participants reported that they experienced problems at school or while undergoing further education because they did not feel at ease with their classmates or could not mix with them at sports or social events. Feelings of loneliness and depression while in the education system were not uncommon. There is an urgent need for the education system to address these issues. Training is required for school managers, teachers and trainers, to help counsel those coming to terms with their sexuality. There is also need for legislative protection from harassment, prejudice and discrimination for those undergoing education and training.

Exclusion was also evident in the area of service provision. For example, in housing, while owning your own home is the norm in the general population, the study found that many lesbians and gay men find it difficult to buy their own homes because of the difficulty same sex couples experience in gaining joint mortgages. Many of those interviewed in this study were living in the private rented sector, which is on average more expensive and less secure than other tenures. The study calls for mortgage and insurance companies to introduce an equality-based code of practice, which would be in the interest of many minority groups.

A particularly disturbing finding from the research was that one-third (32%) of respondents said they had left home at one time or another with no certainty as to where they were going to live next. Measures are needed to try to reduce the risk of homelessness for young people who, for various reasons, feel that they can no longer live at home.

Finally, it was interesting that some of those interviewed said they found it difficult to gain access to gay and lesbian social services or to meet other gay and lesbian people because many services and gay meeting-points are run on a commercial basis. Such services are essential if social exclusion is to be reduced amongst those most prone to marginalisation – those with limited resources. However, at present, most gay services have to be run in this way because they lack independent sources of funding. Adequate public funding of social services for minority groups such as lesbians and gay men is therefore important in tackling social exclusion.

National Anti-Poverty Strategy

The publication of this report is timely in light of the government's recent commitment to the development of a National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS). Under NAPS, all government departments and state agencies will be expected to include the reduction and prevention of poverty as key objectives in the development and implementation of their policies and programmes. The report includes numerous recommendations relevant to government departments and other public bodies. If enacted, these changes will undoubtedly reduce the likelihood of members of the gay community experiencing poverty and social exclusion.

Combat Poverty Agency
December 1995

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

This study was initiated by the Gay and Lesbian Equality Network (GLEN) and funded by the Combat Poverty Agency.

Objectives

This study set out to explore how discrimination and the fear of discrimination impacts on the levels of poverty and exclusion amongst lesbians and gay men and to establish the needs of those most at risk of experiencing poverty. The study focused not just on income adequacy, but also on how discrimination affects people's lives in terms of their relationship with family and friends, education and training, employment, access to resources such as housing and state benefits, health, harassment and violence and emigration.

The study examined the means by which discrimination and prejudice disadvantage lesbians and gay men and exclude them from full participation in society. It also analysed the various strategies which lesbians and gay men use to avoid, cope with or resist discrimination including both formal and informal support networks. The underlying objective of the study was to develop policy recommendations to address these discriminatory processes. It is hoped that the study will contribute to a greater understanding of poverty.

Methodology

The results of this study are based on the replies of one hundred and fifty-nine respondents to a detailed questionnaire. The questionnaire included two hundred and twenty-one questions and covered twelve areas: general information, 'coming out', family, education and training, employment, income adequacy, provision of services, health and well-being, help from relatives, friends and organisations, harassment and violence, emigration and the effect of recent legislative changes.

Due to actual and possible harassment and discrimination, the lesbian and gay population in Ireland is largely a hidden one. This made accessing a

¹ 'Out' refers to individuals recognising their sexuality and disclosing it to others.

representative sample of gay people impossible and subsequently limits the degree to which the findings of our research can be applied to 'the lesbian and gay community' in general. However, to try to overcome these problems we followed the methodologies of previous studies and ensured, as much as was feasible, to access as diverse a sample of lesbians and gay men as possible. The survey information was also supplemented with documentary research, extensive interviews with both individuals and groups of lesbians and gay men and interviews with key personnel within the lesbian and gay social services.

Therefore, while the results of the research may not be statistically representative, they are as inclusive as was possible and represent the experiences of a substantial number of people who are marginalised and excluded from Irish society because of their sexual orientation. The research also allows for the development of conclusions and recommendations, which are outlined below and discussed in detail in the main body of the report.

Findings

The survey results clearly show that there are significant cumulative and interlocking processes of discrimination operating in Irish society that increase the risk of poverty and exclusion for lesbians and gay men. These processes further disadvantage those already living in poverty.

The headline results of the study are presented below:

Profile of participants

- Respondents were predominately young with over half (53%) aged under thirty years.
- Most respondents were either living with a partner (26%) or living with family of origin (23%).
- One-fifth (21%) of respondents were found to be living in poverty.
- Over half (57%) of respondents said that they found it difficult to make ends meet – rising to 91% for those living in poverty.

Family and other support networks

- Approximately half (49%) of respondents became aware of their sexuality before the age of 15.
- Two-thirds (66%) of respondents said that the gradual awareness of their sexual orientation caused them “many” or “some” problems.

Executive Summary

- The majority (82%) of respondents were out to some extent to their families, but only one third of those who had come out said that they had no problems in doing so to family members. Nonetheless, almost all of those respondents who had come out to family members reported that it had improved their lives considerably or in some ways.
- Most respondents (96%) had come out to at least one of their friends and most had lesbian and gay friends which could be a source of support, for example, in the event of financial trouble.
- The Lesbian Lines and Gay Switchboards and Gay Community News were important sources of information and advice for respondents.
- Meeting other gay people was a problem identified by many respondents. Those on low incomes or living in isolated rural areas faced particular problems in terms of gaining access to these support networks.
- 72% of respondents thought that state recognition for same sex partnership agreements would improve their lives.

Education and training

- Three-fifths (57%) of respondents experienced various problems at school, the vast majority of whom describe such experiences as arising as a result of them being lesbian or gay. The problems included isolation, depression, poor self-esteem and harassment and bullying.
- Three-fifths (59%) of those who had gone to college and a third (36%) of those who had been on training courses experienced these same problems. The majority of those who experienced such problems stated that they were due to being lesbian or gay.
- Thirteen respondents who experienced these problems in school subsequently left earlier than anticipated. A further eight who experienced these problems in college, and three who experienced these problems on training courses also left earlier than anticipated because of these problems.
- Of those who experienced problems in the course of their education there was a marked reluctance to talk to anyone, least of all school teachers, counsellors, college tutors or training course supervisors.

Employment and unemployment

- Two-thirds (64%) of respondents were either working or on FÁS-type courses, of which, only two-fifths (42 respondents) said they were completely out at work.

- Few respondents reported direct discrimination in the current place of work or training because of their sexual orientation, but two-fifths (40%) said they had experienced harassment.
- Eleven people reported being dismissed from their job because they are lesbian or gay and a further twenty-three said that they resigned because they found it too difficult to reconcile their job with their sexuality.
- Fear of harassment and discrimination at work was high. About two-fifths of those currently not 'out' at work thought that disclosure of their sexual orientation would lead to discrimination and or harassment.
- Respondents were more likely to say that they experienced discrimination or harassment in their previous rather than their current job.
- Twenty-four people described their current workplace as hostile for lesbians and gay men.
- Many respondents' job opportunities were severely narrowed because they avoided work for which they were qualified (21%) or categories of work (39%) through fear of discrimination, both of which can lead to downward mobility.

Services

- One in ten (11%) of respondents reported experiences of discrimination because of their sexual orientation in the provision of accommodation, including: being refused a mortgage, refused tenancy and verbal harassment from landlords.
- Two-fifths (40%) of respondents believed that they would experience discrimination in these areas if they were to disclose their sexual orientation.
- Almost one-third (31%) of respondents have left home at some time in their lives with no certainty as to where they were going to live next.
- Almost half (47%) of respondents said they would expect to be discriminated against when applying for insurance if they were assumed to be lesbian or gay.
- Two-fifths (39%) of respondents reported experiencing at least one incident of discrimination in services such as pubs, clubs, restaurants, hotels and B&Bs because they are lesbian or gay. Fear of discrimination was even higher. Almost half (47%) of respondents felt they would be discriminated against in these service areas if they were assumed to be lesbian or gay.
- Three-quarters (73%) of respondents thought that proposed equal status legislation would improve the quality of their lives.

Health and Well-being

- Many respondents showed signs of psychological distress, particularly those affected by poverty.
- Nonetheless, 62% of respondents thought that recent law reforms would have a positive effect on their lives.

Harassment and violence

- Two-fifths (41%) of respondents had been threatened with violence because they were assumed to be lesbian or gay.
- A third (35%) of respondents said they had been chased or followed because they were assumed to be lesbian or gay.
- A quarter (25%) of respondents had been punched, beaten, hit or kicked because they were assumed to be lesbian or gay.
- Fifteen respondents (9%) had been assaulted or wounded with a weapon because they were assumed to be lesbian or gay.
- The vast majority (84%) of respondents knew somebody who had been verbally harassed, threatened with violence or physically attacked because they were assumed to be lesbian or gay.
- Four-fifths (81%) of respondents said that the possibility of anti-gay harassment had affected their behaviour.

Emigration

- Three-fifths (59%) of respondents said that they had emigrated at some point in their lives, over half (53%) of whom stated that their sexual orientation was a key factor in their decision to move.
- Two-fifths (42%) of respondents had moved within Ireland, two thirds of whom stated that their reason for doing so was related to the fact that they are lesbian or gay.
- Those who do move can be vulnerable because they have to leave behind their traditional support networks. These moves also deplete the resources and expertise of the Irish gay and lesbian community left behind, particularly for those living in rural areas.

Recommendations

The study points to the need for further development of programmes to combat discrimination and social exclusion and to support lesbian and gay community development initiatives. The recent equality-based law reforms provide a favourable public policy framework and have given a much needed boost to the affected community. The promised equal status legislation should strengthen these positive developments.

The central recommendation of the study is as follows:

- In the context of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy, the government should establish a Task Force composed of representatives of government departments, the lesbian and gay community and others with relevant expertise or experience in these issues. The Task Force should have a Secretariat to develop and oversee the implementations of programmes to combat discrimination and disadvantage identified in this study. The remit of the Task Force should also include:
 - advising the government on policy matters in relation to gay and lesbian issues
 - fostering better community relations at a national level between the lesbian and gay community and others
 - resourcing the lesbian and gay community to facilitate maximum participation in the Task Force
 - resourcing the development of the lesbian and gay community to meet the objective of combating disadvantage
 - commissioning research into the needs of the community including the potential of the community to contribute to meeting these needs and other social and economic objectives
 - facilitating other community and national voluntary organisations to respond to the needs identified in this report.

The Task Force should contribute to the development of European Union (EU) policy and should facilitate links and/or trans-national networking and/or draw down EU funding for appropriate EU programmes.

The Task Force should produce an interim report and recommendations within twelve months, and consider any other matter of relevance.

The study also calls for action on the following points:

- The Government should introduce the proposed amendments to the Employment Equality Act and the Equal Status Bill as a matter of urgency.
- Anti-poverty and social exclusion programmes at European and national level should recognise the lesbian and gay dimension of the problem and actively seek and resource a partnership with the lesbian and gay community.
- The Community Development Programme of the Department of Social Welfare should include the lesbian and gay community within the overall programme and provide for specific projects to address lesbian and gay issues.
- The Department of Social Welfare, the Department of Health and other relevant departments should develop policies and programmes to combat the discrimination and disadvantage identified in this study including a programme to promote lesbian and gay community development initiatives and voluntary social services.
- Pilot projects should be established in Dublin, Cork and other towns to focus on lesbian and gay disadvantage. As with other pilot projects, their purpose would be to assess the scale and nature of needs, to identify good practice, to encourage policy development and to stimulate public debate on anti-poverty action. Different projects might address particular needs such as those of lesbians or young people at risk of homelessness or the unemployed.
- The National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS) should address disadvantage in the lesbian and gay community. (The strategy is being drawn up by an inter-departmental committee with the assistance of the Combat Poverty Agency and will monitor progress and achievement of the targets set out. This Committee is currently undertaking a consultation with those affected by social exclusion through the organisations which represent them.)
- The European Union should recognise the lesbian and gay dimension to social exclusion and commission action research projects in all member

states similar to this report and in a similar partnership manner. The funding of pilot projects should be part of the action research process.

- Lesbian and gay social services, in a similar way to other voluntary services, should receive state support from the Department of Social Welfare and Health Boards.
- The Department of Equality and Law Reform, the Department of Social Welfare and other relevant departments should consider action research projects in a number of areas, including homelessness amongst young gay people, tackling harassment and discrimination in the work-place and in education, the experiences of gay people living in rural areas, gay people from the Travelling community and gay people with disabilities.
- A public information and education campaign to challenge prejudices against various groups and to promote social solidarity should be considered. The Spanish government-sponsored campaign '*democracia es igualdad*', which produced leaflets, videos, etc. should be used as a model. It challenged prejudicial treatment of people of colour, gypsies, people with disabilities and gay people. The Department of Equality & Law Reform and the Department of Arts, Culture and the Gaeltacht which has responsibilities in relation to RTÉ and the IRTC would be important in this regard.

The following are recommendations relating to specific sections of the report:

Family & Youth

- Youth service agencies should develop programmes to deal with the specific needs of young lesbians and gay men.
- Existing groups for young lesbians and gay men should be resourced and others developed in each Health Board Area.
- Groups such as 'Parents Support' should be resourced so that they can provide a more comprehensive service.
- An in-service educational scheme should be provided by the relevant government departments for professionals such as social workers, doctors, teachers and others so that families and young people can receive support and advice in the 'coming out' process.

- Under the Equal Status Bill, there should be provisions whereby non-marital relationships, including those between people of the same sex, may be recognised and registered. Such recognition should include the right to share and transfer child custody, to transfer property and pensions and to the other equivalent rights current in recognised marital relationships.

Education and training

- The Department of Education should develop an anti-discrimination programme of action to tackle the problems of discrimination and underachievement identified in this study.
- Harassment and bullying of lesbian and gay students should be urgently addressed in the context of the overall anti-bullying programme.
- Training should be provided by the Department of Education for management, teachers and counsellors to assist them in providing a supportive learning environment for all students, including those who are lesbian and gay.
- An Equality Code of Practice relevant to management, teachers and students should be developed by the Department of Education which would deal with all forms of prejudice, discrimination and harassment, including that on the basis of sexual orientation.
- Issues relating to equal citizenship and human rights, as well as the problems of prejudice, discrimination and poverty, should be included in the school curriculum.
- The proposed equal status legislation should be introduced as a matter of urgency.

Employment and unemployment

- The proposed amendments to the Employment Equality Act, which will include measures to address discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation, should be introduced as a matter of urgency.
- The Code of Practice to Protect the Dignity of Women and Men at Work issued by the Department of Equality and Law Reform, should be amplified to include harassment on the basis of all categories set out in the proposed amendments to the Employment Equality Act including sexual orientation.
- Measures to create more jobs in the general economy and to reduce overall unemployment is a critical factor in combating poverty in the lesbian and gay community. In addition, the Department of Employment and Enterprise should develop a programme to combat the disadvantages gay

people face in gaining access to employment including discrimination and under-achievement in education and training and discrimination and harassment in the workplace.

- The Department of Employment and Enterprise and FÁS should commission a study into the economic development, job training and job creation potential of lesbian and gay community enterprises. Also, existing lesbian and gay community enterprises need to receive continued state support in recognition of their track-record of job creation and job training. This support is particularly important given the problems of workplace harassment and discrimination experienced by respondents in this study.
- FÁS should ensure that training schemes provide for equal opportunities for lesbians and gay men.
- The trade unions and employer organisations should continue the work of establishing equality policies in all areas of employment
- The Irish Congress of Trade Unions should review progress on their 1987 *Guidelines for Negotiators* regarding lesbian and gay workers.

Services

The early enactment of the proposed Equal Status Bill prohibiting discrimination in education, in the provision of goods, facilities and services and in the disposal of accommodation or other premises will provide the essential framework for progress in this area.

- Mortgage and insurance companies should commit themselves to an equality-based code of practice which would prohibit discrimination against lesbians, gay men and other groups. The code should also disallow questioning of applicants regarding their lifestyle and whether, for example, they have ever taken a HIV test. In the absence of such a commitment, legislation prohibiting such discrimination should be implemented.
- The Department of the Environment should develop an equal opportunities housing policy which would remove the obstacles faced by, *inter alia*, lesbians and gay men in gaining access to affordable and appropriate housing, including access to public and social housing.
- Housing co-ops and housing associations, especially those supportive of lesbians and gay men on low incomes or unemployed, should be encouraged by the Department of Environment and local authorities.
- A pilot project should be established to deal with the special needs of

homeless gay people, especially young people 'at risk'. This project might involve hostel and/or half-way house accommodation.

- The Department of Equality and Law Reform and the Department of Finance should investigate means by which the benefits of marriage partnerships could be extended to non-marriage partnerships (including such issues as taxation, pensions, inheritance, next of kin's status, guardianship of children, etc.).

Health

- As part of its positive health strategy, the Department of Health should assess the general health needs of lesbians and gay men including issues relating to self-esteem and mental health and develop/improve programmes to meet these needs which would include training of relevant professionals.
- The particular needs of gay men who are HIV positive and/or living with AIDS, including those who have emigrated, and with particular reference to those on low incomes or living in poverty, should be assessed urgently by means of an action research project commissioned by the Department of Health.
- A research project on lesbian health issues should be commissioned by the Department of Health. This research would complement research recently undertaken for the Department on HIV prevention strategies in the gay men's community.
- Significantly reducing the levels of prejudice, discrimination and harassment would help tackle the problem of psychological distress in the lesbian and gay community.
- Social integration and support also play an important part in reducing such distress. Lesbian and gay community services require adequate funding to provide such support.

Harassment and violence

- The Department of Justice, as recommended by the Law Reform Commission, should introduce legislation to make harassment a criminal offence. The definition of harassment should include, but not be restricted to, the categories included in the proposed equal status legislation (for example, sexual orientation, race and ethnic origin).
- The Department of Justice and the Garda Síochána, in consultation with the lesbian and gay community, should establish schemes to combat violence against lesbians and gay men. A publicity campaign should be

directed at the gay and lesbian community encouraging victims to report crimes of violence. A Garda team with special responsibility for combating violence against gay people should be set up on an experimental basis. Training courses for Gardaí should include a module on these issues of harassment and violence including the need to give confidence to lesbians and gay men to report such crimes.

Emigration

- Lesbian and gay emigrant groups should receive financial assistance from the state in line with support given to other emigrant groups.
- An action research project should be carried out by the relevant state agency to assess the needs of lesbian and gay emigrants with particular reference to disadvantage and poverty.
- Structures to provide for a partnership between the gay community and the statutory sector should include representation for emigrants.
- Mainstream emigrant support groups should take steps to make their services more accessible and relevant to lesbians and gay men.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction and Background

1. Introduction

The commitment of the current government to anti-poverty measures is evidenced by a recent speech of the Taoiseach, John Bruton T.D., where he stated that the processes of disadvantage produce “stigmatised, depressed and marginalised communities” and warned that “no society can be at peace with itself in the face of such exclusion”.² In an address at the United Nations World Summit for Social Development in March 1995, the Taoiseach committed the government to the work of eradicating poverty, promoting the goal of full employment and combating social exclusion. To achieve this goal the government has approved the development of a National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS), under which all government departments and state agencies will be expected to include the reduction and prevention of poverty as key objectives in the development and implementation of their policies and programmes.

