

## 3.8 Berkshire Anti-Homophobia Group Study

There are five parts to this section: (a) background information, (b) survey respondents' characteristics, (c) survey data, (d) case studies and (e) discussion.

### (a) Background Information

Homophobia and homophobic crime are individual and community safety issues, and serious social problems.

#### **What is Homophobia?**

The Oxford Dictionary defined homophobia as “an irrational hatred and/or fear of homosexuals.” Strictly speaking this amounts to prejudice. For the purposes of this report, homophobia is understood as *acting* upon this hatred and/or fear. Acts of violence and other crimes against people because of their sexual identity constitute homophobic crime.

#### **What is Heterosexism?**

Heterosexism is wrongly assuming that everyone is heterosexual. Studies suggest that *at least* four per cent of the British population is gay or lesbian (see Section 2.3). This figure does not include those who identify as bisexual. Others are behaviourally bisexual (termed ‘men who have sex with men’ and ‘women who have sex with women’ and used to describe those who identify as heterosexual but engage in homosexual acts). Transvestites and transsexual people also identify as bisexual, gay or lesbian. Bisexual, behaviourally bisexual and trans-gendered people can find themselves in situations where they are perceived to be gay or lesbian and so can be the victims of homophobia and homophobic crime.

#### **How are Homophobia and Heterosexism Expressed?**

Homophobia and heterosexism are expressed:

- ⇒ Through negative and stereotypical attitudes towards bisexual, gay and lesbian people.
- ⇒ Through verbal abuse, harassment, intimidation and violence (sometimes resulting in disablement and even death).
- ⇒ Through rejection by colleagues, family and friends, etc.

Homophobia and heterosexism are expressed in families, schools, colleges and universities, in the media, in the workplace, on the streets, and many other places. Homophobia creates a climate of fear for individuals and the bisexual, gay, lesbian and trans-gendered community as a whole. This fear encourages silence. This silence reinforces invisibility. Invisibility reinforces assumptions, myths and negative attitudes. They legitimise abuse, harassment and violence. This is a vicious circle that needs to be broken.

### **The Aim and Objectives of the Berkshire Anti-Homophobia Group**

Representatives of the local bisexual, gay and lesbian community established the Berkshire Anti-Homophobia Group in March 1998. The initial founders of the Group favoured developing a wide and diverse membership, focusing particularly on those in the front-line of dealing with the issues of homophobia and homophobic crime. Accordingly, this working group includes representatives from Thames Valley Police, local authorities and Victim Support.

The aim of the Berkshire Anti-Homophobia Group is to work towards making local communities in Berkshire safer for bisexual, gay, lesbian and trans-gendered people by:

- (a) Promoting dialogue and trust between the local bisexual, gay, lesbian and trans-gendered community and the police (and other agencies involved in community safety).
- (b) Developing effective communication links between this community and the police, and other appropriate agencies.
- (c) Monitoring homophobia, homophobic crime and police response.
- (d) Developing effective support networks and services for the victims of homophobia and homophobic crime.

- (e) Promoting appropriate and sensitive policies, procedures and training for the police and other agencies around issues of homophobia and sexual identity.
- (f) Raising awareness of homophobia and homophobic crime in the wider community.

ReachOUT is one of the partner agencies in the Berkshire Anti-Homophobia Group and the author was commissioned to undertake a study into homophobia and homophobic crime locally, see Mullen (1999).

### **Local Issues**

The Berkshire Anti-Homophobia Group initially identified two basic and broad tasks. These can be summarised as:

- (a) Improving individual and community safety for bisexual, gay, lesbian and transgendered people in Berkshire.
- (b) Improving the delivery of services by the police (and other agencies charged with individual and community safety), more specifically, improving the delivery of services for victims of homophobia and homophobic crime.

To meet these objectives it was felt necessary to first ‘map’ the incidence of homophobia and homophobic crime locally through a countywide Homophobic Incidents Survey. This need reflected recognition of three local issues. First, that homophobia, homophobic crime and police response were not being systematically monitored or recorded. Second, (and as a result of the first) that under-reporting encouraged the false belief that homophobia and homophobic crime are not important or significant issues. And third, that anecdotal evidence from individuals and community organisations suggested that homophobia and homophobic crime *are* important and significant issues.

