

English summary

Background

Recent years have witnessed persistent news coverage of incidents of anti-gay violence. Amsterdam in particular is often said to be a place where dangers for homosexuals are on the increase. Anti-gay violence plays an important part in the public debate on both Amsterdam as 'gay capital' and the multicultural society as migrants (and Muslims in particular) are feared to insufficiently recognise Dutch values of tolerance towards homosexuals, and to be responsible for a large part of anti-gay violence. For this research, detailed data about the nature and extent of this problem and the perpetrators of anti-gay violence have been gathered.

Objective

The central question of this research is: what are the motives of the perpetrators of anti-gay violence in Amsterdam? In answering this question we focused on the 'tipping point': what factors cause certain situations to get out of hand to such an extent that perpetrators resort to verbal and/or physical violence? Furthermore, we answered three other questions:

- What is the nature and extent of anti-gay violence in Amsterdam? (Could one speak of a structural problem? Could one speak of an increase? Is the problem worse in Amsterdam than elsewhere?)
- What patterns can be discerned in the suspects' profiles?
- Where and when does anti-gay violence in Amsterdam tend to take place?

Method

In order to answer the central question regarding the perpetrators' motives we have methodically applied the so-called 'pyramid model'. By conducting a survey at secondary schools we were able to form an image of Amsterdam youngsters' views on homosexuality and anti-gay violence. We have subsequently held focus group discussions with seven groups of young people who, according to current views, are more likely to resort to anti-gay violence. Finally, we have focused on the perpetrators themselves. In-depth file studies and interviews with the perpetrators have yielded information on the motives of 52 perpetrators of 45 recent incidents.

In order to answer the three other research questions we have analysed all incidents from 2007 that are recorded as gay-related by the gay network Roze in Blauw ('Pink in Blue') of Amsterdam-Amstelland Police.

Results and conclusions

The data from the gay network of Amsterdam-Amstelland Police show that gays fall victim to violence in Amsterdam on a regular basis. In 2007, 201 cases were recorded, of which 67 were cases of physical violence, 17 of robbery, and 38 of serious threat. Anti-gay violence in Amsterdam is thus a grave and serious problem. The suspects usually declare themselves unambiguously and aggressively against expressions of homosexuality. Due to scarce and incomparable data, we cannot comment on the supposed increase of anti-gay violence in Amsterdam or on the

severity of the problem in comparison to other cities. We do see an increase of the number of police registrations of anti-gay violence between 2006 and 2008.

Suspects of physical violence are usually boys aged between 17 and 25, and are just as often of indigenous Dutch as of Moroccan origin (both 36%). In view of the fact that of all Amsterdam youngsters up to 24 years, 39% belongs to the former group and 16% to the latter, Moroccans are overrepresented as suspects of physical anti-gay violence. The majority (55%) of the incidents of physical violence takes place outside those areas that are known as gay areas (such as nightlife and gay cruising areas), but a considerable part also takes place within these areas (42%). Most incidents in the gay nightlife area take place in and around the Reguliersdwarsstraat. Most acts of violence are committed during the weekend. Anti-gay violence reaches a clear peak in summer, especially in August.

The major cause of the aversion to homosexuality felt by perpetrators of anti-gay violence lies in their views and emotions regarding masculinity and sexuality. Four aspects of homosexuality that particularly appear to arouse annoyance, disapproval and loathing are anal sex, feminine behaviour, the visibility of homosexuality, and the fear of being hit on by a gay.

It is remarkable that the perpetrators do not reject homosexuality on all fronts. Indeed, in many cases the perpetrators declare not to hate gays at all and realise that homosexuality is a part of Dutch society. They reject homosexuality, however, on express conditions: gays should not openly show the four aspects of the behaviour mentioned above. The perpetrators tend to copy the prevailing gay-tolerant rhetoric of Dutch society, but do not refrain from all sorts of violence as soon as homosexuality comes close to them or if gay men do not fulfil their supposed obligations.

Violence is resorted to especially when these boys believe themselves to be the object of gay men's sexual desire. We conclude that this is a demonstrable trigger of anti-gay violence in almost 40% of the investigated cases. The perpetrators do not want to be a sex object, but their image of gay men as hypersexual beings makes them feel this threat. These boys cannot bear the thought of being forced into a position that they perceive as feminine and humiliating.

A remarkable result is that there is little difference in the ways in which the different groups that we examined (secondary school students, focus group youngsters and perpetrators) think about homosexuality. Apparently, gay tolerance among secondary school students is flimsy: many of them declare to accept homosexuality, but do not show as much tolerance when asked what they think of it when it comes close to them. Youngsters who are suspected of homosexuality are shut out and discriminated against on a daily basis in Amsterdam's schools.

The small differences between the groups lead to the alarming conclusion that the group of potential perpetrators of anti-gay violence is very large. This result is substantiated by the fact that many perpetrators of anti-gay violence did not plan their criminal act in advance. One can speak of organised 'gay bashing' only to a limited extent. Most incidents arise on the spot. The situation gets out of hand the moment the perpetrators are confronted with a situation that clashes with their views on gender and sexuality.

We found a few factors that can account for the fact that some people resort to anti-gay violence and others do not. Perpetrators often commit acts of violence in groups and are easily influenced by peer pressure. Resistance against homosexuality helps members of many groups shape their identity: through it, youngsters acquire a tough, masculine status in a group. Thus they prevent themselves being seen as 'gay', which for them is synonymous with weak and feminine. Apart from this, socio-economic factors play an important part. Perpetrators show a remarkably low level of education, are often unemployed, and belong to problematic families. Committing acts of anti-gay violence can be an effective way to gain respect and a masculine status for those who cannot do so legally.

Perpetrators of anti-gay violence are not inspired by religious beliefs. Those perpetrators who are Muslims have only a superficial knowledge of the Koran and rarely go to mosque. The motives of the Moroccan perpetrators are almost the same as those of the indigenous Dutch perpetrators. Views and emotions regarding sex and gender play a decisive part, albeit that Moroccan boys list anal sex and the visibility of homosexuality as the most reprehensible aspects of homosexuality, and not feminine behaviour. Their overrepresentation is due to the street culture in which many Moroccan boys live.