This study explores how discrimination and the fear of discrimination impacts on the levels of poverty and exclusion amongst lesbians and gay men and examines the needs of those most at risk of experiencing poverty. The rationale for this study is that lesbians and gay men experience systematic, cumulative and serious discrimination in those areas crucial to economic and social well-being. This includes disadvantages in terms of the family and other support networks, in the education and training systems, in the labour market, in housing and other services, by harassment and violence and consequently by negative self-esteem. The study, therefore, focuses not just on income adequacy, but also on how discrimination and exclusion affects people's lives.

Prejudice and discrimination against gays and lesbians and the need for action to counter it, has been officially recognised in government policy for almost six years now. Since 1988, gay workers in the civil service have been protected by an anti-discrimination policy which forbids discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. This protection has recently been extended to local authorities and health boards in Ireland. The most important legislative recognition of this anti-discrimination policy was the decriminalisation of homosexuality in 1993 which was based firmly on the principle of equal citizenship for gay people (Rose 1994). The previous Fianna Fáil/Labour government which implemented these changes also brought forward amendments (1993) to the

² Delivered by An Taoiseach at a conference called ‘Putting Poverty 3 into Policy’, in Ballyconnell, Co. Cavan on 25th of April 1995.

Introduction and Background

Unfair Dismissals Act (1977) which deemed dismissals on the grounds of sexual orientation to be automatically unfair. The Health Insurance Act (1994) and the Consumer Credit Bill (1994) also include protection for lesbians and gay men. These legislative changes received all-party support in the Oireachtas. The current government (Fine Gael, Labour and Democratic Left) has continued this equality programme and is also committed to introducing amendments to the Employment Equality Act (1977) and a new Equal Status Bill, which will include protection for a wide range of categories including sexual orientation.

Despite the considerable progress made in addressing the issue of discrimination, the reality for many lesbians and gay men is very often one of fear of disclosure in a climate of prejudice and hostility. This has serious practical effects for individual lesbians and gay men, narrowing employment opportunities in the context of high unemployment and presenting particular problems for those lesbians and gay men who are already disadvantaged.

Prejudice leads to many stereotypes, one of these being the notion of gay people as a homogenous minority; affluent, organised and male. The reality is that the lesbian and gay community is diverse in terms of gender, socio-economic background, educational attainment, age, location and health status. For individual lesbians and gay men already suffering disadvantage in any or all of these areas, discrimination on the basis of their sexual orientation can lead to forms of 'double disadvantage'. This issue has been explored by the recent Report of the Second Commission on the Status of Women in analysing the situation of women in poverty, women with disabilities, lesbian women and other groups of women facing particular problems. The Commission found that "women who are doubly disadvantaged need *additional* (their italics) measures directed towards ending their marginalisation and bringing them closer to social equality." (Second Commission on the Status of Women, 1993: 164)

Even those gay men and lesbians who otherwise have access to more resources and social and economic opportunities are still subject to the same processes of discrimination which make them vulnerable to disadvantage. These processes can work through the entire lives of individual lesbians and gay men. For example, research has shown that many lesbians and gay men experience isolation, depression and confusion when their sexual identity is being formed, very often in an environment where

disclosure of their emerging sexual orientation would expose them to isolation from their families and prejudice and discrimination within their schools (Gonsiorek, 1993). This continues throughout their life in employment and other areas relevant to their social and economic well-being such as access to accommodation, services and vital support networks.

An added dimension to both discrimination faced by gay people and the ensuing risk of disadvantage, has been the emergence of the AIDS crisis during the 1980s. Notions of a “gay plague” has increased the level of prejudice that exists concerning homosexuality and has been used to further discriminate against gay people. HIV related illness has also had a profound impact on the lives of substantial numbers of gay men, in some cases resulting in severe poverty and homelessness (see, for example, Murphy-Lawless and Redmond, 1992). Research emerging from the United States also suggests that poverty can be a contributing factor in premature mortality for those who are HIV positive (Hogg et al, 1994).

While many lesbians and gay men try to avoid discrimination by attempting not to disclose their sexual orientation, this may lead to significant social and psychological problems. A recent World Health Organisation (WHO) study concluded that people who hide their sexual orientation for fear of discrimination or alienation live less fulfilling lives, encounter additional stress and are placed in situations that are not conducive to safe sexual practices (WHO, 1991). Furthermore, research in this area has also found that psychological adjustment appears to be highest among those who are committed to their gay identity and do not attempt to hide their sexuality from others. As with other stigmatised minorities, gay men and lesbians probably maintain self-esteem most effectively when they identify with, and are integrated into, the larger gay community (Garnets et al, 1992).

The biggest obstacles to such integration is prejudice and discrimination. This report is an important addition to the level of understanding of the complexity of such discrimination and as such, it is hoped it will be a valuable resource in developing effective strategies to improve the lives of those lesbians and gay men who are disadvantaged.

1.1 Research aims

The aims of this research were:

1. To explore how discrimination and the fear of discrimination impacts on the levels of poverty and exclusion amongst lesbians and gay men and to establish the needs of those most at risk of experiencing poverty.
2. To examine the means by which discrimination and prejudice disadvantage lesbians and gay men and exclude them from full participation in society.
3. To analyse the various strategies which lesbians and gay men use to avoid, cope with or resist discrimination including both formal and informal support networks.
4. To develop policy recommendations to address discriminatory practices which increase the risk of poverty in the gay community.
5. To provide a resource for the lesbian and gay community and to contribute to a greater understanding of poverty.

1.2 Defining the issues

In this section of the report three main issues which underpinned the research are outlined. The relevant literature on these issues, which guided the approach adopted in this study is also reviewed. These three issues are: poverty, discrimination and sampling.

Poverty in Ireland

Poverty, Income and Welfare in Ireland (Callan et al, 1989) published by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI), is one of the first in a series of reports analysing the wealth of data collected in the 1987 survey of income distribution, poverty and usage of state services. According to the authors, although reducing or eliminating poverty is one of the main aims of economic and social policy, there is an extremely wide range of views about the extent and nature of the problem and how best to respond to it. The basic objectives of this study were: to explore how poverty is best thought of and measured; to present a range of new findings on low income and deprivation; and to measure the effectiveness of the social welfare system in reducing poverty (op cit: xiii). A relative definition of poverty was used in the study so that a person was defined as liv-

ing in poverty when, “due to lack of resources, he or she is excluded from the ordinary living patterns, customs and activities in the society” (op cit: xiv).

The report drew on more than one measure of the extent of poverty in Ireland. It was felt that to do otherwise would not reflect the “extremely complex” nature of the phenomenon and would be to some extent arbitrary. As the report states, “Thinking in such hard and fast terms about the ‘poor’ versus the non-poor, may not be particularly helpful, since people will move in and out of poverty over time, and those just above any line we draw are probably not very different from those just below it.” (op cit: xii).

Income thresholds were calculated from the sample representing 40%, 50% and 60% of average income. About 10% were in households below the lowest threshold, about 20% were below half average income, and about 30% were below the highest 60% threshold (op cit: xv). Unemployment was found to be the single most important cause of poverty in Ireland. The study concluded that:

Poverty cannot therefore be seen as simply a problem for the social welfare system. Rather, it is a deep seated structural feature of the economy and society. Not only the social welfare and taxation systems, but also the education system, manpower and training policies, and industrial policy, have crucial roles to play in bringing about the structural changes required to have any major impact on poverty. (op cit:180)

Poverty and Time: Perspectives on the Dynamics of Poverty (Nolan et al, 1994) examined the dynamics of poverty over time based on limited follow-up of those interviewed in the 1987 survey (for the Callan et al 1989 study) two years later. The authors found that experiences in the labour market over time was a key determinant of “permanent income” and thus of current living standards (op cit: xi).

Although the central objective of the ESRI research was to elucidate the causal factors at work in the production and reproduction of poverty, there was no analysis of the processes of discrimination which increase and reinforce the risk of poverty. The survey questionnaire on which the ESRI study was based, for example, did not include questions on sexual orientation and disadvantage so no data is available from the survey to correlate sexual orientation and disadvantage. Even if such questions were included,

Introduction and Background

it is probable that few lesbian and gay participants would have revealed their sexual orientation as a reflex reaction to defending themselves from experiencing discrimination and prejudice.

The links between discrimination against women and the greater risk of their being in poverty has also been the subject of recent research. *Women and Poverty* (Daly: 1989) investigated the extent, nature and causes of poverty amongst women and the response of women in combating that poverty. She noted that:

In spite of growing awareness of the existence of poverty, very little information exists about poverty among Irish women. We can estimate the numbers of women living below a poverty line but we have little comprehensive and accessible information on what life is like for women living on low incomes. Until now there has not been a specific investigation of women's poverty in Ireland. At best, women have been an addendum to research focusing mainly on men or, more often, information is not analysed by sex. The huge gaps in information about poverty among Irish women precipitated this book. Without adequate information and analysis, new and effective policies to address women's poverty are unlikely to be developed. (op cit: 4)

According to Daly, developing an understanding of women's poverty requires analysis as well as description. She recommended that women's experience in the home and the family, with work, social welfare and other public services should be examined when considering their chances of escaping from, or ending up in, poverty. She used a class and gender framework to attempt to explain women's access to resources and opportunities:

Gender is the process whereby differences between the sexes are built into structures, so that men generally are more powerful than women and men's interests dominate. This is a structural view of poverty: access and control over resources determines who is poor and who is not. (op cit: 5)

However, there are difficulties in using a class and gender framework. First, it is difficult to fully explore and explain the interaction between the two forces. The use of previous research is limited as poverty has usually been examined in Ireland in the context of class. Furthermore, class analysis

focused on men and women has largely been excluded from the analysis. Daly concluded that women are more vulnerable to poverty than men and that a key feature of women's poverty is financial dependence.

She also noted that some groups of women who are at high risk of experiencing poverty, such as Traveller women and those who are homeless, are often excluded from conventional poverty research. They are unlikely to appear in household surveys, for instance, as these are based on samples of the register of electors and women living in these circumstances are rarely registered. In the case of lesbians and gay men questions regarding sexual orientation tend not to be included in large-scale quantitative studies, and therefore it is impossible to analyse results by sexual orientation.

Daly's work was very relevant to the approach adopted in the present study. Conventional research approaches could not be relied on to investigate the dynamics of poverty in the gay and lesbian community. In our study, the analysis of factors such as employment or educational attainment had to be viewed in the light of respondents' experiences of discrimination and social exclusion. The concept of discrimination is now discussed in more depth.

Discrimination

The second issue underpinning the research was the concept of discrimination. Here some of the research in this area is briefly discussed, starting with one of the most comprehensive research reports on discrimination and disadvantage in Ireland, *Inequality in Northern Ireland* (Smith and Chambers, 1991). They used four methods to measure inequality. These are:

1. Comparisons between the actual circumstances of Protestants and Catholics. This is a measure of *inequality of condition*.
2. Further analysis to show how far the measured inequalities of condition are associated with various differences between the two groups, for example, in terms of age, educational and job qualifications and so on. This analyses the extent of *inequality of opportunity*.
3. Studies of the policies and practices of organisations that command and distribute resources (jobs and housing). This is a measure of the prevalence of *affirmative action* which is intended to prevent discrimination and promote equal opportunities.

4. Study of *perceptions* of inequality and discrimination and *views* about the need for countervailing policies.

As the authors note, these methods do not include a direct measure of the actual extent of discrimination (op cit: 62). They state that in England, direct measures of discrimination against racial minorities have been provided by extensive field experiments carried out at various times from 1967 onwards. From studies based on this fieldwork there would appear to be a link between claimed experience of discrimination and actual discrimination against people originating from the West Indies.

The Second Commission on the Status of Women reported that research has found that about one in ten (10%) of the population has a homosexual orientation, with this figure occurring across different cultures, contexts, national samples, small scale studies and different time periods. They also noted that in Ireland, as in many other countries, this substantial minority of the population is also largely underground (Report of the Second Commission on the Status of Women, 1993).

Travellers have been identified as particularly liable to suffer from discrimination in Ireland. *The European Parliament Committee of Inquiry on Racism and Xenophobia* (1991) reported, for example, that the single most discriminated against ethnic group in Ireland is the Travelling People. *The Task Force on the Travelling Community* (1995) reported that Irish Travellers experience discrimination at both the individual and interpersonal level and the institutional level. The Task Force argued that Travellers experience discrimination at an individual level when they seek access to a range of goods, services and facilities and when they suffer from verbal attacks and intimidation. In contrast, they argued that Travellers are discriminated against at an institutional level when their culture is not recognised, when they are segregated from others in the provision of services and when legislation and policy-making does not take account of their culture and identity.

The Task Force also noted that discrimination can be both direct and indirect. Direct discrimination, they argued, consists of treating Travellers, on the grounds that they are Travellers, less favourably than others. They explained that indirect discrimination is often more complex and occurs when conditions are applied equally to all, but by their nature either disqualify Travellers or produce outcomes which adversely affect more Travellers than those in the settled

community. For example, services or facilities which are open to all with a fixed abode, indirectly discriminate against those in the Traveller community.

The Task Force called for the introduction of Equal Status Legislation to give Travellers a legal means of redress against discrimination. They also called for the establishment of an Equality Authority to promote and implement such legislation and the introduction of a Code of Practice and Equal Status Policy to ensure that institutions and organisations and their employees acknowledge and respect the distinct culture and identity of Travellers (Task Force on the Travelling Community, 1995: 81-99).

The understanding of discrimination against lesbians and gay men in Ireland has been developing over a twenty year period since the formation of the first formal gay and lesbian community organisations in 1974. The understanding has been developed through conferences, seminars and various publications. In 1986, *Out for Ourselves: The Lives of Irish Lesbians and Gay Men* was published, which included analysis and “personal accounts” of a wide range of issues including employment, harassment and violence, health, the “coming out” process³, disability, sexuality, emigration, youth, the law, marriage and children, parents, class issues and community development and services (Dublin Lesbian and Gay Collectives, 1986).

In 1987 the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) adopted a policy document entitled *Lesbian and Gay Rights in the Workplace: Guidelines for Negotiators* which provides an overview of sexual discrimination against lesbians and gay men in the workplace, together with proposals for positive action and the handling of complaints. They defined such discrimination as “treating workers less favourably because of their sexuality or because other people may have prejudices about that sexuality”. It stated that underlying this discrimination is a pervasive ‘heterosexism’ which it defined as “the usually unquestioned consensus that lesbian/gay sexuality is unnatural and/or inferior to heterosexuality”. The guidelines dealt with workplace discrimination including: recruitment, training and promotion, harassment, dismissals and indirect discrimination in relation to conditions of employment. The guidelines also dealt with discrimination in law, hous-

³ *Coming out* (a shortened form of coming out of the closet) refers to the sequence of events through which individuals recognise their own sexuality and disclose it to others. For a discussion of these issues see Plummer (1992) and Herdt (1989).

ing and other social areas. It called for the introduction of a workplace anti-discrimination policy and set out a model agreement to protect the rights of gay and lesbian workers (ICTU 1987).

The only quantitative measure of gay discrimination in Ireland has been a survey of gay men carried out by Gay Health Action (1989). The *Gay Health Survey* primarily focused on issues relating to safer sex and was part of the organisation's response to the threat of HIV and AIDS. However, it also included coverage of employment issues and found that of the two hundred and sixty-five respondents, over half (58%) thought that they would be discriminated against at work if they disclosed their sexual orientation to all of their colleagues. Furthermore, one in ten (11%) reported being discriminated against at work simply because they were known to be gay.

In 1990, the Irish Council for Civil Liberties (ICCL) published *Equality Now for Lesbians and Gay Men* which examined prejudice and discrimination from a civil liberties perspective. The study examined issues relating to the law, domestic partnerships, custody and adoption, employment, public and private health, violence against lesbians and gay men, freedom of expression, education and youth. It also proposed detailed legislative measures to counter this discrimination.

However, sexual discrimination and harassment is not just confined to the workplace. *Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship* investigated social support networks in the lesbian and gay community in San Francisco (Weston, 1991). The study found that roughly one-third of interviewees recounted stories in which incidents they labelled as rejection constituted a focal point of coming out. Interviewees reported variously being institutionalised, forced to leave home, reduced to living on the street, denied an inheritance, assaulted and/or insulted. Many individuals who had come out to themselves whilst still adolescents were careful to establish financial independence and separate residence before coming out to parents, "just in case". Some who had come out while still dependent on adults were denied financial support and protection. People described making painful choices in regard to employment, based on their perceptions of how true a person could be to their sexual orientation in a particular type of job. Weston quotes a case of a gay man who had dropped out of an MBA programme to become a waiter after he had experienced pressure from corporate employers to be more "discreet" about his sexual identity.

The study identified strong social and economic support networks operating within lesbian and gay households and within friendship groups. The financial obligations of lesbians and gay men who support dependants or who pool material resources with lovers or others they define as kin is usually ignored in the provision of benefits to those who have dependants.

Sampling issues

In undertaking this survey, the most obvious difficulty was trying to obtain a representative sample from a population which, owing to the severity of anti-gay prejudice and discrimination, is largely a hidden one. There is now an extensive body of literature relating to appropriate methodologies for sampling lesbian and gay populations (Gonsiorek and Weinrich, 1991; Weston, 1991). More recently, a survey of the nature and extent of discrimination against homosexual men and lesbians in Britain used random sampling techniques, together with qualitative in-depth interviews of a smaller sub-sample (Snape, D. et al, 1995). The study involved interviews with 116 people who described themselves as homosexual and 619 who described themselves as heterosexuals. Due to limited resources and other practicalities it was not possible for our study to follow this methodology. However, it is interesting that the results of both surveys concur, both revealed widespread discrimination against lesbians and gay men. Research studies on the gay community in the United States shows that while representativeness is not possible, workable approximations can be achieved which enhance the 'generalisability' of findings (Herek and Berrill, 1992).

According to Gonsiorek and Weinrich (1991), in order to enhance representativeness, any homosexual sample should mimic the major demographic characteristics of the overall population. The other principle is that sampling should be diverse and the subjects should be drawn from as wide a variety of sources as possible. These sources and the demographic characteristics of the samples should then be described in considerable detail. While these procedures will not eliminate sampling problems, they should reduce them, and a clear and detailed description of procedures will make any sampling limitations apparent (op cit: 120). In the survey for this study it proved impossible to mimic the major demographic characteristics of the overall population (for example, there are very few older gay people in this survey), and therefore the results may be more representative of the gay community which is 'out', or 'out' sufficiently to participate in a study, rather than lesbian and gay men as a whole.

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In her survey of social support networks in the lesbian and gay community in San Francisco, Weston (1991) used a combination of fieldwork and eighty in-depth interviews. In general she let self-identification regarding sexual orientation be her guide for inclusion in the sample. To avoid race, class, and organisational bias that had characterised many previous studies of gay men and lesbians, she made her initial connections through personal contacts developed over the six years she had lived in San Francisco prior to the project. The alternative of gaining access through agencies, college classes, and advertisements, tends to weight a sample for 'joiners', professional interviewees, the highly educated, persons with an overtly political analysis and individuals who see themselves as central (rather than marginal) to the population in question.