It was the Berkshire Anti-Homophobia Group’s intention – armed with the results of the survey – to develop services for the victims of homophobia and homophobic crime, to introduce these issues onto the agenda of local agencies, decision-makers, opinion-formers, etc. and to raise the issues of homophobia and homophobic crime in the wider community.

### **Crime and Disorder Act 1998**

As well as the local impetus discussed above, the Crime and Disorder Act (1998) placed a duty on local authorities and police areas to work together to address the issues of crime and disorder. More specifically, there was a requirement for these agencies to

work together to implement a three-year strategy, including short and long-term performance targets for reducing crime and disorder. This involved:

- ⇒ Reviewing the levels and patterns of local crime and disorder.
- ⇒ Publishing a report analysing the audit's implications for a crime reduction strategy.
- ⇒ Consulting with partners prescribed by the Home Secretary and others with an interest.
- ⇒ Formulating and publishing a strategy for the reduction of crime and disorder.

The Home Office recommended that local authorities and police areas pay particular attention to hard-to-reach social groups, including the gay and lesbian community:

It is absolutely central to the success of the partnerships that they should be seen as credible and inclusive by *all* sections of the community. It is likely that the Home Secretary will use ... [the] powers [in the] Crime and Disorder Act to require the police and local authorities to invite the full participation of gay and lesbian groups in the work of the new partnerships. This should do much to ensure that issues of concern to these groups are not overlooked when the audit is conducted and the strategy developed. Seeking the involvement of the gay and lesbian community must be an *active* process not a passive one. This community is not always visible, and may for historical reasons not find it easy to engage in a dialogue with some of the groups involved in the partnerships; it will *not* be enough just to write to the local pressure group inviting it to send a representative to a meeting and then thinking that your obligation to this sector of the community is discharged. You must develop creative and flexible ways to break down any barriers which may exist locally, and to encourage full and active engagement in the work by local gay and lesbian people (Home Office, 1998).

It was anticipated that the results of the Homophobic Incidents Survey would inform the six local authorities' crime and disorder audits and strategies and that its future work would contribute to the on-going process of community safety and crime reduction.

## **Methodology**

Prior to this study there was a lack of systematic evidence concerning the incidence of homophobia and homophobic crime locally. As discussed earlier, this encouraged the perception that these were not important and significant local issues.

To remedy this the Berkshire Anti-Homophobia Group decided to conduct a survey across the county. The survey method was chosen because it was deemed the most effective and efficient way of collecting the large amount of data desired. A tick box design was used and the survey was anonymous and confidential. This was important given the sensitive nature of the subject and the worries some respondents had about the use and destination of the information. The survey was designed in a holistic way, giving respondents the opportunity to reveal the wide range of possible cases of abuse, harassment and violence, including those perpetrated by other bisexuals, gays and lesbians.

The surveys were distributed through the four commercial scene venues in Berkshire and nine community-based organisations and 314 surveys were completed, representing 1.6% of the estimated gay and lesbian population locally.

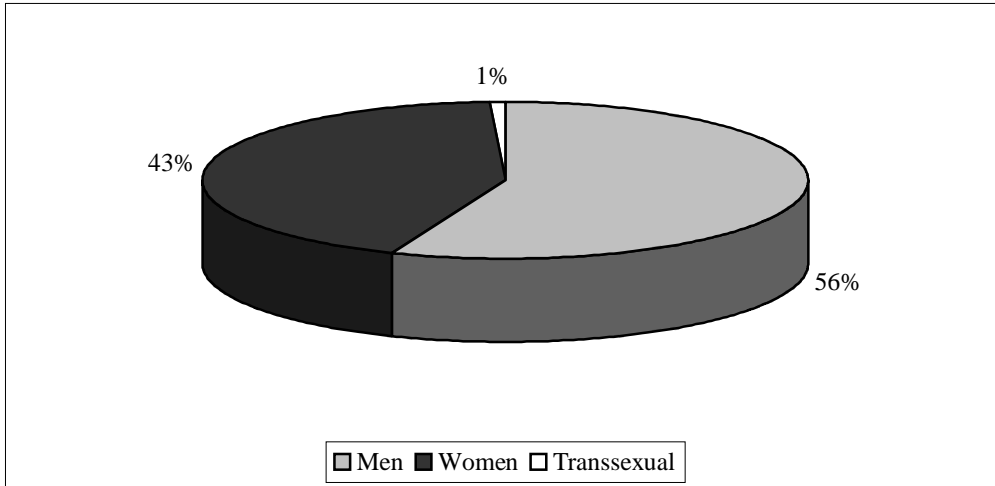
Anecdotal evidence of cases of homophobia and homophobic crime were collected from community-based organisations and an in-depth interview with a young gay man was conducted for this study.