By asking each person interviewed for names for potential participants, Weston utilised techniques of friendship-pyramiding and snowballing-sampling. From a growing pool of contacts she used 'theoretic sampling', deliberately selecting certain categories to arrive at a sample varied in race, ethnicity, and class background. Despite these efforts to incorporate differences, the sample remains weak in several areas, most notably the age range (which tends to cluster around the 20s and 30s), the inclusion of relatively few gay parents, and a bias toward fairly high levels of education. This partly reflects Weston's own personal situation as a well educated lesbian with no children in her late twenties. She states that her fieldwork allowed her to compensate for this bias in sampling.

Our sample also suffered some of these weaknesses. As outlined in the next chapter, respondents were also predominantly young and highly educated. However, as detailed throughout the report, even this fairly privileged group of lesbians and gay men experienced relatively extreme degrees of discrimination or lived in fear of such discrimination in relation to employment, housing and the use of services and were exposed to totally unacceptable levels of harassment and indeed physical assault.

1.3 Methodology

In an attempt to ensure that the study sample was as diverse as possible, participants were drawn from a variety of sources (such as the diverse lesbian and gay organisations), extensive personal contacts and using 'snowballing' techniques (i.e. asking each person interviewed for the names of potential participants). The diversity of the sample was also increased by involving lesbians and gay men, on a voluntary basis, in distributing, and in some cases administering, questionnaires. All of these individuals had worked extensively in the gay community for a number of years and had built up considerable levels of trust with a wide diversity of lesbians and gay men. This element of trust was of crucial importance where potential participants were extremely concerned about confidentiality.

The survey was carried out during the months of September and October, 1993. About half the questionnaires were administered by the volunteers, the rest being given to individual lesbians and gay men for self-completion and collected later. The process of distributing and administering questionnaires also incorporated elements of action research where those administering questionnaires had information on lesbian and gay services and were able to refer interviewees if requested. The study focused on two large urban centres, Cork and Dublin. Two hundred and fifty questionnaires were either distributed or administered in these cities, one hundred and fifty nine being returned with seventy-four male and eighty-five female respondents (a response rate of 64%).

The questionnaire used for the study consisted of two hundred and twenty-one questions covering perceptions and expectations of discrimination and prejudice in key areas crucial to economic and social well-being. These areas were identified from the literature and from consultation with key people in the lesbian and gay community as well as researchers on issues of disadvantage. These areas are: general information, 'coming out', family, education and training, employment, income adequacy, provision of services, health and well-being, help from relatives, friends and organisations, harassment and violence, emigration and the effect of recent legislative changes.

Questions in relation to perceived experiences of discrimination were supplemented with questions eliciting information on respondents' expectations as to what prejudice and discrimination respondents felt they might experi-

ence if their sexuality was disclosed. In fact, the research indicates that expectations of discrimination are as important a factor in the lives of lesbians and gay men as experiences of such discrimination, which in turn has important implications for the development of strategies to combat discrimination.

The questionnaire survey was supplemented with extensive interviews with both individuals and groups of lesbians and gay men. Interviews were also conducted with key personnel within the lesbian and gay social services who deal with problems faced by gay people on a daily basis and others with relevant experience on issues of disadvantage (approximately 20 people).

1.4 Conclusions

The body of literature outlined above provided a valuable starting point to the central focus of this report: that the discrimination lesbians and gay men experience in areas crucial to social and economic well-being increases the risk of poverty for gay people generally and further disadvantages those lesbians and gay men who are already poor. The rationale underlying this study is that there are systematic, cumulative and interlocking processes of discrimination operating in key areas associated with economic and social well-being including, family and other support networks, education and training, employment and unemployment, the provision of services and health and well-being. These discriminatory processes also include harassment and violence and have an impact on the health and well-being of lesbians and gay men as well as resulting in significant levels of emigration. Even those gay men and lesbians who would otherwise have access to adequate resources and social and economic opportunities are still subject to the same processes of discrimination which make them vulnerable to disadvantage.

The following chapters of this report present the findings of our research which confirm that lesbian and gay men are at risk of poverty, particularly as a result of discrimination and exclusion

.CHAPTER TWO

Profile of Participants

In this chapter a brief profile of those who participated in the study is outlined. The chapter is divided into two sections. The first section examines the sample as a whole while the second section outlines the characteristics of those in the study found to be living in poverty.

2. General profile

Figure 2.1 shows the distribution of the sample by age and gender. Respondents were predominantly young, with over half (53%) aged under thirty years. The graph also shows that older people (i.e. those aged forty years or over) were underrepresented in the sample. This may be because many older lesbians and gay men grew up in an era when a gay community did not exist in Ireland. They are, therefore, less likely to be connected to the newer, more formal lesbian and gay social networks and more difficult to contact. Also, having grown up in an era where the consequences of disclosure of one's sexual orientation could be disastrous, older people are understandably more used to secrecy and less willing to participate in studies where there is always a perceived risk of disclosure (Garnets and Kimmel, 1993).

Figure 2.1 also shows the variation in the age of the sample by gender. Three quarters of women interviewed were aged between twenty-five and thirty-nine, while the age profile of the male sample was more dispersed, with a peak in the twenty to twenty-four age category.

This difference in age profile may help to explain the variation in accommodation arrangements outlined in the Figure 2.2 below. The figure shows that overall respondents were most likely to say that they were either living with a partner or with parents and or brothers and sisters. However, women were more likely than men to be living with a lover, while men were most likely to be living with their parents or a brother or sister. Living with friends also proved popular with almost a quarter of respondents saying that they were sharing accommodation with such people.

Participants were also asked about their present relationship status and the results are shown in Figure 2.3 below. Half of respondents said that they were in same sex relationships, and this was a particularly popular option for the women in the sample. The men, possibly reflecting their youth and the fact that they were more likely to be living at home, were more likely to report that they were single than in a relationship.

Figure 2.1: Age Profile of Participants

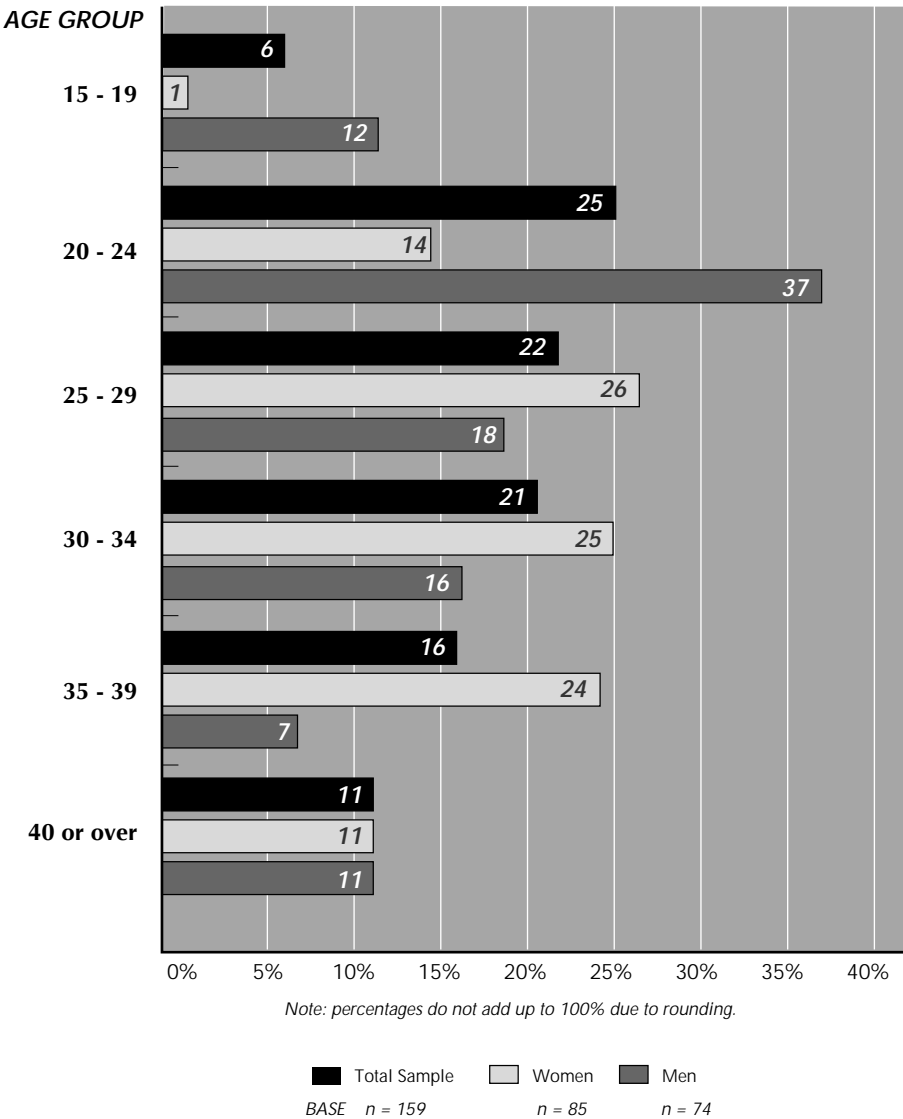


Figure 2. 2: Living Arrangements

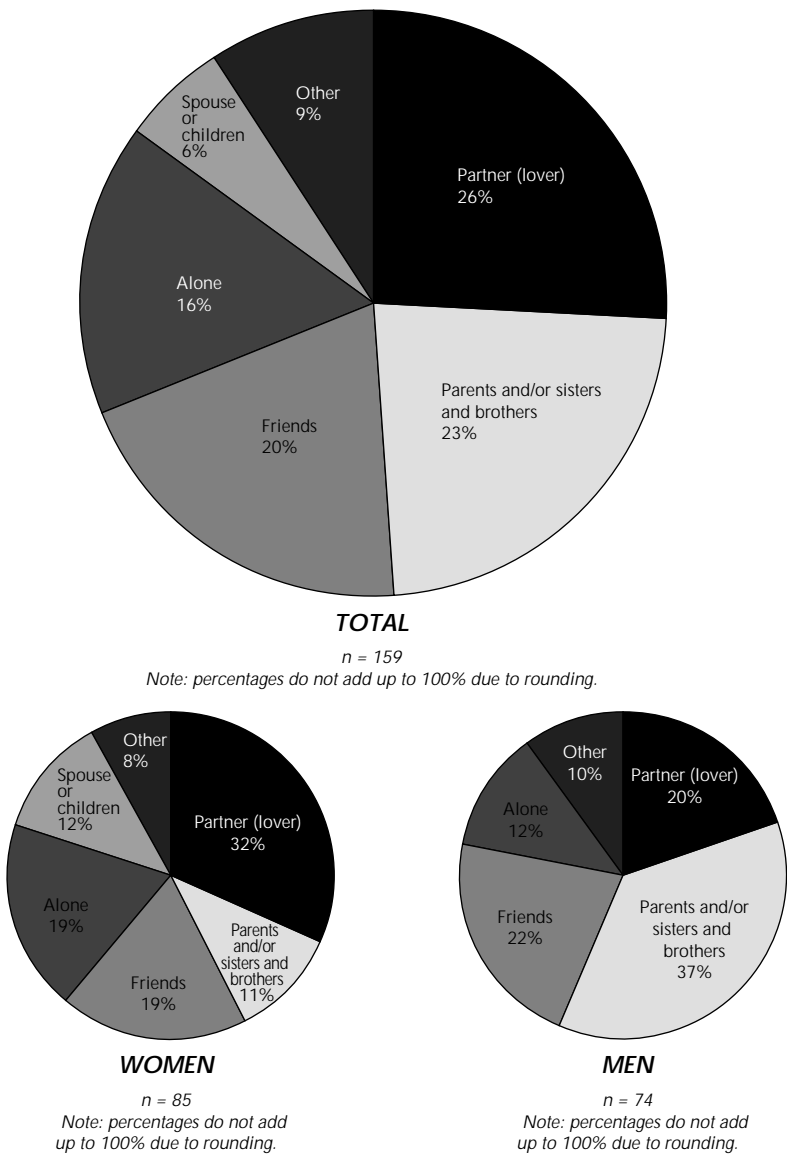
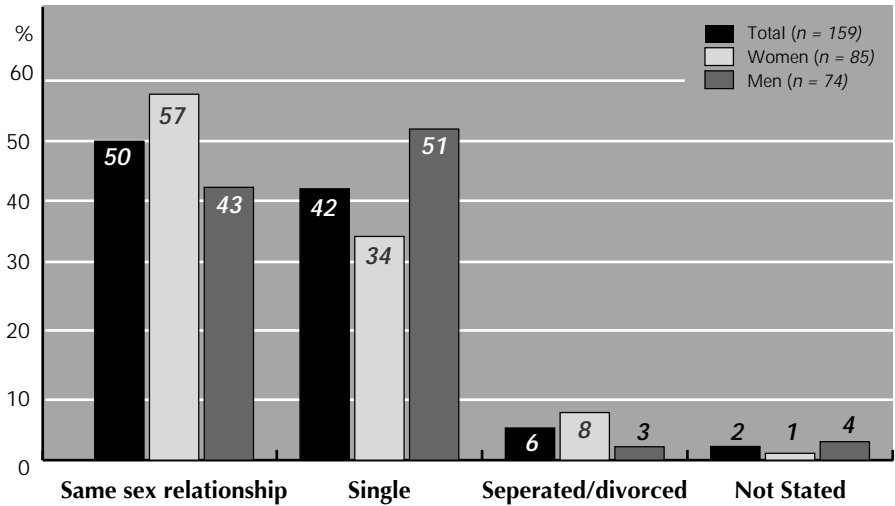


Figure 2.3: Present Relationship Status



Note: percentages do not add up to 100% due to rounding.

2.1 The poverty sub-sample

A recent review of measurements of poverty commented that there is no agreed definition of poverty and there is no single satisfactory and convincing method of setting a poverty line that is 'objective' and appropriate for all purposes (Nolan and Callan, 1994: 9-26). However, as the reviewers point out, this does not mean that research on poverty is unnecessary. Rather, they argue that research can play a vital role in policy formation. The approach they adopt is to explicitly acknowledge the uncertainty and absence of consensus on where to locate a poverty line and how to measure poverty. They subsequently place more emphasis on findings that do not depend on a precise location of a single poverty line. They conclude that "a great deal may still be learnt about the nature and meaning of poverty, the characteristics of those in or on the margin of poverty, and the effects of anti-poverty policy" (op cit: 24).

Included in the questionnaire for this study were a number of questions relating to income adequacy to try to determine the incidence of poverty among respondents. Before reporting the findings of this section of the question-

naire it is worth repeating that we realise that as the sample in this study is not necessarily statistically representative of the lesbian and gay population as a whole and the incidence of poverty identified among respondents is not necessarily indicative of the extent of poverty among all gay people in Ireland. Nonetheless, identifying those respondents who are likely to be living in conditions of poverty was extremely useful in assessing the impact of discrimination on those living in these conditions and possibly the means by which discrimination may have led to such disadvantage.

The ESRI research of poverty in Ireland (Callan et al, 1989) was drawn on in examining the incidence of disadvantage in this study sample. In drawing up the questionnaire the same questions used by the ESRI in examining poverty in Ireland were included. However, it was impossible to exactly replicate their method for the following reasons. The ESRI study focused on households while this study focuses on individuals.

Few people in the study sample gave details of their income, although the rate of response to other parts of the questionnaire was quite high. Unlike the ESRI, who excluded such non-replying respondents from their analysis, we did not think this was feasible or necessary in our research as the study aimed to gather information not only on the living standards of lesbians and gay men but also comprehensive information on experiences of discrimination.

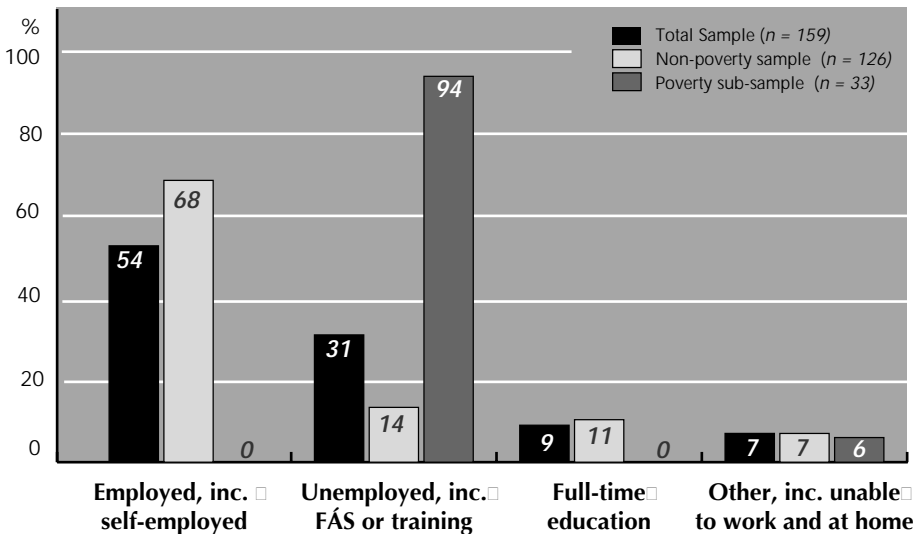
There was also a low response rate to questions about whether respondents lacked items because they could not afford them (referred to as enforced absence). Respondents did, however, give details of whether they had items or not.

Finally, while a number of respondents reported that they did not have access to a number of primary items, such as heating and food, most did have access to secondary items, for example, consumer durables such as washing machines and televisions. This may reflect the fact that most of the study respondents are single and their capacity to pool household resources with others is greater than might be the case for a family unit with children.

Given these limitations, the ESRI definition of poverty was adapted to include respondents who were either unemployed or had incomes of less than 70% of average household income (at 1993 prices) *and* who did not have access to at least one of the primary items identified by the ESRI.

Using this definition of poverty thirty-three people in the survey were identified as living in poverty. As stated above few respondents gave details of their incomes and so these details are not reported. Alternative information, however, is available which gives some idea of those who are most likely to be living in poverty and this is now reported. As Figure 2.4 shows, almost all of those in the poverty sub-sample were either unemployed or on FÁS/other type schemes. However, it should also be noted that not all of those who reported that they were unemployed were defined as living in poverty. This is, perhaps, testimony to the stringency of the poverty measure used.