## **(b) Survey Respondents' Characteristics**

The author extracted the youth sample from the total. Note that these findings relate to Berkshire as a whole and not just Reading.

Out of a total of 314 people who completed the Homophobia Incidents Survey, 107 (34 per cent) were aged 25 or less. Chart 25 shows the gender of respondents.

### **Chart 25: Survey Respondents' Gender**

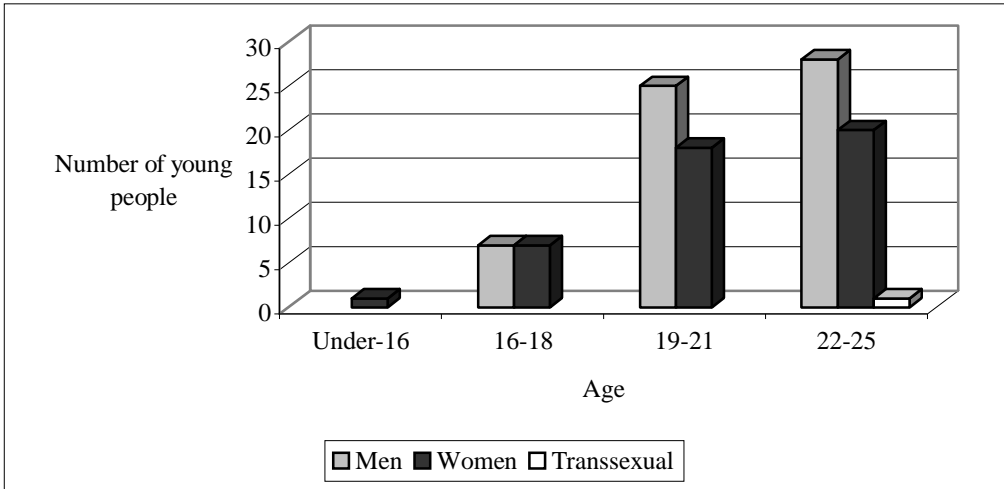


Note:  $n = 107$

- Fifty-six per cent of respondents were men, 43 per cent were women and one identified as a transsexual.

Chart 26 shows the age of respondents.

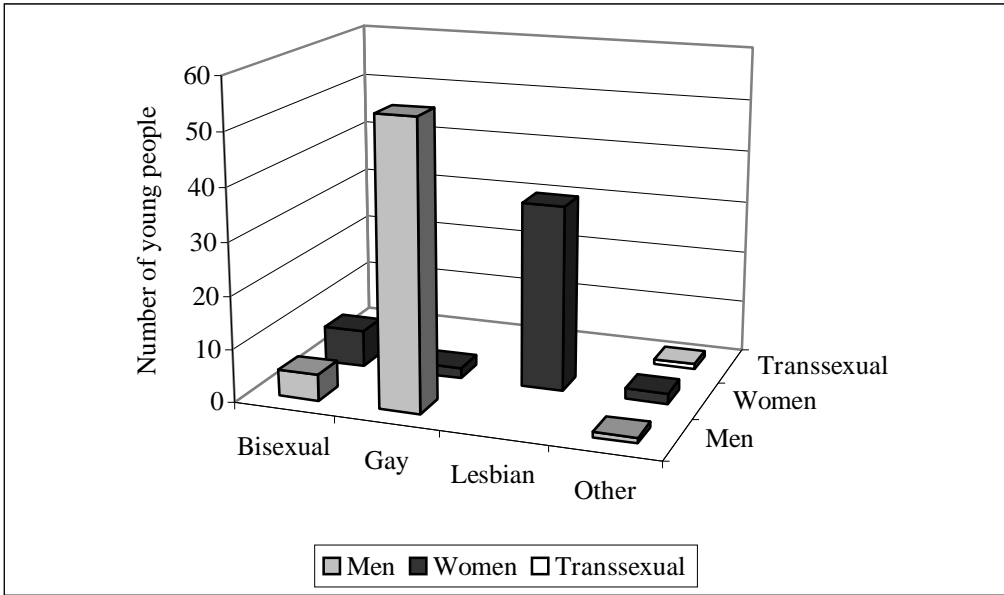
### **Chart 26: Survey Respondents' Age**