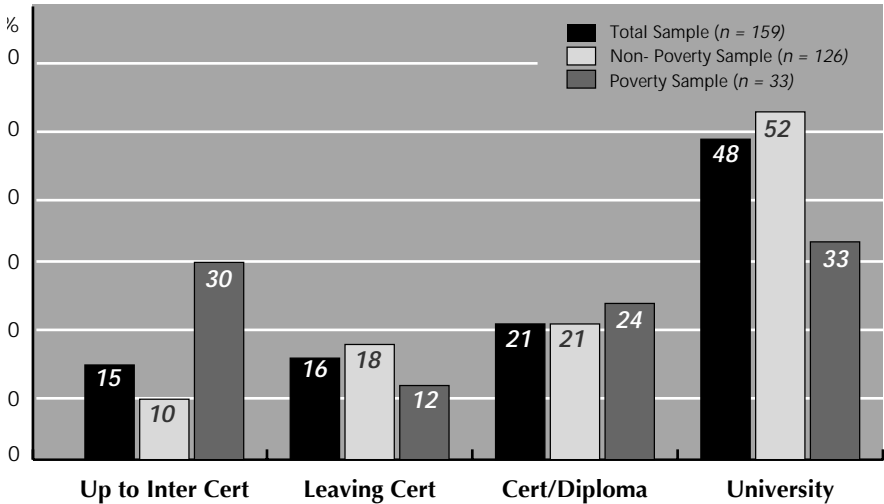
Figure 2.4. Occupation Profile



Note: percentages do not add up to 100% due to rounding.

Previous research has found a positive correlation between the lack of educational qualifications and an increased risk of experiencing disadvantage (Nolan et al, 1994). Respondents in the study sample were asked for their highest educational qualification and Figure 2.5 shows that those interviewed were, on the whole, highly qualified. Almost half (48%) of those interviewed had a primary degree or higher, above the national average. It is also worth noting (not shown in Figure 2.5) that the women in the sample were more highly qualified than the men. Almost three-fifths (59%) of women reported having a primary degree or higher compared to one-third (35%) of men. However, this difference should be viewed within the context that the women were older than the men, and therefore more of the latter were too young to have completed their third-level education.

Figure 2.5. Educational Attainment



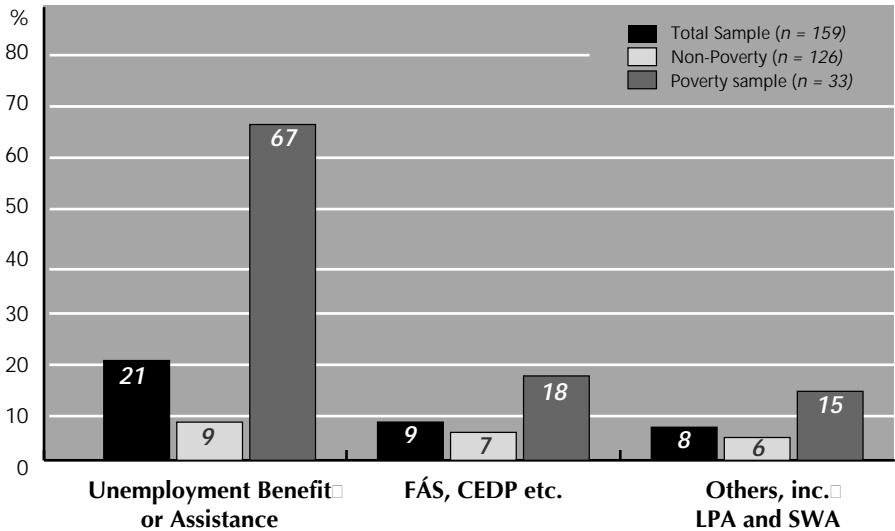
Note: percentages do not add up to 100% due to rounding.

This bias towards higher levels of education is a weakness in the sample and reflects the problems in getting a representative sample of lesbians and gay men (Weston, 1991).

Respondents were also asked if they were receiving any state benefits and Figure 2.6 summarises the information given. Approximately one in five (21%)

of respondents said that they were receiving an unemployment payment and a further one in ten (9%) were receiving a FÁS or other training payment. As expected, those in the poverty sub-sample were much more likely to be in receipt of a state benefits than other respondents, however substantial minorities of the 'non-poor' were receiving such payments.

Figure 2.6. State Benefits Received



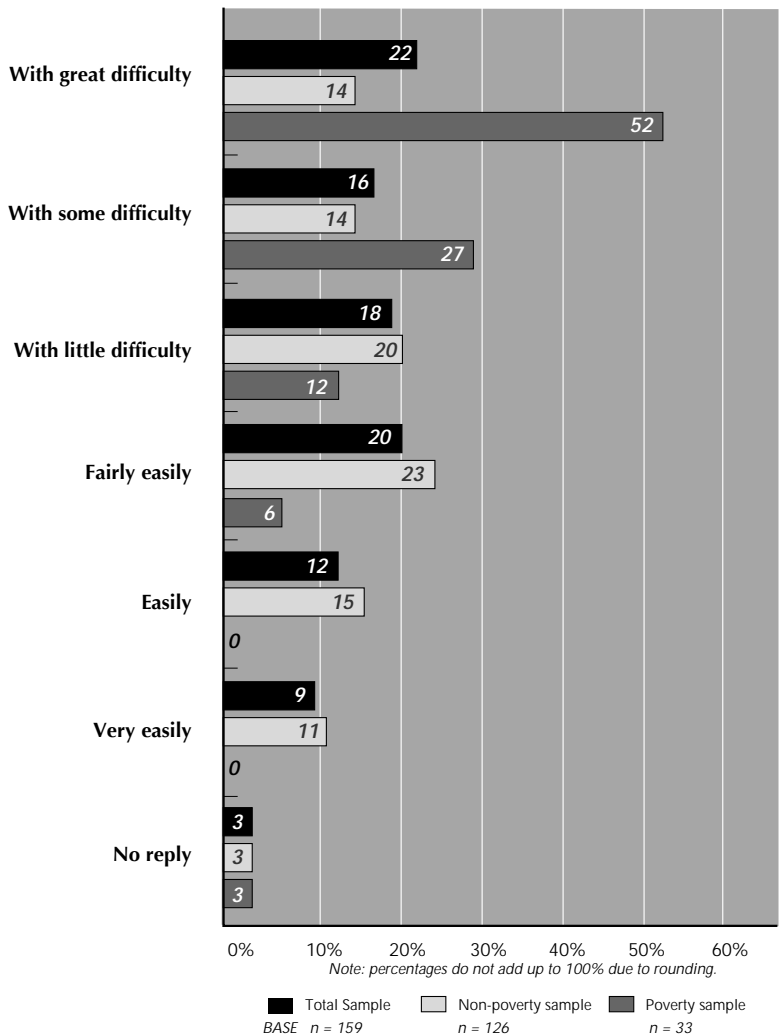
Note: percentages do not add up to 100% as not all respondents were in receipt of state benefits

Some respondents reported that they also received supplementary payments, such as a rent (22%) or fuel (10%) allowance. As expected, those in the poverty sub-sample were more likely to report that they were in receipt of such allowances (48% and 18% respectively).

Participants were also asked to assess how easily or difficult they found it to make ends meet. Such questions, while subjective, are useful as they help to indicate the impact of poverty on people's economic well-being. The question used, which is reported in Figure 2.7, has been previously used in the ESRI poverty studies. Over half (52%) of those defined as living in poverty said that they made ends meets with great difficulty. In comparison, one in seven (14%) of those who were thought not to be living in poverty said they experienced the same problem. It is noticeable

that very few (6% or two respondents) of those living in poverty said that they found it fairly easy to make ends meet and none found it easy or very easy.

Figure 2.7. Extent to Which Participants Are Able to Make Ends Meet



Participants also reported that they had been in debt to pay for selected items such as Christmas expenses (29%), rent (27%) and other essential items such as food (20%), clothes or shoes (20%) and fuel (15%). This was particularly true for those in the poverty sub-sample, three-quarters of whom reported going into debt to pay for at least one of these items.

2.2 Summary of main findings

- Respondents were predominately young with over half (53%) aged under thirty years.
- Most respondents were either living with a partner (26%) or living with family of origin (23%).
- One-fifth (21%) of respondents were found to be living in poverty.
- Over half (57%) of respondents said that they found it difficult to make ends meets, rising to 91% for those living in poverty.

CHAPTER THREE

Family and Other Support Networks

3. Introduction

A major fear for lesbians and gay men in choosing to disclose their sexual orientation is the effect this might have on their relationships with family and friends. In this chapter the 'coming out' experiences of the study sample of lesbian and gay men is reported.

Apart from the obvious emotional trauma of negative reaction or rejection, the potential loss of these vital support networks can have profound implications for their future social and economic well-being, increasing the risk of unemployment, homelessness and poverty. Isolation can also diminish an individual's ability to cope with adverse social and economic conditions. As a recent ESRI study found, those who are socially isolated are particularly at risk of suffering psychological and physical distress (Whelan et al, 1991).

Family of origin is the most important unit of support for most people, particularly in the early periods of their lives, and can be one of the most crucial determinants of their social and economic place in society (see, for example Hannon and O'Riain, 1993). However, many lesbians and gay men find they are unable to discuss their emerging sexual orientation with their families and those who do so risk a range of negative reactions, ranging from shock and crisis to emotional rejection, outright hostility, and in some cases, abuse and violence.

As in other areas of the lives of lesbians and gay men, they must strike a balance, at a very early age, between the risks of disclosing their sexual orientation to family members and the effects of coming to terms with their sexual orientation on their own. Either way, hostility or lack of support from family members can result in poor self-esteem leading to poor performance in education and in some cases, leaving school, trying to live on social welfare payments, in low paid employment, or any other means which could enable them to establish economic independence away from home so as to develop a more positive self-identity. This process of progressive isolation from family members can have profound consequences for those younger lesbians and gay men who leave home before they qualify for social welfare payments, sometimes resulting in homelessness and prostitution (Boyer, 1989).

For those lesbians and gay men from families suffering from extra stress as a result of unemployment and poverty the risks of disclosure can be even

Family and Other Support Networks

greater. Given the level of general prejudice associated with being lesbian and gay, the disclosure of a child's sexual orientation can be an important extra stress factor, particularly when very little effective support is available which would allow parents to view their child's sexual orientation in a more positive light. As a recent book entitled *Coming Out*, which provides practical advice to younger lesbians and gay men, put it:

Don't forget: you have to live with the knowledge of your homosexuality for a long time. You have had the time to adjust to it, to get used to it. To your parents this is something new. It may be something that they have never even thought about or considered. Any information they might have on the subject is likely to be bits and pieces that they have casually learned from news reports or television over the years – and most probably negative reports at that. (Larkin and Byrne, 1994).

Given the difficulties associated with obtaining support from family many lesbians and gay men seek support elsewhere. For younger lesbians and gay men, the absence of sex education and counselling services in schools and colleges, which would specifically address the issue of their emerging sexuality in either a positive or non judgmental way, closes off a potentially important alternative to any lack of support at home.

Perhaps the most important source of support tends to be friends, particularly lesbian and gay friends if the individual has been able to contact others of similar sexual orientation. However, developing contacts with other lesbians and gay men can be very difficult, particularly for those living in isolated areas or those already marginalised in the cities who cannot afford to access lesbian and gay social facilities in the city centres.

In order to explore these issues, a substantial part of the survey questionnaire related to relationships with family and friends and access to other support networks. The information derived from respondents was supplemented with interviews with individuals and groups of lesbians and gay men, community workers and other relevant individuals. Of particular value was discussions held with members of Parents Support (formally called Parents Enquiry), a group of parents of lesbians and gay men who offer advice and support to parents coming to terms with their children's sexual orientation.

3.1 Family

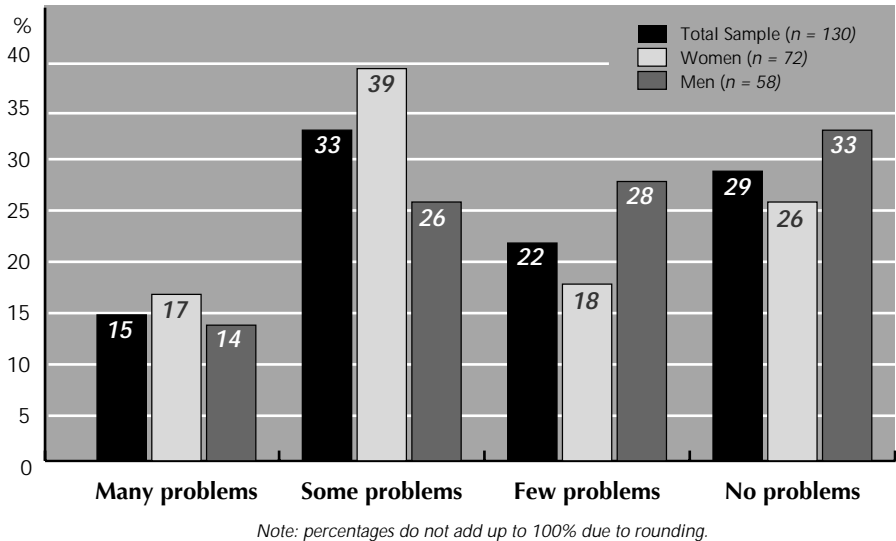
The results of our survey indicate that many lesbians and gay men experience problems coming to terms with their emerging sexual orientation. Most respondents said they became aware of their sexual orientation in their teens. Half (49%) said that they became aware of their sexuality before the age of fifteen and a further one in five (21%) realised they were gay or lesbian by the time they were nineteen. When asked, respondents said that their growing awareness of their sexuality caused them problems. Two-thirds (66%) of respondents said that this realisation caused them “many” or “some” problems. Only one in eight (12%) reported no problems with coming to terms with their sexuality.

As this chapter reports in detail, a main source of these problems was respondents’ concern about the possible impact which their sexual orientation would have on their relationship with their families. This concern might help to explain why so few respondents said that they had revealed their sexual orientation to family members before they reached the age of twenty (38%). This fear might also explain why, at the time of the survey, a substantial minority (15%) of participants said that they had not disclosed their sexual orientation to any family member. As many lesbian and gay men become aware of their sexual orientation at a young age (i.e. while still at school) an in-service educational scheme should be provided to relevant professionals such as social workers, doctors and others so that families and young people can receive support and advice in the ‘coming out’ process.

Turning now to those who said that they were ‘out’ to some extent (82% of respondents), a little under half (60 respondents) said that they were ‘out’ to all family members, including their parents, while the remaining (70 respondents) said that they were ‘out’ to some family members only. Respondents were asked if ‘coming out’ to their families caused any problems and Figure 3.1. shows that less than a third (29%) said that they had no problems ‘coming out’ to family. It is also worth noting from the figure that women were more likely to be ‘out’ to their families compared to men, and also that they were a little more likely to report that they experienced problems in doing so.

Family and Other Support Networks

Figure 3.1. Extent of Problems Experienced on 'Coming Out' to Family Members



When asked what type of problems were experienced in 'coming out' to family members, respondents reported instances of rejection and breakdown in family relationships. The risk of rejection from family can be profoundly traumatic for younger lesbians and gay men who are only coming to terms with their emerging sexual orientation themselves and whose family is the primary source of emotional and financial support. Of particular significance is the economic consequences of being forced to leave home before the completion of their education or when they are too young to qualify for social welfare in their own right. This can lead to a significant risk of poverty and in some cases, homelessness.

Below, a selection of respondents' comments indicate how deep-felt some of these problems were. Both lesbians and gay men recounted how they were forced to seek psychiatric or spiritual help after they told their families of their sexual orientation. In some cases, they felt isolated from the family or were asked to leave home. Furthermore, for gay men, fears concerning HIV and AIDS added to the difficulties experienced.

List 3.1. Problems Experienced in ‘Coming Out’ to Family

“My mother suffered a nervous breakdown and two cousins have lost contact.”

“Strain and self-blame on the part of parents.”

“My mother sent me to a shrink. My father sent me to a priest and when he couldn’t change me I got chucked out of home and was given money to take my lifestyle to London.”

“My mother wanted me to see a psychiatrist; my father was too embarrassed to discuss it.”

“I was rejected by my father and banned from the family home.”

“It led to much hurt and pain for them (her parents) and for me due to their reactions.”

“I was ostracised by the majority of my family and forced to leave home because of their fear that my sexuality might lead to HIV infection (gay man).”

In light of these negative experiences it is understandable that most respondents (84% of those not fully ‘out’ to family members) felt that they would face a range of problems if they were to ‘come out’ or ‘come out’ further to family members. The implications for some of revealing their homosexuality to their family was further revealed during the study in interviews with members of Parents Support. This group was set up by concerned parents of lesbian and gay men to provide support for parents coming to terms with their children’s sexual orientation. Below, one mother describes how, in her own attempt to come to terms with her son’s sexual orientation, she became aware of the difficulties experienced by many other lesbian and gay men:

After the initial shock we then started to talk to David and he told the usual story, you know, that he felt different from the time he was nine and ten. And then we got to meeting all these people in the Hirschfeld (lesbian and gay centre), we learnt that our son being gay was part of

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life, that it wasn't the end of the world, that it wasn't our fault. But we also met a lot of very sad young people, mostly young boys. I mean really horrific stories and because we were the only parents that had ever put in an appearance down there my son was known as the 'gay with the parents'. We kept going every time they had meetings. So we would hear the stories and, particularly being a mother, people would come up to me and say 'Can I tell you what happened to me?'.

She also described the negative consequences which some people underwent on 'coming out' to their families:

There were stories of fathers beating them up, mothers packing their suitcases and throwing them out, leaving home, to be let go to Dublin, on the streets, in prostitution, and drugs and everything and nowhere to go. The guys in the Hirschfeld, there weren't so many women then, they would put them up. They would look after them, they would try to get them flats, but the parents didn't give a damn. And it was awful, these were only kids, you know.
(Interview with the mother of a gay man)

Very often young people are not directly told to leave their family home but the climate becomes so intolerable that they feel they must leave. As one lesbian community worker interviewed during our study put it:

What's more true when they're 'coming out' to their families is that the vast majority won't be thrown out at the beginning. What happens is a gradual breakdown of their relationship with their family.

The reaction of family members, and parents in particular, depends on a variety of factors. In the United States, research has found that parents apply their negative conceptions of homosexuality to their children, viewing their child as estranged and unfamiliar. This reaction, combined with a feeling of personal responsibility for making the child this way, plunges parents into an emotional and psychological crisis (Strommen, 1993). The disclosure of a family member's homosexuality can also be an additional stress factor in a family already under pressure (for reasons such as poverty) and quite vulnerable to further crisis.

A key point here is that parents often have to deal with what they imagine to be a crisis with very little effective support. Interviews with individual lesbians

and gay men in the course of this study suggests that the first reaction of many parents is to try to hide their child's sexual orientation from relatives, friends and neighbours – the very people they would otherwise be most likely to rely on for support. In a number of cases, parents sought advice from Catholic priests or psychiatrists, many of whom had a negative view of homosexuality to begin with and whose interventions simply added to the general air of crisis.

The results of this survey indicate that there is an urgent need for the youth service agencies to develop programmes to deal with the specific needs of young lesbian and gay men. In addition, existing groups for young gay and lesbian men and other groups such as Parents Support should receive adequate resources to provide comprehensive services.

Within the context of the problems which respondents mentioned about coming out to their families, it is interesting to note that the majority felt that telling their families about their sexual orientation improved their lives. About half (51%) of those who said they were out to their families to some extent (130 respondents) said that coming out had improved their lives considerably, while another four in ten (42%) thought that it had improved their lives somewhat. Only eight respondents (6% of those out to some extent to their families) thought that it had not improved their lives at all. Overall, there was little difference in the experiences of men and women in their reaction to coming out, although women were a little less positive about how it benefited their lives. The small numbers in this sample do not allow us to explain this slight difference, however it may have implications for the resources which gay people (and their families) need to come to terms with their sexuality.

3.2 Other support networks

Given the fears outlined above, it is not surprising that most lesbians and gay men turn to close friends when trying to come to terms with their sexual orientation. As one lesbian community worker put it:

I think that, by and large, the support seems to come from friends and then families secondary. Very often the friends are other lesbian and gay friends and then other friends maybe, and then family. I think there are very few women that I either know or have befriended who have unequivocal support from families.

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The importance of friends emerged from both the survey and in subsequent interviews with different gay people. The vast majority (96%) of respondents in the survey said that they had 'come' out to at least one of their friends, although only a third (34%) had done so before the age of twenty. Revealing one's sexual orientation to friends caused problems, but on average, less so than 'coming out' to family. Almost a half (46%) of those who had come out to at least one friend said that they had no problem in doing so, about one-third (31%) said they experienced a few problems, while one in five (20%) said they experienced some problems. Only four people (3% of those who had come out to friends) said they experienced many problems in doing so.

Participants in the study said that the problems they experienced in 'coming out' to friends included outright rejection or gradual breakdown of relationships. The reaction of friends included embarrassment, and in many cases, fear that others would presume they were also lesbian or gay if they were to continue their friendship.

Given this situation, it is understandable that lesbians and gay men are often anxious to befriend others of their own sexual orientation. Almost two-thirds of respondents (63%) said they had more than ten lesbian and gay friends while one-third (33%) had between two and five lesbian and gay friends. The importance of these relationships and friendships is underlined by the fact that next to family members, these friends were the people respondents were most likely to turn to in the event of financial trouble. About two-fifths (32 respondents from a base of 82) said that they had borrowed from lesbian or gay friends when in financial trouble.

In interviews with groups of lesbians and gay men as part of this study, one of the main concerns raised by participants was the difficulty they experienced in meeting other gay people. While recent poverty research has focused on the way in which unemployment and poverty can increase social isolation because of the costs of socialising, for lesbians and gay men the costs of socialising can be much higher owing to the limited number of gay venues which exist. Consequently, low income, unemployment and rural isolation can have an even greater impact on the capacity of lesbians and gay men to meet others.

This problem of rural isolation is one of the most common issues arising in the information and help-lines provided by the gay community in different

parts of Ireland. In Cork, a member of Lesbian Line (a telephone information and advice line for lesbians) interviewed as part of the research, referred to women in Waterford, Kerry and more rural parts of Cork who felt isolated and could not even explain how they felt:

....because the whole idea of how they feel is so foreign to the language and cultural situation that they are in, that they are not even sure that the word lesbian applies to them.

In trying to link-up with other lesbians and gay men, the problems for those living in rural areas can be complex, involving not only money but also having to deal with suspicions which arise when travelling to the bigger cities on a regular basis. As the member of Cork Lesbian Line put it:

A lot of them hardly travel at all. Their main source of contact would be maybe ringing the line on a regular basis and the very odd time coming up to the city to meet. That's not very easy because usually it's the weekends or the evenings that they come up, and that's often the most difficult time for Line workers to be around and befriend. But even so, they would be met if possible. But usually they wouldn't be able to come up very often anyway because of lack of money or else their lifestyle just wouldn't allow for a break away, or too many questions might be asked about where they are going when it's something they mightn't have done before.

For those living in the larger cities and towns meeting other lesbians and gay men can also be problematic. For example, some of those in the study from Cork said that they would have difficulties in going to some of the local lesbian and gay pubs or discos for fear of being seen by relatives, neighbours or colleagues at work. To overcome this, many reported that they often travel to Dublin where they can be more sure of anonymity, but this can be very costly.

While risks of disclosure are lessened in a very large city such as Dublin, the issue of isolation can be as important as in rural areas. In Dublin, the main lesbian and gay venues are commercially-based pubs and clubs which can be expensive for those who are unemployed or working in low income employment. Travel costs can be an extra cost for those living in suburban housing estates.

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The lesbian and gay community has tried to redress these problems itself through the provision of social services such as telephone help-lines, information services and befriending groups. The June 1995 edition of *Gay Community News*, "Listings Section", for example, lists more than sixty lesbian and gay community organisations, facilities and regular events. These groups vary considerably in scale and resources and in some towns their continued existence relies on the efforts of one or two people. However, in Dublin and Cork especially, there are more established groups with greater numbers of experienced volunteers providing more developed services. For example, Gay Switchboard Dublin (formerly TAF), which was established in 1974, has continued consistently without state funding since its foundation, and now operates seven days a week throughout the year with at least two trained volunteers working on each rota.

Respondents in the study survey reported fairly heavy use of gay and lesbian services. Over half (54%) reported that they had telephoned the lesbian and gay switchboards for information and advice. Those in the poverty sub-sample were more likely than others to have telephoned the switchboard (61% compared to 52%). *Gay Community News*, the monthly lesbian and gay newspaper was also a major source of information in terms of news, advice, contacts, lesbian and gay venues, accommodation and so on. While the sample may not necessarily be representative of the readership, it is worth reporting that three-fifths (58%) of respondents said that they read *Gay Community News* regularly and a further one-third (35%) read it occasionally. To socialise, respondents said they met other lesbians and gay men in pubs or discos or else at parties organised by gay friends. Parties were a particularly important point of contact for those living in areas which lacked lesbian or gay venues or for those who did not have sufficient resources to go to more commercially oriented lesbian and gay venues (such as pubs or clubs) on a regular basis.

However, it must be stressed that the information and advice services provided to the gay community have largely depended on the voluntary activity of individual lesbians and gay men. Lesbian and gay telephone helplines, for example, do not receive funding from the state. Conducting these services has also been difficult: for example, advertisements of services have been refused by some newspapers and obtaining premises has proved problematic because of discrimination by landlords and incidents of organised attempts to obstruct gay community facilities. A recent report in this area

showed that gay community services in Ireland are overstretched and under-resourced in their attempts to respond to a disparate range of competing needs (GLEN/ Nexus, forthcoming).

Given these problems, it is perhaps no surprise that while three fifths (62%) of those interviewed thought that the gay community 'supports and looks after its members', less than half (46%) of those in the poverty sub-sample agreed. Those living in poverty are more likely to feel excluded from the gay community when most lesbian and gay meeting venues are commercially-based and when the lesbian and gay community itself does not have the resources to meet the level of need.

Finally, in relation to family and support networks, respondents were asked if they thought that state recognition for same sex partnership agreements would improve their lives. The majority of respondents (72%) felt that it would. It is hoped that under the proposed Equal Status Bill, there should be provisions whereby non-marital relationships, including those between people of the same sex, may be recognised and registered. Such recognition should include the right to share and transfer child custody, to transfer property and pensions and to the other equivalent rights current in recognised marital relationships

3.3 Findings and conclusions

- Approximately half (49%) of respondents became aware of their sexuality before the age of fifteen when they were particularly vulnerable and dependent, especially in economic terms.
- Two-thirds (66%) of respondents stated that the gradual awareness of their sexual orientation caused "many" or "some" problems.
- The majority (82%) of respondents were 'out' to some extent to their families, but only one-third of those who had 'come out' said that they had no problems in doing so to family members. Nonetheless, almost all of those respondents who had 'come out' to family members reported that it had improved their lives considerably or in some ways.
- Most respondents (96%) had 'come out' to at least one of their friends and most had lesbian and gay friends which could be a source of support, for example, in the event of financial trouble.

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- The Lesbian Lines and Gay Switchboards and *Gay Community News* were important sources of information and advice for respondents.
- Meeting other gay people was a problem identified by many respondents. Those on low incomes or living in isolated rural areas faced particular problems in terms of gaining access to these support networks.
- 72% of respondents thought that state recognition for same sex partnership agreements would improve their lives.
- Youth service agencies should develop programmes to deal with the specific needs of young lesbians and gay men.
- Existing groups for young lesbians and gay men should be resourced and others developed in each health board area.
- Groups such as Parents Support should be resourced so that they can provide a more comprehensive service.
- An in-service educational scheme should be provided by the relevant government departments for professionals such as social workers, doctors and others so that families and young people can receive support and advice in the 'coming out' process.
- Under the Equal Status Bill, there should be provisions whereby non-marital relationships, including those between people of the same sex, may be recognised and registered. Such recognition should include the right to share and transfer child custody, to transfer property and pensions and to the other equivalent rights current in recognised marital relationships.

CHAPTER FOUR

Education and Training

4. Introduction

Educational qualifications have become a key determinant of future participation and positioning in the labour force. Throughout the 1980s unemployment rates have reflected the educational qualifications of school leavers: those leaving school early being more likely to be unemployed or in low paid employment. Research conducted by the ESRI confirms that education plays a central role in the reproduction of disadvantage (Nolan et al, 1994). The Irish National Teachers Organisation study of primary school children confirmed that social background was a major influential factor in any child's future development. They concluded that those from disadvantaged backgrounds exit the system at a far greater rate than the national average (INTO, 1994). Early school leavers are predominantly drawn from semi-skilled and unskilled backgrounds (Ronayne, 1992). Children from these backgrounds are further disadvantaged by class differences in the provision of education itself (Daly, 1989).

Research in Britain and the USA has shown that working class lesbians and gay men are doubly disadvantaged in the education process. The problem generally begins at secondary school when sexual identity is being formed. Some gays and lesbians experience isolation, depression and confusion. Unable, or less able, to relate to other children, academic achievement declines and in a number of cases truancy begins (Trenchard and Warren, 1984). As reported in Chapter Two, the sample in this study included many high academic achievers, with almost a half (48%) reporting that they have a primary degree or higher. However, many respondents still reported feelings of depression, isolation and loneliness which may have had a negative effect on their performance while going through the education system.

Research has found that these negative experiences can be reinforced by the absence of positive images of homosexuality and the lack of adequate counselling facilities (Trenchard and Warren, 1984). This issue has been raised in the Report of the Second Commission on the Status of Women which recognised that lesbian teenagers may lack positive role models. In a recent study exploring the transition of young people from school to work, it was found that the quality or absence of counselling and guidance services was of crucial importance. Of particular concern was the failure of formal education to provide an adequate preparation for life in general and for working life in particular (Ronayne, 1992: 7).

To explore these issues further, a substantial part of the questionnaire used in our survey focused on respondents' experiences and perceptions of the educational process including school, third level college and training. As with other parts of the research, this information was supplemented by interviews with groups of lesbians and gay men. Respondents' educational attainment is reported in Chapter Two, and is not repeated here.

4.1 Schooling

Many factors influence the learning environment at school and a student's ability to experience success, not least the student's psychological well-being. Most studies confirm that self-realisation of one's sexual identity occurs in the adolescent years, the period when most young adults attend secondary school. Our study found that the majority (70%) of respondents realised they were lesbian or gay before the age of nineteen years.

As a pupil's experiences in primary and post-primary school may affect their decision to go on to third-level education, and that in turn may influence their life-chances, it is important that early school life should be a positive experience. About three-fifths (57%) of respondents, however, reported that they had negative experiences while at school. Loneliness, depression and/or extreme self-criticism were the most common negative experiences of respondents. While these are feelings which could be experienced by many pupils in school, in most cases (89%), respondents in our survey felt they arose as a result of they being lesbian or gay. Respondents felt ashamed about their feelings and repressed them, worried that they would not be accepted by others or would be subjected to bullying and harassment. A selection of their responses is given below:

List 4.1. Negative Experiences at School

"I was ashamed of my own aberrant feelings. I had no way of explaining them to myself, so I repressed them as much as possible."

"I was paranoid about lack of acceptance and that other people would find out."

"My two best friends deserted me and as a result I suffered from very bad depression and needed to repeat my Leaving."

"I was alienated by my classmates, snide comments passed at every opportunity. The teacher gave me a hard time."

"I was constantly harassed by students in secondary school (at one point attacked). I was also harassed by teaching staff."

When asked if they thought they would have experienced problems if they had 'come out' or 'come out' more at school, the majority of those who replied (91% of 54 respondents) thought this would have caused at least some problems. This suggests that the perception of the possible discrimination that would result from disclosure acted as a powerful deterrent for respondents in doing anything to tackle the problems they experienced. In light of these findings, the Department of Education should develop an anti-discrimination programme to tackle the problems of discrimination and under-achievement. Harassment and bullying of pupils, particularly those vulnerable to such attacks, should be urgently addressed.

A student who is at risk because of constant psychological strain and threat of physical violence because of others' reaction to their sexual orientation, cannot be expected to participate and compete in an equal way with peers in the learning situation. This scenario was confirmed by participants in the study, where problems experienced due to being lesbian or gay did have an negative impact on the extent to which they participated in school. Of the ninety-one respondents who said they experienced problems in school, half said they did not attend discos or dances (51%) or did not get involved in sports (50%) because of these problems. A smaller proportion (43%) said they found it hard to cope with academic work and a few (14%) even went so far as to say that they left school earlier than anticipated because of problems they experienced. In an interview with a group of young gay people for this study, one man described his own negative experience of school in a small rural area and why he decided to leave school:

I just couldn't put up with the bullying, so I had decided I would leave basically. I used to mitch quite a lot anyway. The day I told my mother I was leaving school was the greatest feeling I ever had. It was doing me in, mentally and physically. I just wasn't able for it anymore. I was, what, fourteen and I was a nervous wreck. I didn't

learn how to read and write until I left school and started reading things I was interested in.

For some adolescents the experience of being lesbian and gay in what they perceive to be a hostile environment can be even more serious. The recent *Report of the Secretary's Task Force on Youth Suicide* projected that lesbian and gay adolescents were two to three times more likely than peers to attempt suicide (US Department of Health and Human Services, 1989 in Garnets and Kimmel, 1993: 487). No evidence is available in Ireland to confirm that there is a parallel pattern at work here. Suicide was not included in the questionnaire developed for this research. Nevertheless, there is a very real need to encourage teaching staff who provide guidance and counselling services to include issues of sexual identity in their programmes and to devise strategies to assist young lesbians and gays within the education system and devise sanctions in relation to bullying.

The absence, or perceived absence, of such assistance is apparent from the results of the survey. Only six respondents who experienced problems (91 respondents in all) told a teacher about them, while four told a school counsellor. Most of those who did tell someone told parents (16 respondents), friends (19 respondents) or lesbian and gay friends (13 respondents). Others simply went outside their school, family or friends in order to discuss the problems they were having with their sexual orientation. According to one gay man:

I came out when I was in 5th year in school. I had no information about being gay but had heard of the word and set about finding out more. The first place I rang was the Samaritans who gave the usual 'are you feeling suicidal' routine. I kept ringing back and on the third occasion they gave me information about REACH (a Christian gay group).

This study has identified the need for further training of all those involved in education, including managers, teachers and counsellors, to assist them in providing a supportive learning environment for all students, including those who are lesbian and gay. To instill an appreciation of tolerance among pupils, issues relating to equal citizenship and human rights, prejudice, discrimination and poverty, should be included in the school curriculum.

4.2 Third-level

Attendance at third-level institutions was high. As reported earlier, the majority (69%) of our sample had received a third-level qualification: one in five (21%) had a third-level certificate or diploma and almost a half (48%) had a primary degree or higher. In addition, eight respondents reported that they went to college but left earlier than anticipated because of the problems they experienced. Respondents who attended third level (118 respondents in total) were asked about their experiences there. Three-fifths (59%) of these respondents said that they experienced problems including loneliness (39%), depression (37%) and extreme self-criticism (24%). Incidents of bullying and harassment (3%) were less prevalent in college compared to school. While all of these are problems that can be experienced by any student, the majority of respondents in this study who experienced such problems felt it was due to they being lesbian or gay. The following panel gives a selection of respondents' comments on the subject. Respondents lacked information or counselling and said they relied on their academic success or turned to alcohol or food for support while in college.

List 4.2. Negative Experiences at Third-level

"The isolation was very painful."

"I did not know other gay people in college. There was no gay or lesbian group."

"I had little belief in myself. I relied on being good academically to compensate."

"Alcohol gave me a place to crawl into and a mask to hide behind – I enjoyed feeling in love but my girlfriend had immense problems with being lesbian."

"There was no teachers I could talk to and no information I could read."

"I over ate. I didn't care about my appearance so as not to attract the opposite sex."

"My college life was hell because I knew I was lesbian and I didn't know of any other. Sad days with too many pints to see it through."

"The fact that I didn't have a boyfriend and didn't want a boyfriend made me feel like a failure. (lesbian)"

"I was in a seminary and I had a nervous breakdown. This was specifically due to my sexual orientation, my conditioning and attitude. I was asked to leave."

Respondents who said that they experienced problems were asked to indicate what impact these difficulties had on their college life, and while the numbers involved are small the results are nonetheless interesting. For men who experienced problems (29 respondents), about half said that consequently they did not get involved in sports, go to discos or participate in other social activities. In comparison, half of the women (41 respondents in all) said they found their academic work difficult because of the problems they were experiencing in college. As mentioned earlier, eight people reported leaving college earlier than anticipated because of problems they experienced, five of whom were in the poverty sub-sample.

Those who had negative experiences in college were more likely to talk to peers than to college personnel. Four in ten (28 respondents) of this subset said that they spoke to lesbian and gay friends about their problems, while an equivalent number spoke to other college friends. Only eight respondents said they discussed these problems with a college counsellor, five spoke with a college tutor and six spoke with the college doctor. One gay man who spoke to the college doctor said he found the experience unhelpful:

I was told it was just a phase I was going through due to depression. I was advised to socialise more with girls.

In trying to develop a more supportive environment in universities, individual lesbians and gay men have successfully lobbied for the establishment of lesbian and gay societies in the main third-level colleges. Despite early resistance from some colleges, there are now lesbian and gay societies in University College Cork; University College Galway; University College Dublin; Dublin

City University; Trinity College Dublin; St. Patrick's College, Maynooth; Dublin Institute of Technology (Kevin Street). None of the Regional Technical Colleges (RTCs) or teacher training colleges have a lesbian and gay society, though Cork RTC is in the process of forming one (O'Carroll 1993).

To support the rights of lesbian and gay men, the proposed equal status legislation should be introduced as a matter of urgency. The proposed Equal Status Bill will make it unlawful for educational establishments to discriminate by refusing a person admission to the establishment, by applying different conditions of admission and by denying or limiting access to any benefit provided by it. However, the Bill does not appear to address the issue of providing a non-discriminatory learning environment free from harassment. In response to this deficiency, the proposed Education Bill should place an onus on educational authorities to provide for equal opportunities.

An Equality Code of Practice relevant to managers, teachers and students should also be developed which would deal with all forms of prejudice, discrimination and harassment, including on the basis of sexual orientation. The Code of Practice to protect the dignity of women and men at work, published by the Department of Equality and Law Reform, is a model in this regard. The Code aims to provide guidance towards creating a work environment free of sexual harassment and a framework for dealing effectively with complaints of sexual harassment when they arise (Department of Equality and Law Reform, 1994).

4.3 Training

For those who do not go on to third-level education, access to quality training courses is often a vital means of developing the skills necessary for future employment or promotion. Training can be equally important for those who emerge from third-level without the specific skills necessary for employment. Also, FÁS sponsored workschemes, which include an element of training, are often the only source of employment for those who are disadvantaged.