- Thirteen per cent of respondents were aged between 16-18, 40 per cent between 19-21 and 46 per cent between 22-25. One young woman was aged 15.

Chart 27 shows the sexual identity of respondents.

**Chart 27: Survey Respondents Sexual Identity**



- Eleven per cent of respondents identified as bisexual, 52 per cent as gay, 33 per cent as lesbian and four per cent as ‘other’.

Chart 28 shows the ethnic identity of respondents.

**Chart 28: Survey Respondents’ Ethnic Identity**



- In terms of ethnic identity, 4.7 per cent of respondents identified as Asian, 3.7 per cent as Black, 88.8 per cent as white and 2.8 per cent as mixed race.

Table 36 shows how the ethnic identity of the youth sample compares to the whole sample and the ethnic minority population of Berkshire.

**Table 36: Survey Respondents’ Ethnic Identity (Comparisons)**

Ethnic Identity	Berkshire Anti-Homophobia Group: Youth Sample	Berkshire Anti-Homophobia Group: Total Sample	Berkshire Population (1)
Asian	4.7%	3.8%	5.09%
Black	3.7%	1.9%	1.62%
White	88.8%	90.8%	92.67%

Note: (1) From 1991 Census.



Table 37 shows the accommodation status of respondents.

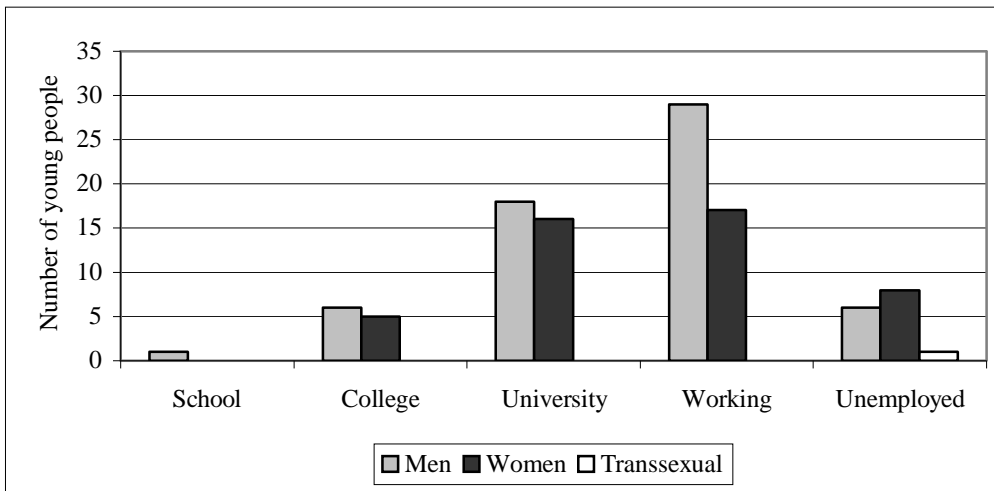
**Table 37: Survey Respondents' Accommodation Status**

<b>Accommodation Status</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Transsexual</b>
Living Alone	10	4	
Living with Family	16	13	
Living with Partner	5	8	
Living in Care	1		
Homeless		1	
Living with Friends	24	14	1
Living in Hostel		1	
Living Elsewhere	3	5	

- Thirteen per cent of respondents lived alone: 17 per cent of men and nine per cent of women.
- Twenty-seven per cent of respondents lived with family.
- Twelve per cent of respondents lived with a partner: eight per cent of men and 17 per cent of women.
- Thirty-six per cent of respondents lived with friends: 40 per cent of men and 30 per cent of women.