Approximately four in ten (43%) of respondents indicated that they had gone on a training course, of which about half (53%) said they had experienced problems while undergoing this training. While the numbers are small, it is worth noting that amongst those who experienced problems (36 respondents), loneliness (75%), depression (33%) and extreme self-criticism

(33%) were most mentioned. Furthermore, most of those who had problems (33 out of 36 respondents) felt that they were due to they being lesbian or gay. As a result of these problems, a few (3 respondents) said they left the training course before completion, thirteen felt it was hard to cope with the work involved, and twenty-one did not participate in social activities organised around the training course. Only three of those who had a negative experience on a course said that they mentioned these to the trainer concerned.

4.4 Findings and conclusions

The results of this survey suggest that lesbians and gay men face particular problems in the education and training process. These processes result in a tendency towards disadvantaging lesbians and gay men. A number of statistics indicate the seriousness of these problems and the impact they have on individual lesbian or gay men's capacity to participate on an equal footing with their peers.

- Three-fifths (57%) of respondents experienced various problems at school, the vast majority of whom describe such experiences arising as a result of they being lesbian or gay. The problems included isolation, depression, poor self-esteem and harassment and bullying.
- Three-fifths (59%) of those who had gone to third-level college and a third (36%) of those who had been on training courses experienced these same problems. The majority of those who experienced such problems stated that they were due to being lesbian or gay.
- Thirteen respondents who experienced problems in school subsequently left earlier than anticipated. A further eight who experienced problems in college, and three who experienced problems on training courses also left earlier than anticipated because of these problems.
- Of those who experienced problems in the course of their education there was a marked reluctance to talk to anyone about their problems, least of all official sources of help.
- The Department of Education should develop an anti-discrimination programme of action to tackle the problems of discrimination and under-achievement identified in this study.

- Harassment and bullying of lesbian and gay students should be urgently addressed in the context of the overall anti-bullying programme.
- Training should be provided by the Department of Education for management, teachers and counsellors to assist them in providing a supportive learning environment for all students, including those who are lesbian and gay.
- An Equality Code of Practice relevant to management, teachers and students should be developed by the Department of Education which would deal with all forms of prejudice, discrimination and harassment, including on the basis of sexual orientation.
- Issues relating to equal citizenship and human rights as well as the problems of prejudice, discrimination and poverty should be included in the school curriculum.
- The proposed equal status legislation should be introduced as a matter of urgency.

CHAPTER FIVE

Employment and Unemployment

5. Introduction

Positioning in the labour market and unemployment are the most critical factors in determining income levels and poverty. Employment is the area in which lesbians and gay men are most vulnerable to discrimination. With high levels of unemployment, lesbians, gay men and others on the margins of the labour market are likely to be further excluded.

Discrimination in the workplace is a complex process and operates at a number of different levels: in the recruitment process, in training and promotion and in unfair selection for redundancy and dismissal. Also important is harassment in the workplace. According to one European Commission report, "Sexual harassment is inextricably linked with women's disadvantaged status at work and subordinate position in society" (Rubinstein, 1989: 12). Research in several member states, documenting the link between the risk of sexual harassment and the recipients' perceived vulnerability, suggests lesbians and gay men are disproportionately at risk from, and vulnerable to, harassment. The report points out that such discrimination can have a devastating effect upon victims' health and confidence, morale and performance and can damage their employment prospects (CEC, 1991).

Because of their fear of experiencing either discrimination or harassment many lesbians and gay men choose to avoid disclosing their sexual orientation at work, hiding their personal lives from management or co-workers at great personal cost. Others choose to avoid jobs in areas where they feel there may be a greater risk of experiencing discrimination or harassment, or to enter employment in areas where being lesbian or gay is not such a disadvantage. However, in the latter case, such alternative areas of employment are often low paid or insecure.

To explore these issues a substantial section on employment was included in the questionnaire used in this survey. Details of the occupational profile of respondents is given in Chapter Two. In summary, over half (54%) of our sample were employed or self-employed, three in ten (31%) were either unemployed or on a training course and the remainder were either in full-time education (9%) or otherwise unavailable for work (7%).

This chapter focuses on respondents' experiences of discrimination and harassment in the workplace. Before reviewing the findings in this area, it is worth repeating that our sample may not be representative of all lesbian

and gay men. It is most likely to be only representative of those who have 'come out' sufficiently to participate in the study. There may be substantial differences between this group and lesbian and gay men as a whole. However many respondents either experienced, or feared experiencing, discrimination and harassment in the workplace because of their sexual orientation and the urgent need for policies to tackle such sexual discrimination and harassment is pointed out in this chapter.

5.1 Discrimination

Respondents were asked a range of questions relating to their experience in current and previous places of employment, particularly whether they ever experienced discrimination in areas such as training, transfer, promotion or any other area either in their current place of employment or in previous employment because they are lesbian or gay. They were also asked if they are 'out' at work (if their employer and work colleagues knew they are gay/lesbian), and if not whether they thought that 'coming out' would result in discrimination. Very few respondents reported experiences of discrimination in areas such as access to training, promotion, transfer or other areas within their current place of employment because they are lesbian or gay. However, only forty-two people (out of 101 respondents currently at work or on FÁS schemes) said they were completely 'out' in their current workplace. The low level of direct discrimination experienced must be viewed within this context. On the other hand, for those who are not 'out', it must also be considered that some employers may make assumptions about employees' sexuality orientation and act accordingly. When those who have not 'come out' in their current place of employment were asked whether they felt that disclosure of their sexual orientation would lead to discrimination, twenty-seven respondents (44% of those not 'out') believed it would, nineteen (31%) were unsure and fifteen (25%) believed it would not.

A similar pattern of responses was evident when respondents were asked about their experiences of discrimination in previous places of employment due to being lesbian or gay. In this case, nineteen respondents (23%) thought they were discriminated against in areas such as training, employment interviews, promotion and other areas. As in the case of current employment, many more (55 respondents) felt that disclosure of their sexual orientation would have led to discrimination in these areas and interestingly a further thirty-six said they did not know.

In light of this fear and uncertainty about discrimination and prejudice at work, the proposed amendments to the Employment Equality Act, which will include measures to address discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation, should be introduced as a matter of urgency.

5.2 Harassment

Sexual harassment in the workplace is a major consideration for many lesbians and gay men. The Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) has broadly defined sexual harassment as persistent, unwanted sexual innuendoes, propositions or physical contact that are offensive to the worker concerned. It includes all forms of harassment from unpleasant remarks to sexual assault (ICTU 1985). In examining this issue, respondents in the survey were asked about their experiences of harassment which included sexually derogatory statements, sexually explicit or discriminatory remarks, unwelcome comments about person or dress, repeated and unwanted verbal or physical advances, lewd or suggestive behaviour and being isolated or frozen out at work. Four in ten of those currently in work or training (40% of 108 respondents) said they had experienced some form of harassment in their current place of work, half of whom felt this was due to being lesbian or gay. While the numbers are small, it is worth noting that more men than women said that they had been harassed due to the fact that they are lesbian or gay. This may reflect the fact that more women than men experience general harassment in the work place because of their gender.

As in the case of discrimination, the number of respondents who have, or have not, experienced harassment in the workplace cannot be considered in isolation from the numbers who have not disclosed their sexual orientation. To recap, fifty-seven respondents said that they had not disclosed their sexuality at work. For these respondents, four in ten (40%) felt that to do so would expose them to various forms of harassment, a quarter (26%) said that it would not and a third (33%) were unsure.

The reported extent of sexual harassment was much greater for respondents in previous places of employment. Seventy-eight respondents (54%), reported experiences of harassment in their previous workplace. In order of occurrence, harassment included unwelcome comments about person and dress (59%), sexually explicit or discriminatory remarks (51%), sexually derogatory statements (49%) and repeated and unwanted advances (24%). This finding may indicate that gay people move to areas of employment

where their sexual orientation is more accepted. It may also reflect that anti-gay prejudice in the workplace is becoming less acceptable as a result of positive changes in government policy (such as protection under the Unfair Dismissals Act already referred to) or pro-active trade union policy on the issue. Finally, it is worth recording that three-fifths of those who experienced harassment in their previous place of employment (59% of 78 respondents) felt that this was because they were lesbian or gay. Again more men than women described the incidents as being related to their sexual orientation which indicates the possible added dimension for women of gender-based harassment.

5.3 Impact of discrimination and harassment

The most serious impact of discrimination and harassment in the workplace is undoubtedly dismissal or constructive dismissal where an individual is effectively no longer able to work in a hostile environment. Eleven respondents reported being dismissed from their job because of their sexual orientation, eight of whom were defined by our criteria as living in poverty. Twenty-three respondents also stated that they left jobs because it was too difficult to reconcile the job with being lesbian or gay.

Discrimination and harassment can also have serious implications in terms of an individual's capacity to do their job in an effective way. For example, of the forty-three respondents who said they were harassed in their current place of employment, almost half (20 respondents) said that it had affected their work performance. The impact of harassment on job performance in previous employment was even greater. Of the seventy-eight people who experienced some form of harassment in their previous place of employment, the majority (56 respondents) said it affected their performance at work.

Harassment at the workplace also had an effect on respondents' attendance at work. A small number (7 respondents) who experience harassment in their current workplace said these incidents have affected their attendance at work while nineteen people said incidents of harassment affected their attendance at work in previous jobs.

Very few respondents either reported or took action about incidents of harassment they experienced. Only nine of those who had been harassed in their current place of employment, and eighteen of those who had experienced it in a previous job, said that they either reported or took action

about the incident. The reasons why people did not report or take action varied. Most in this situation said they did not report or take action on harassment for pessimistic reasons – they felt there was no-one to report such incidents to, nothing could be done, they could not be sure of any support or it would expose them to further discrimination. Others thought that reporting harassment would widen exposure of their sexual orientation in the workplace more than they would have wished. The list below gives a selection of respondent's reasons for not reporting harassment.

List 5.1. Reasons for not Reporting Harassment

"I didn't feel I would get anywhere."

"I wanted to keep my job. I also have to work with these people tomorrow and in the future."

"I discussed my boss's behaviour with other workers. There wasn't anybody to report him to, as he wasn't answerable to anybody."

"The person involved was my manager and he was married with two children so I didn't think anybody would believe me."

"I was afraid of discrimination in terms of my future employment."

"I had no one to report it to – I work directly with my boss."

Given the experience of harassment, or fear of experiencing harassment and discrimination in the work place it is perhaps not surprising that twenty-four people described their current workplace as hostile, thirty-six people described it as neutral while only thirty-three thought it was supportive for lesbians and gay men. It is also interesting that women were more likely than men to say that their workplace environment was hostile. In keeping with earlier findings, respondents were more likely to have found their previous workplace even more hostile than their current one. Sixty-six respondents found their previous place of employment hostile, forty-six described it as neutral and only nine ranked it as supportive for gays and lesbians.

Another impact of discrimination is that lesbians and gay men avoid working in certain occupations or for certain employers where they feel they might be subjected either to harassment or discrimination. This has the effect of narrowing job opportunities for gay people. One in five (21%) of respondents said they had avoided specific jobs which they were qualified to do because they feared anti-gay harassment or discrimination. Eight of those defined as living in poverty had done so. Furthermore, two-fifths (39%) of respondents said that there were categories of employers they would not work for because of the fear of experiencing anti-gay harassment and discrimination.

Interviews with individual lesbians and gay men indicate that many lesbians and gay men avoid certain occupations which are predominantly controlled by the Catholic church, particularly teaching jobs. Such avoidance is probably understandable given the Vatican statement that "it is not only legitimate but obligatory" to discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation in certain categories of employment such as teaching (Irish Times, 30 July, 1992).

5.4 Findings and conclusions

It is clear from the results of the survey outlined above that the level of discrimination and perceived discrimination in the area of employment is considerable for lesbians and gay men. The effects of this discrimination are also vividly demonstrated in the pressures to be 'downwardly-mobile'. The following figures on the effects of discrimination are among the most compelling:

- Two-thirds (64%) of respondents were either working or on FÁS-type courses, of which two-fifths (42 respondents) said they were completely 'out' at work. Few respondents reported direct discrimination in the current place of work or training because of their sexual orientation, but two-fifths (40%) said they had experienced harassment.
- Eleven people reported being dismissed from their job because they are lesbian or gay and a further twenty-three said that they resigned because they found it too difficult to reconcile their job with their sexuality.
- Fear of harassment and discrimination at work was high. About two-fifths of those currently not 'out' at work thought that disclosure of their sexual orientation would lead to discrimination and/or harassment.

- Respondents were more likely to say that they experienced discrimination or harassment in their previous rather than their current job.
- Twenty-four people described their current workplace as hostile for lesbians and gay men.
- Many respondents' job opportunities were severely narrowed because they avoided work for which they were qualified (21%) or categories of work (39%) through fear of discrimination.
- The proposed amendments to the Employment Equality Act, which will include measures to address discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation, should be introduced as a matter of urgency.
- The *Code of Practice to Protect the Dignity of Women and Men at Work* issued by the Department of Equality and Law Reform, should be amplified to include harassment on the basis of all categories set out in the proposed amendments to the Employment Equality Act, including sexual orientation.
- Measures to create more jobs in the general economy and to reduce overall unemployment is a critical factor in combating poverty in the lesbian and gay community. In addition, the Department of Employment and Enterprise should develop a programme to combat the disadvantages gay people face in gaining access to employment including discrimination and under-achievement in education and training and discrimination and harassment in the workplace.
- The Department of Employment and Enterprise and FÁS should commission a study into the economic development, job training and job creation potential of lesbian and gay community enterprises. Also, existing lesbian and gay community enterprises need to receive continued state support in recognition of their track-record of job creation and job training. This support is particularly important given the problems of work place harassment and discrimination experienced by respondents in this study.
- FÁS should develop a policy and programme to ensure that training schemes provide for equal opportunities for lesbians and gay men.

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- The trade unions and employer organisations should continue the work of establishing equality policies in all areas of employment
- The Irish Congress of Trade Unions should review progress on their Guidelines for Negotiators (1987) regarding lesbian and gay workers.

CHAPTER SIX

Services

6. Introduction

The problem of discrimination in the provision of services has received considerable public recognition over the past few years. The need to address the problem was emphasised in the Programme for Government (1993-1997) where the objective of the proposed equal status legislation was outlined. The new legislation will prohibit discrimination not only in the work place, but also in education (see above) and the provision of goods, facilities and services. Sexual orientation was included as one of the categories protected under the provisions of this proposed legislation. The present government of Fine Gael, Labour and Democratic Left, which came into office in November 1994, has adopted a similar equality agenda.

The problem of discrimination in the provision of services is one of the issues to emerge from this study. In order to explore the issue, respondents were asked about their experiences and perceptions of such discrimination in the areas of accommodation, insurance and other services. As in other sections of this study, the survey results were supplemented by extensive interviews with relevant groups and individuals. The results are outlined as follows.

6.1 Housing

Discrimination in housing provision is one of the most serious problems facing the gay community. The European Parliament, in a report on homelessness in 1987, recognised the difficulties experienced by many sections of society in securing rented accommodation and called for the introduction, or better enforcement, of laws banning discrimination on the grounds of, *inter alia*, sexual preference. (European Parliament 1987: 8). The problem has also been recognised at an Irish level by the National Campaign for the Homeless. Because of structural discrimination against single people and those in partnerships which are not legally recognised, lesbians and gay men are relatively disadvantaged, especially in the allocation of public housing. As a consequence, those living in poverty are highly unlikely to have public housing available to them.

Those in partnerships, whose joint low incomes put them on the margins of the owner/occupier private housing market are likely to be excluded because of the difficulty in obtaining joint mortgages for same sex couples. Also, tax relief available to married couples is not available to other partnerships (such as single-earner non-married couples). Exclusion can also arise from insurance companies being reluctant to provide mortgage protection policies to gay men because of the perceived HIV risk.

The net result of processes of exclusion from either public or private housing is that lesbians and gay men are more likely to be restricted to the private rented sector, which is more expensive, less secure and where tenants are vulnerable to discrimination from private landlords. In the 1980 and 1987 household budget surveys it was found that tenants in the private rented sector generally have lower than average incomes, yet the proportion of their incomes spent on housing is approximately twice that of local authority tenants or private owner occupiers (Threshold: 1993: 14-15).

Another related issue is the harassment and the threat of violence from people living nearby. Incidents of this nature are likely to have a greater impact on lesbians and gay men who are poor and do not have the same choice in determining where they live and when they can move.

Our own survey confirms the importance of the private rented sector for lesbians and gay men. Almost half of those interviewed (48%) said that they were privately renting, and this rose to three quarters (73%) for those considered to be living in poverty. These rates are significantly above the national average where only 9% of households in the general population live in the private rented sector, however, this might, in part be explained by the age profile of our sample.

A quarter (25%) of respondents were owner-occupiers, however most were still repaying their mortgage. Although the numbers were small (31 respondents in all), it was noteworthy that the majority (71%) of those with a mortgage were women. The lower figure for men may indicate the difficulty they faced in obtaining mortgage protection policies due to the perception of HIV risk on the part of insurers. However, this may also be partly due to the age and employment profile of the sample, with women being older and more likely to be in employment. To ensure the same level of access to owner-occupation for lesbians and gay men as is already afforded to the general public, mortgage and insurance companies should commit themselves to an equality-based code of practice. Such a code would prohibit discrimination against lesbians and gay men and other groups and would also disallow questioning of applicants regarding their lifestyle and whether, for example they have ever taken a HIV test. In the absence of such a commitment, legislation prohibiting such discrimination should be implemented.

Our survey also indicates that lesbians and gay men have difficulty in

obtaining access to local authority housing. Only eight respondents said they lived in local authority accommodation, of whom only three were living in poverty. The Department of the Environment should facilitate lesbian and gay men in gaining access to affordable and appropriate housing, including access to public and social housing. Housing co-operatives for this group should also be encouraged by statutory agencies.

A sizeable minority of respondents (11%) reported experiencing some form of discrimination concerning accommodation because of their sexual orientation. Incidents of discrimination included being refused tenancy, verbal harassment from landlords, personal questions about the nature of their relationships, being refused a mortgage and in one case, eviction. A much larger proportion (43%) however, felt that they would experience these forms of discrimination if they were assumed to be lesbian or gay.

Another important factor in determining access to accommodation for lesbians and gay men is the level of prejudice they face in the neighbourhoods in which they live. Many lesbians and gay men consciously avoid living in areas where they feel more vulnerable to discrimination and harassment from neighbours and others in the locality. This can be difficult for those whose location choice is limited by their lack of resources. A number of people interviewed in the course of the research had experienced severe harassment, including assault, in their own neighbourhoods but said they could not afford to move elsewhere.

The problem was also highlighted by those who completed the survey questionnaire. Approximately one in eight of respondents (12%) said that they are completely 'out' or generally known to be lesbian or gay in the neighbourhoods in which they live. However, about another half (45%) of respondents said that they have 'come out' in their neighbourhood to a more limited extent. Some of this latter group felt that 'coming out' was not a choice, because their neighbours made assumptions about their sexuality on the basis of their living arrangements or because of the friends who visited them.

Some of those who reported that they were known to be gay or lesbian in their neighbourhood said that they were subsequently called names (such as AIDS bastard) or received abusive letters and were insulted or ignored on the street. Given the extent of difficulties faced by some respondents, it is not surprising that over half (55%) of respondents felt that they would

experience problems in their neighbourhood if they were known to be lesbian or gay. These worries placed restrictions on some respondents' behaviour and social life. For example, a small number of respondents said that they avoided having lesbian and gay friends in their homes as this would risk disclosure of their sexual orientation in their neighbourhood.

6.2 Homelessness

Research in other countries has shown that young lesbians and gay men are significantly at risk of homelessness (Kruks, 1991). A survey conducted in London, for example, found that one in ten (11%) of respondents reported that they were "thrown out of home" because of being gay or lesbian (Trenchard and Warren, 1984). In Sydney, Australia a special refuge has been established for young lesbians and gay men who are homeless. A previous on-the-street survey conducted in Sydney in 1984 of more than 400 young gay people identified serious problems of disadvantage and in particular that about one-third were living in extreme poverty and many had insecure accommodation (Twenty-Ten Association, 1990). This issue of homelessness is of particular importance in Ireland because young people do not qualify for social welfare in their own right before the age of eighteen (see Mc Carthy and Conlon, 1988).

These factors, together with the housing problems discussed in the section above, increase the risk of homelessness for those lesbians and gay men who are already disadvantaged. The potential risk was illustrated in our survey. Almost one-third (32%) of respondents said that they have left home at one time or another with no certainty as to where they were going to live next. The proportion almost doubled (to 61%) for those considered to be living in poverty. In light of the seriousness of these findings, a pilot project should be established to deal with the special needs of homeless gay people, especially young people 'at risk'. This project might involve hostel and/or half-way house accommodation.

6.3 Insurance

A life insurance policy is now an integral element in obtaining any mortgage. Difficulties in gaining access to insurance, even perceived difficulties or disincentives, therefore have some controlling force in gaining access to housing itself, and are consequently a contributory force towards disadvantage. The difficulties arise largely, though not entirely, from the AIDS crisis. Application forms were redesigned to ensure that gay men would be identified and that

anyone who had even considered taking a HIV test would be refused insurance. The industry has since slightly modified its stance, but particularly when two men apply for a joint mortgage, not only will they still be rigorously questioned, they may also be forced to take a HIV test. As a result, what should be a routine matter has become a major disincentive to the only real chance most gay men will have of accessing secure housing.

Among our respondents approximately a third (31%) said that they have life insurance while a fifth (20%) have mortgage protection policies. In this context, five people said that they were asked to undergo a HIV test and two people reported having been refused insurance cover. However, the survey found evidence that many gay people expect to be discriminated against when applying for insurance. Almost half (47%) of our respondents said that they would expect to be discriminated against on the grounds of their sexual orientation, while a further two-fifths were unsure. These findings add weight to the call above (section 6.2.) for mortgage and insurance companies to introduce an equality-based code of practice.

6.4 Other services

Respondents were asked about their experiences in gaining services in pubs, clubs, restaurants, hotels and B&Bs. Two-fifths (39%) of respondents said that they had experienced at least one incident of discrimination in these areas because they were assumed to be lesbian or gay. Two thirds (41 respondents) of those who suffered discrimination were refused service in a pub, club or restaurant, while a quarter (14 respondents) said that they were refused accommodation. Again, fear of discrimination was higher than actual experiences. Almost half (47%) of respondents felt they would be discriminated against if they were assumed to be lesbian or gay and a further two-fifths (39%) were unsure. Only one in ten (9%) believed they would not be discriminated against in these services because of their sexual orientation.

6.5 Findings and conclusions

Lesbians and gay men face discrimination in different areas of service provision including accommodation, insurance and other areas. In summary:

- One in ten (11%) of respondents reported experiences of discrimination because of their sexual orientation in the provision of accommodation including being refused a mortgage, refused tenancy and verbal harassment from landlords.
- Two-fifths (40%) of respondents believed that they would experience discrimination in these areas if they were to disclose their sexual orientation.
- Half (49%) of respondents who have experienced incidents of harassment and violence, stated that these incidents took place in their locality.
- Almost a third (31%) of respondents have left home at some time in their lives with no certainty as to where they were going to live next.
- Almost half (47%) of respondents said that they would expect to be discriminated against when applying for insurance if they were assumed to be lesbian or gay.
- Two-fifths (39%) of respondents reported experiencing at least one incident of discrimination in services such as pubs, clubs, restaurants, hotels and B&Bs because they are lesbian or gay. Fear of discrimination was even higher. Almost half (47%) of respondents felt they would be discriminated against in these service areas if they were assumed to be lesbian or gay.
- Three-quarters (73%) of respondents thought that the proposed equal status legislation would improve the quality of their lives.
- The early enactment of the proposed Equal Status Bill prohibiting discrimination in education, in the provision of goods, facilities and services and in the disposal of accommodation or other premises will provide the essential framework for progress in this area.

- Mortgage and insurance companies should commit themselves to an equality-based code of practice which would prohibit discrimination against lesbians and gay men and other groups and would also disallow questioning of applicants regarding their lifestyle and whether, for example, they have ever taken a HIV test. In the absence of such a commitment, legislation prohibiting such discrimination should be implemented.
- The Department of the Environment should develop an equal opportunities housing policy which would remove the obstacles faced by, *inter alia*, lesbians and gay men in gaining access to affordable and appropriate housing, including access to public housing.
- Housing co-ops and housing associations, which would be supportive of lesbians and gay men especially those on low incomes or unemployed, should be encouraged by the Department of Environment and local authorities.
- A pilot project should be established to deal with the special needs of homeless persons, especially young people 'at risk'. This project might involve hostel and/or half-way house accommodation.
- The Department of Equality and Law Reform and the Department of Finance should investigate means by which the benefits of marriage partnerships could be extended to non-marriage partnerships (including such issues as taxation, pensions, inheritance, next of kin's status, guardianship of children, etc.).

CHAPTER SEVEN

Health and Well-being

7. Introduction

The comparatively higher rates of psychological distress associated with lower status is one of the most consistently documented findings in the literature on psychiatric epidemiology. (Whelan et al. 1991:2)

Research in the United States has shown that gay people who feel they are not able to come out or who are isolated from the gay community may experience significant psychological distress, including impairment of self-esteem (Garnets et. al., 1992). According to World Health Organisation (WHO), those who conceal their sexual orientation for fear of discrimination or alienation live less fulfilling lives, encounter additional stress and are placed in situations that are not conducive to safe sexual practices (WHO 1991). A recent ESRI report, found that unemployment and poverty have an substantial effect on psychological distress and that "social support can play an important buffering role" (Whelan et al, 1991:6-7).

As outlined in other sections of this report, individual lesbians and gay men have to try to achieve a balance between the positive effects of 'coming out' and the possible negative consequences. The findings of this research indicate that those with better access to resources and opportunities are better able to take advantage of the possible gains of 'coming out' and better equipped to deal with the problems of discrimination. On the other hand, those who have limited resources and opportunities are more vulnerable to the possible negative consequences of disclosing their sexuality.

It is important to note that the issue of health and well-being in the lesbian and gay community has been dominated over the past fifteen years by the AIDS epidemic which has had an overwhelming impact on the lives of gay men (and lesbian women, who have often been at the forefront of activism and organisation around the issue). While this study has not covered the issue of HIV and AIDS, research has shown that HIV and AIDS have had a particularly serious impact on those with few resources (Murphy-Lawless and Redmond, 1993). Research emerging from the United States also suggests that lower socio-economic status is associated with shorter survival following HIV infection (Hogg et al, 1994).

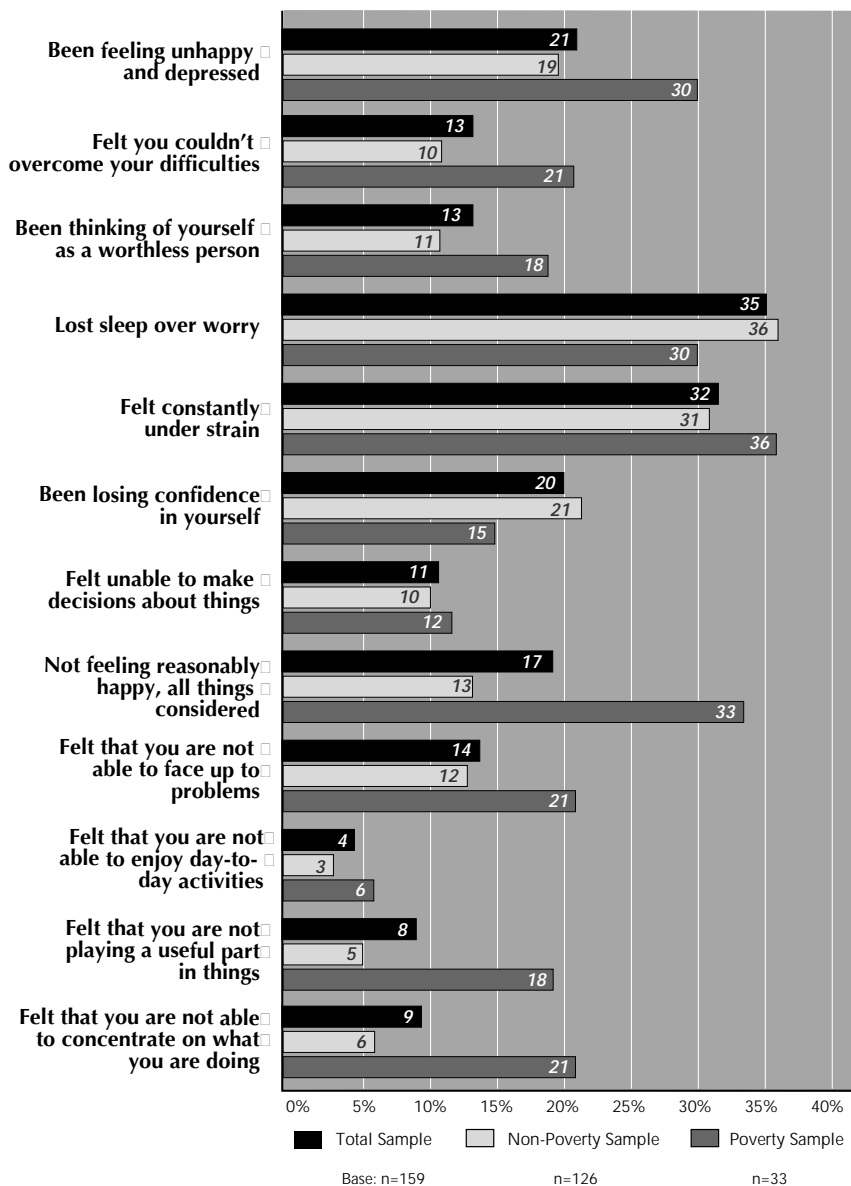
7.1 General Health Questionnaire

To obtain some indication of the psychological well-being of respondents, and the possible impact of poverty and disadvantage on people's stress levels, we included a twelve item general health questionnaire in our survey. The measure, which is internationally validated, was used by the ESRI in a recent report on unemployment, poverty and psychological distress (Whelan et al, 1991).

To assess participants' psychological well-being, they were asked to respond to twelve statements, six negative and six positive. Respondents were asked to compare their recent feelings with their usual ones. Only departures from normal feelings were scored as indicating personal distress, so giving preference to symptoms of distress over personality traits. The negative responses to the questions are given in Figure 7.1 and show that some respondents, and particularly those in the poverty sub-sample, were under mental stress. Approximately a third of respondents reported loss of sleep (35%) or being constantly under strain (32%) and a fifth (21%) said that they felt unhappy and depressed more so than usual. On the whole, those in the poverty sub-sample showed more signs of psychological stress than others, although they were a little less likely to say that they had lost sleep or had lost confidence in themselves.

These figures are further put in context if we compare the responses of participants in this survey to those of the ESRI's study on unemployment and psychological distress (Whelan et al, 1991). If the most extreme negative item is taken, "been thinking of yourself as a worthless person", less than 1% of respondents in the ESRI study who are classified as employees described having this feeling "more so than usual" compared to 13% of total respondents in our sample and 18% of those in the poverty sub-sample. However, it is important to note that the ESRI interviewed all its respondents, whereas in this survey some questionnaires were self-completed.

Figure 7.1: A Comparison of the Level of *Negative* Responses on the General Health Questionnaire Items



7.2 Findings and conclusions

The psychological health and well-being of lesbians and gay men appears to be significantly affected by anti-gay discrimination and the difficulties experienced in attempting to conceal sexual orientation from others. Using the measure of psychological distress used by the ESRI, responses to the survey show that many respondents showed signs of psychological distress, particularly those affected by poverty.

- As part of its positive health strategy, the Department of Health should assess the general health needs of lesbians and gay men including issues relating to self-esteem and mental health and develop/improve programmes to meet these needs which would include training of relevant professionals.
- The particular needs of gay men who are HIV positive and/or living with AIDS, including those who have emigrated, and with particular reference to those on low incomes or living in poverty, should be urgently assessed by means of an action-research project commissioned by the Department of Health.
- A research project on lesbian health issues should be commissioned by the Department of Health. This research would complement research recently undertaken for the Department on HIV prevention strategies in the gay men's community.
- Significantly reducing the levels of prejudice, discrimination and harassment would help tackle the problem of psychological distress in the lesbian and gay community.
- Social integration and support also play an important part in reducing such distress. Lesbian and gay community services require adequate funding to provide such support.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Harassment and Violence

8. Introduction

That lesbians and gay men fear and encounter harassment and violence against them because of their sexual orientation, is a consistent finding of this research. Previous chapters have touched on these issues and this chapter brings the information together. According to the Irish Council on Civil Liberties: "Violence against lesbians and gay men is alarmingly common, and frequently unreported. It can range from strident abuse to full-scale murderous assault" (ICCL 1990:41). A recent survey of Irish lesbians victimised by verbal and/or physical violence found that respondents had suffered incidents including spitting, threats of blackmail at work, burglary, and physical and sexual assault (Miner, 1993).

8.1 Violence and insults

As part of this study, respondents were asked a number of questions about experiencing violence and/or insults because of their sexual orientation. To begin with, respondents were asked if they had ever been punched, hit, kicked or beaten because someone assumed them to be lesbian or gay. A quarter (25%) of respondents reported experiencing such assaults: one in eight (14%) had done so at least once in their lives and one in ten (11%) twice or more. The responses to other questions are consistent with this high level of violence as evidenced by the following findings:

- Two-fifths (41%) had been threatened with violence because they were assumed to be lesbian or gay: 18% once in their lives and 23% twice or more.
- A third (35%) said they had been chased or followed because they were assumed to be lesbian or gay: 19% once in their lives and 16% twice or more.
- Fifteen respondents (9%) had been assaulted or wounded with a weapon because they were assumed to be lesbian or gay: twelve once in their lives and the remaining two respondents twice or more.

Respondents were also asked if they had ever been subjected to verbal insults because they were assumed to be lesbian or gay. Almost four-fifths (79%) of respondents said they had been subjected to such abuse: one-fifth (22%) once in their lives, and a little under three-fifths (57%) twice or more. Almost all (31 respondents) of those considered to be living in poverty reported experiencing verbal abuse at least once in their lives because of their sexual orientation, with most (27 respondents) having this experience twice or more.

Respondents reported that these incidents of harassment and violence most frequently occurred in the area where they live, outside gay or lesbian venues, in the workplace, on training courses or in school and college and at their homes.

8.2 The experiences of others

The scale of the problem of harassment and violence directed against lesbians and gay men was illustrated when participants in our study were asked how many people they know personally who have been verbally harassed, threatened with violence or physically attacked because they were assumed to be lesbian or gay. The majority (84%) of respondents said they personally knew someone who has been subjected to various forms of harassment and violence: one in ten (10%) just knew one person that this had happened to, while three-quarters (74%) said they knew more than one person who has experienced these incidents.

Respondents were asked if the possibility of anti-gay or lesbian harassment or violence affected their behaviour in any way. Four-fifths (81%) of respondents said that it did affect their behaviour. As those defined as living in poverty in this study were particularly prone to harassment and violence, it is not surprising that they were even more likely than respondents as a whole to report behavioural change for this reason. Thirty-one (94%) of those in poverty, reported changing their behaviour because of the possibility or experiencing harassment and violence.

Finally, those who answered that the possibility of anti-gay or lesbian harassment or violence affected their behaviour were asked in what ways this threat had influenced their behaviour. Of the one hundred and twenty-eight respondents who said they changed their behaviour, the majority (70%) said they avoided public displays of affection, about half said they avoided certain areas (53%) or avoided revealing personal information about themselves at their workplace (47%), and just over a quarter (28%) said that they avoided dressing or behaving in a way that might reveal their sexual orientation.

8.3 Findings and conclusions

The numbers of respondents who have experienced harassment and violence on the basis of their sexual orientation is one of the most alarming results to emerge from this study. The headline statistics are repeated here together with recommendations to tackle sexual harassment and violence.

- Two-fifths (41%) of respondents had been threatened with violence because they were assumed to be lesbian or gay.
- A third (35%) said they had been chased or followed.
- A quarter (25%) of respondents had been punched, beaten, hit or kicked.
- Fifteen respondents (9%) had been assaulted or wounded with a weapon.
- The vast majority (84%) of respondents knew somebody who had been verbally harassed, threatened with violence or physically attacked because they were assumed to be lesbian or gay.
- Four-fifths (81%) of respondents said that the possibility of anti-gay harassment had affected their behaviour.
- The Department of Justice, should introduce legislation to make harassment a criminal offence as recommended by the Law Reform Commission in their 1994 report on non-fatal offences against the person. The definition of harassment should include, but not be restricted to, the categories included in the proposed equal status legislation (i.e. sexual orientation, race, ethnic origin, etc.).
- The Department of Justice and the Garda Síochána, in consultation with the lesbian and gay community, should establish schemes to combat violence against lesbians and gay men. A publicity campaign should be directed at the gay community encouraging victims to report crimes of violence. A Garda team with special responsibility for combating violence against gay people should be set up on an experimental basis. Training courses for Gardaí should include a module on these issues of harassment and violence including the need to give confidence to lesbians and gay men to report such crimes.

CHAPTER NINE

Emigration and Migration

9. Introduction

Emigration has often been an imperative for lesbians and gay men in Ireland, where the climate of discrimination has been a spur for movement to those cities or countries where it is perceived to be possible to lead an open gay life without serious negative consequences. Migration within Ireland has also been important. As outlined in Chapter Three of this study, those who live in rural areas face considerable isolation and often leave the areas in which they live for those cities, Cork and Dublin in particular, where the lesbian and gay community is more established and where opportunities exist to meet others.

Emigration, like other strategies to avoid discrimination, can have positive or negative effects. Often the balance is tipped in favour of those with resources such as money, support networks and job qualifications which they can draw on. As one emigrant guide puts it:

Being Irish and lesbian or gay in Britain can be an enormously liberating experience. It can also be very disappointing. It depends on who you meet, what your expectations are and very often how prepared you are to deal with the many apparent contradictions you find here. (O'Flynn and Murphy, 1991: 183)

For many lesbians and gay men emigration has been a successful move and while many of these emigrants feel that they could not return, some feel empowered to return and build a satisfactory life in Ireland. However, especially for those who emigrate without resources, the challenge of trying to survive in an alien environment and often without support, can be overwhelming. Those who emigrate to Britain may face the additional problems of anti-Irish racism and disadvantage (see, for example, Taylor, 1991). According to one community worker, to be Irish and gay in Britain is "to have a multiplicity of negative identities and potentially a multiplicity of negative experiences" (PIAA, 1990).

9.1 Emigration

While all respondents were currently living in Ireland, almost three-fifths (59%) said that they had left the country at some stage to live and work elsewhere. Of those who have emigrated (93 respondents), over half (53%) said that their sexual orientation influenced their decision to emigrate to some extent. Previous research has examined why Irish gays and lesbians emigrate. A recent study on young emigrants in London found:

Significant numbers of young Irish gays come to London in part to escape the repressiveness of a society that denies their existence, and in part to develop a positive sense of their own sexuality. (Taylor, 1991: 9)

Some participants in our research concurred with this research finding. Below, some quotes from a group of lesbians interviewed in the course of this study, show how some had left Ireland so that they could live a more open life and to overcome discrimination.

List 9.1. Reasons for Emigration

"I knew things had to be better in another country. I didn't think about how I would survive. Lots of lesbians I'd known had moved from Ireland to London and the States. At least in another country I'd have a chance to be myself, to live the way I wanted to without the shame, secrecy or guilt associated with being a lesbian in Ireland. The stories from those who were living away from here were fabulous and the magazines and pride marches gave an impression of great freedom for gays."

"You have to work at something to survive. What sort of jobs in Ireland are open to lesbians who are out, I ask you? There's not much choice involved for some people, you have to emigrate to stay true to what you know you are and try and earn a living."

"A lot of women go away because they don't have any means of living as a lesbian in a city as small as Cork. So they either come out to parents and go away, hey don't, but still go away. It's a terribly hard decision."

The capacity of emigrants to establish an independent livelihood abroad is determined by a number of factors, particularly the resources they possess and access to support networks in the countries they go to, such as extended family members and Irish community organisations. However, many lesbians and gay men find they are excluded from these traditional support networks due to discrimination and prejudice. As Anne Maguire, founder member of the Irish Lesbian and Gay Organisation (ILGO) in New York wrote:

Coming to America, wet behind the ears, without a Greencard is frightening. The support structure needed to survive is provided by the particular ethnic group one belongs to. Through family, friends or contacts one finds somewhere to live and work. The social network in these communities provides comfort, safety, and support for the new arrival. Through the founding of ILGO it became clear that Irish lesbians and gay men were in a bit of a fix. In order to avail of the many advantages and comforts offered by the Irish community one has to tow the line. One is not supposed to challenge the racism or anti-Semitism in our community never mind volunteer the information that one is lesbian or gay. (Maguire, 1993: 16).

In response to this situation Irish lesbian and gay support groups have formed in major urban centres like London, New York and Boston, none of which have received direct funding from the Irish government. It is hoped that the situation will improve in the future in line with recommendations from the National Economic and Social Council (NESC) regarding the needs of emigrants. They state that:

There is a need to improve the level of support to the young, vulnerable, deprived emigrants to the UK – support to emigrant groups should, therefore be targeted. (NESC 1991:37)

As well as the problems faced by those lesbians and gay men who emigrate, emigration also has an impact on the development of the Irish gay community. A recent paper by the Northern Ireland Economic Research Council argued that emigration is one of the processes by which peripheral areas remain disadvantaged and by which core areas retain their political and economic dominance. Emigration, they explained, involves losses or costs to the exporting area and considerable gains and subsidies to the importing area (Dignan et al, 1990). Throughout the 1970s and 1980s large numbers of those who had participated in services to the lesbian and gay community in Ireland departed for the more diverse societies of London and New York. The training and expertise of these individuals went with them, as new bodies were found to work the phone lines of the Lesbian Line and Gay Switchboards throughout the country. For example, in 1990 half the volunteers at Gay Switchboard Dublin emigrated. Another dimension to this loss is that the lesbian and gay community is depleted of role models of individuals who had experience of being out for a number of years and could provide informal befriending support to other lesbians and gays.

However, there has been a positive aspect to emigration. Many of the initiatives undertaken to organise the gay community and develop services to meet the needs of lesbians and gay men over the last twenty years have been driven by activists with experience in gay communities abroad. Also, although the trend of emigration has continued, there is evidence to indicate that quite a number of individual lesbian and gay men are returning to live and work and organise in their home place. The return of such emigrants is likely to have been encouraged by recent positive changes in the law and the all-party commitment to equality measures contained in the last Programme for Government.

9.2 Internal migration

Similar issues arise in relation to moving within Ireland. As outlined in other sections of this report, there is evidence of young lesbians and gay men coming to Dublin without any support when they arrive, making them vulnerable to exploitation, poverty and homelessness. Two-fifths (42%) of our respondents said that they had moved within Ireland to live and work elsewhere, of which about two-thirds (42 respondents) said that their move was related to the fact that they are lesbian or gay.

9.3 Findings and conclusions

- Three-fifths (59%) of respondents said that they had emigrated at some point in their lives, over half (53%) of whom stated that their sexual orientation was a key factor in their decision to emigrate.
- Two-fifths (42%) of respondents had moved within Ireland, two thirds of whom stated that their reason for doing so was related to the fact that they are lesbian or gay.
- Those who do move can be vulnerable because they have to leave behind their traditional support networks. These moves also deplete the resources and expertise of the Irish gay and lesbian community who are left behind, particularly for those living in rural areas.
- Lesbian and gay emigrant groups should receive financial assistance from the state in line with the support given to other emigrant groups.
- An action-research project should be carried out by the relevant state agency to assess the needs of lesbian and gay emigrants with particular reference to disadvantage and poverty.

- Structures to provide for a partnership between the gay community and the statutory sector should include representation for the large emigrant community.
- Mainstream emigrant support groups should take steps to make their services more accessible and relevant to lesbians and gay men.

CHAPTER TEN

Conclusions and Recommendations

10. Introduction

This study was initiated by the Gay and Lesbian Equality Network (GLEN) and funded by the Combat Poverty Agency. It examined the processes of discrimination which tend to increase the risk of disadvantage in the lesbian and gay community and which further disadvantage those living in poverty. It also analysed the various strategies which lesbians and gay men use to avoid, cope with or resist discrimination. The underlying objective of the study was to bring forward policy recommendations to counter and eliminate these discriminatory processes and to provide a basis for effective community development strategies. In this final chapter, we draw together the findings of the research and the recommendations for change.

10.1 Main findings and their implications

The survey results clearly show that there are significant cumulative and interlocking processes of discrimination operating in key economic and social areas which increase the risk of poverty for lesbians and gay men and further disadvantage those living in poverty.

To begin with, most respondents said that they became aware of their sexuality from a young age. Almost half (49%) were aware of their sexuality before the age of fifteen, while still vulnerable and dependent, especially in economic terms. The research also found that many respondents had problems coming to terms with their sexuality, and in many cases lacked information, advice and someone to talk to. Most respondents had disclosed their sexual orientation to at least one member of their family and also to friends. While some respondents did feel that disclosing their sexuality further to family or friends might cause problems, the results show a growing tolerance among family and friends which is in contrast to the discrimination and harassment lesbians and gays are exposed to in other contexts.

Many respondents experienced problems at school because they felt that they did not fit in or because they feared being harassed or subjected to violence against them because of their sexuality. Others feared such experiences if their sexual orientation was revealed. These experiences had an impact on respondents' school life – either in terms of experiencing loneliness and depression or in limiting their willingness to mix with their schoolmates at sports or social events. In some cases, it seems that respondents' educational achievement was impaired by these experiences because they left school earlier than anticipated to avoid further harassment.

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However, achievement in school is an important key to achieving economic independence and progression on to adulthood. It is important, therefore, that the school environment be supportive for pupils, and particularly those who are lesbian or gay. The findings of this research indicate that training is required for management, teachers and counsellors to help them provide such an environment. Also an Equality Code of Practice should be introduced in schools to deal with all forms of prejudice, discrimination and harassment. The curriculum should also be developed to include discussion of issues relating to equal citizenship and human rights, as well as the problems of prejudice, discrimination and poverty.

While reports of discrimination at work were low, incidents of harassment were much higher, and in addition many respondents said that they had not disclosed their homosexuality at work. Some respondents had avoided certain jobs or had left or were forced to leave jobs because of their sexual orientation. Others felt that disclosure of their sexual orientation in the work place would lead to discrimination and/or harassment. Fear of harassment and discrimination were higher than actual incidents, which points to the need for stringent anti-sexual discrimination legislation as a matter of urgency.

The processes of discrimination continue in services such as housing. A small number (11%) of respondents had experienced discrimination in the provision of accommodation including being refused a mortgage, refused tenancy and verbal harassment because of the sexual orientation. Almost half (47%) of respondents, however, said that they would expect to encounter such discrimination if they were known to be gay. The findings of this study indicate that gay people find it difficult to own their own home or gain access to local authority housing. In the case of home ownership, they find it difficult to be accepted for mortgage protection policies due to the perception of HIV risk, while in the case of local authority housing the points system does not work in their favour. Consequently, many are forced into the private rented sector, which can be expensive and insecure.

The findings relating to homelessness are particularly alarming. Almost one-third (32%) of respondents said that they had left home at one time or another with no certainty as to where they were going to live next. The proportion almost doubled (61%) for those considered to be living in poverty. Providing counselling and support in school may help to reduce the numbers of

young gay people who feel they have to leave home early. However, a pilot project, which could include a hostel and/or half-way house accommodation, should also be established to deal with the specific needs of homeless gay people, especially young people at risk.

Another worrying finding from the research was the high numbers of respondents who said that they experienced harassment or violence because they were assumed to be lesbian or gay. Two-fifths of respondents were threatened with violence, a third had been chased or followed, a quarter had been punched, beaten or hit and one in ten had been assaulted or wounded because they were assumed to be lesbian or gay. Respondents reported that fear of attack also limited their social activities.

Combating this harassment should be a priority. The Department of Justice should introduce legislation to make harassment a criminal offence and schemes should be established by the Department and the Gardaí, in consultation with the lesbian and gay community, to combat such violence. A publicity campaign should also be directed at the community encouraging victims to report crimes of violence. There would also be benefit in establishing a special Garda team to tackle these issues. Finally, training courses for Gardaí should include a module on these issues of harassment and violence including the need to give confidence to lesbians and gay men to report such crimes.

It is not surprising that the cumulative effects of the prejudice, discrimination and harassment outlined above results in high levels of psychological distress amongst respondents. Emigration is one strategy used by many lesbians and gay men to try to avoid discrimination. Three-fifths (59%) of respondents had emigrated at some point in their lives with a majority stating that their sexual orientation was a key factor in their decision to emigrate. For some this is a very positive move, while for others without resources such as money, friends and qualifications, the challenge to survive in an alien environment can prove very difficult. Emigration also has an negative impact on the gay population in Ireland in that the continual outflow of gay people undermines the gay community's capacity to develop and sustain services. A similar effect is found in rural areas where high emigration undermines the capacity of local areas to develop and provide jobs and facilities especially for younger people which in turn feeds emigration.

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The large numbers who emigrate combined with the barriers to 'coming out', also significantly reduce the profile of the lesbian and gay community at home, so that there is a perception that the community is very small and its concerns are not of national significance. The 'invisibility' of large numbers of lesbians and gay men also sustains stereotypes and prejudices. The barriers to revealing one's sexual orientation significantly restrict the capacity of lesbian and gays to organise in, for example, trade unions to promote and defend their interests. Involvement in gay community organisations demands varying degrees of disclosure which can hinder full participation by many individuals especially in terms of representing a group publicly whether at meetings or in the media.

The fear of disclosing one's sexual orientation allied with the perception that the response from particular support services may be apathetic or hostile, also contributes to the perception that issues and problems affecting lesbians and gay men are of no great importance. Very few respondents either reported or took action about incidents of harassment they experienced at work. This pattern is reflected in many other areas including education and in terms of the Gardai where many incidents of violence go unreported. Hence the problems of discrimination and harassment can seem not to exist and so no remedial action is taken and the problem can be perpetuated. The task is to intervene in this negative cycle by making agencies aware of the nature and extent of the problems and issues affecting gay people, to encourage them to promote their services as 'friendly' to lesbians and gays.

It is clear from this study that many mainstream social support services do not respond to the needs of lesbians and gay men. For example only a handful of respondents who experienced problems in the education or training systems had reported the matter to a teacher or school counsellor and some of these had experienced an unhelpful response.

However, as with other disadvantaged communities, lesbians and gay men have organised collectively to provide their own community services and to generally improve their quality of life. Generally speaking, these social services do not receive state or other funding. They are under-resourced and overstretched in attempting to respond to the many and sometimes competing social needs of different groups such as lesbians as distinct from gay men, or youth, or those living in poverty or the vital requirement for HIV prevention work and the care of those who are HIV positive and or living

with AIDS. Lesbian and gay social services should receive state support (for example, from the Department of Social Welfare and Health Boards) in a similar way to other voluntary services.

For funding and other support, lesbian and gay community social services must rely on lesbians and gay men who are themselves experiencing a range of economic and social problems. These services also have to operate in an environment of prejudice and discrimination which restricts their ability to secure suitable premises or fundraise (e.g.: some hotels have refused to rent facilities for fund-raising events) or advertise their services in newspapers or local radio. Despite all these difficulties, lesbians and gay groups have consistently provided invaluable social services in a professional manner for more than twenty years. These groups vary considerably in scale and resources and in some towns their continued existence relies on the efforts of one or two people. However in Dublin and Cork especially there are more established groups with greater numbers of experienced volunteers providing more developed services (Byrne et al, 1995).

The effectiveness of these limited social services is revealed by the finding that more than half of the sample have phoned lesbian and gay switchboards for information and advice, a similar proportion read *Gay Community News* regularly and about three-fifths of respondents thought that the gay community "supports and looks after its members". However, as many gay and lesbian meeting venues are commercially-based, it is not surprising that less than a half (46%) of those we identified as living in poverty thought that the gay community looked after its members.

10.2 Recommendations

A task then for policy-makers is to build on the positive results of this study and to tackle the problems of discrimination, prejudice and harassment which it has highlighted. A related task is, of course, to minimise the overall levels and causes of prejudice and discrimination and disadvantage in society at large.

There is a widespread political and social consensus on the need to combat disadvantage and social exclusion. It is the state, on behalf of the people, which has the primary role in ensuring equal citizenship and social cohesion. Only the state has the power, authority and resources to put in place policies and programmes which can effectively combat prejudice, discrimi-

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nation and disadvantage. However, it is now generally accepted that such policies and programmes must be developed and implemented in partnership with the non-governmental sector. Community groups must be resourced and structures for participation established, if such partnership is to be effective. It is also generally agreed that programmes to promote community development are a vital complementary means of generating progress from the ground up.

With regard to discrimination, the government's proposed equal status legislation is a model for action. The proposed legislation would prohibit discrimination on the grounds of gender, marital or parental status, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, race, colour, nationality and national or ethnic origin, including membership of the Travelling community. It is likely that the Employment Equality Agency will be renamed the Equality Authority and will be restructured to reflect its wider scope. However, while various anti-poverty programmes include specific provision for women, the Travelling community and people with disabilities, there is as yet no anti-poverty programme which recognises the specific problems affecting the lesbian and gay community and provides for its participation. The funding and publication of this study is a vital first step in this regard.

However, in light of the seriousness of some of the findings highlighted in this report, we also believe that a Task Force composed of representatives of government departments and others including representatives of the lesbian and gay community should be established to develop and oversee the implementation of programmes to combat discrimination and disadvantage identified in this study. The Task Force would be supported by a Secretariat and would have the following remit:

- advising the government on policy matters in relation to gay and lesbian issues
- fostering better community relations at a national level between the lesbian and gay community and others
- resourcing the lesbian and gay community to facilitate maximum participation in the Task Force
- resourcing the development of the lesbian and gay community to meet the objective of combating disadvantage
- commissioning research into the needs of the community including the potential of the community to contribute to meeting these needs and other social and economic objectives

- facilitating other community and national voluntary organisations to respond to the needs identified in this report.

The Task Force should contribute to the development of European Union (EU) policy and should facilitate links and/or trans-national networking and/or draw down EU funding for appropriate EU programmes.

The Task Force should produce an interim report and recommendations within twelve months and consider any other matter of relevance.

The research is also very timely as it comes in light of the recent announcement of the government's commitment to develop a National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS). Under NAPS, all government departments and state agencies will be expected to include the reduction and prevention of poverty as key objectives in the development and implementation of their policies and programmes. They will also be required to consult and involve people affected by poverty in this process. This report has provided ample proof that NAPS should address disadvantage in the lesbian and gay community by tackling discrimination and harassment as a priority.

Policies to tackle discrimination and harassment in the areas of education, employment and services have been outlined above. These policies would be helped by the inclusion of information and education campaigns to promote social solidarity. In Spain, a government-sponsored campaign, which could be taken as a model, used, for example, leaflets and videos to challenge prejudice against people of colour, gypsies, people with disabilities and gay people. The Departments of Equality and Law Reform and of Arts, Culture and the Gaeltacht (which has responsibilities in relation to RTÉ and the IRTC) should take the lead in this regard.

The research has also identified the need to ensure that the experiences of marginalised groups such as the gay community should be included in anti-poverty programmes, both at European and national level. Such programmes should actively seek and resource a partnership with the lesbian and gay community. Furthermore, the Community Development Programme of the Department of Social Welfare should include the lesbian and gay community within its overall programme and provide for specific

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projects to address lesbian and gay issues. Pilot projects should also be established in Dublin, Cork and other towns to focus on lesbian and gay disadvantage. As with other pilot projects, their purpose would be to assess the scale and nature of needs, to identify good practice, to encourage policy development and to stimulate public debate on anti-poverty action. Different projects might address particular needs such as those of lesbians or young people at risk of homelessness or the unemployed.

Finally, the research has also identified the need for additional action research in this area. This research was ground-breaking in its holistic approach to the experiences of the gay community and the impact of discrimination and harassment on gay people's life changes and has identified a number of recommendations for policy change. However, as reported throughout this study, our analysis was limited by the sampling methods open to us and the numbers in the sample. There is a need to re-examine some of the issues identified in this research, particularly ways of identifying those most at risk of experiencing poverty, the 'coming out' process, homelessness amongst young gay people and how best to tackle the experiences and fears of discrimination and harassment, especially in the work place. Further research is also needed to pick up on some of the issues identified in this research, but which we were unable to analyse in detail, for example the experiences of gay people living in rural areas, people from the Travelling community or people with disabilities. However, in identifying priorities for the future, this research has pinpointed numerous areas in need of legislative change, extra funding or pilot programmes which should receive immediate attention.

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