Chart 29 shows the occupation of respondents.

**Chart 29: Survey Respondents' Occupation**



- Ten per cent of respondents were at college, 32 per cent at university, 43 per cent were working, 14 per cent were unemployed and one young man was at school.  
 Table 38 shows the respondents area of residence.

**Table 38: Survey Respondents' Area of Residence**

Area of Residence	Men	Women	Transsexual
Basingstoke	5	2	
Bracknell	1	2	
Crowthorne		1	
Farnborough	2		
Guildford		1	
Hayes	2	1	
Kingston		1	
Maidenhead	5		
Newbury		1	
Reading	34	31	1
Slough	6	2	
Southampton	3		
Uxbridge		1	
Wokingham	2	3	

- Sixty-two per cent of respondents lived in Reading, 82 per cent lived in other areas of Berkshire and 18 per cent lived in other counties in the region.

The Berkshire Anti-Homophobia Group study's sample was relatively youthful: over one-third were aged 25 and under. In terms of the gender mix, the sample was relatively balanced. There was a higher proportion of Asian and Black respondents in the youth sample compared to both the total sample and Berkshire's population. An equal proportion of men and women lived in the family home although men were more likely to be living alone or with friends compared to women, who were more likely to be living with a partner. Most respondents were either studying or working and most lived in Reading.

This sample therefore is of relevance and significance. It is a *local* study of homophobia and homophobic crime as experienced by young bisexuals, gays and lesbians.

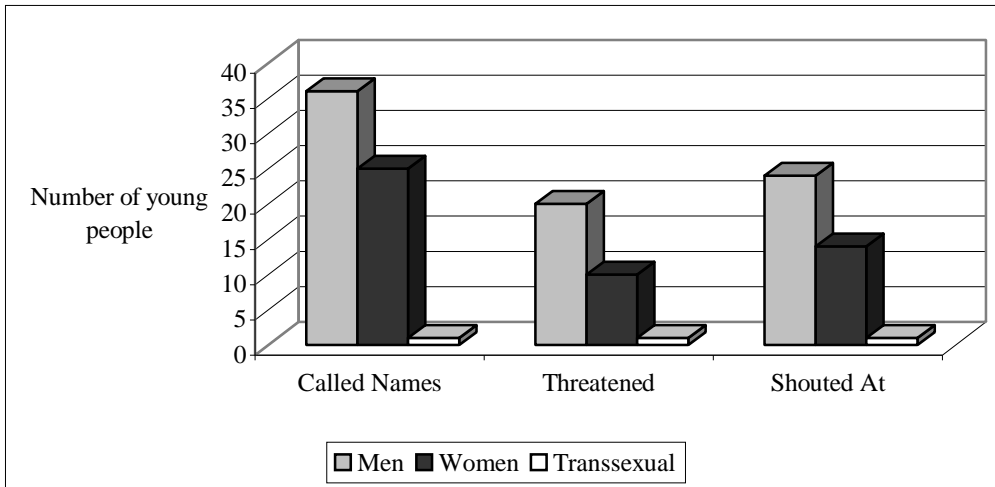
### **(c) Data from Survey**

#### **Verbal Abuse**

- Seventy-five respondents (70 per cent) had been verbally abused: 45 men (75 per cent of men), 29 women (63 per cent of women) and one transsexual.

Chart 30 shows the type of verbal abuse experienced by respondents.

**Chart 30: Type of Verbal Abuse Experienced by Respondents**



Note:  $n = 75$

- Fifty-eight per cent of respondents had been called names: 60 per cent of men, 63 per cent of women and one transsexual.
- Twenty-nine per cent of respondents had been threatened: one third of men, 54 per cent of women and one transsexual.
- Thirty-six per cent of respondents had been shouted at: 40 per cent of men, 30 per cent of women and one transsexual.

Chart 31 shows those responsible for the verbal abuse.

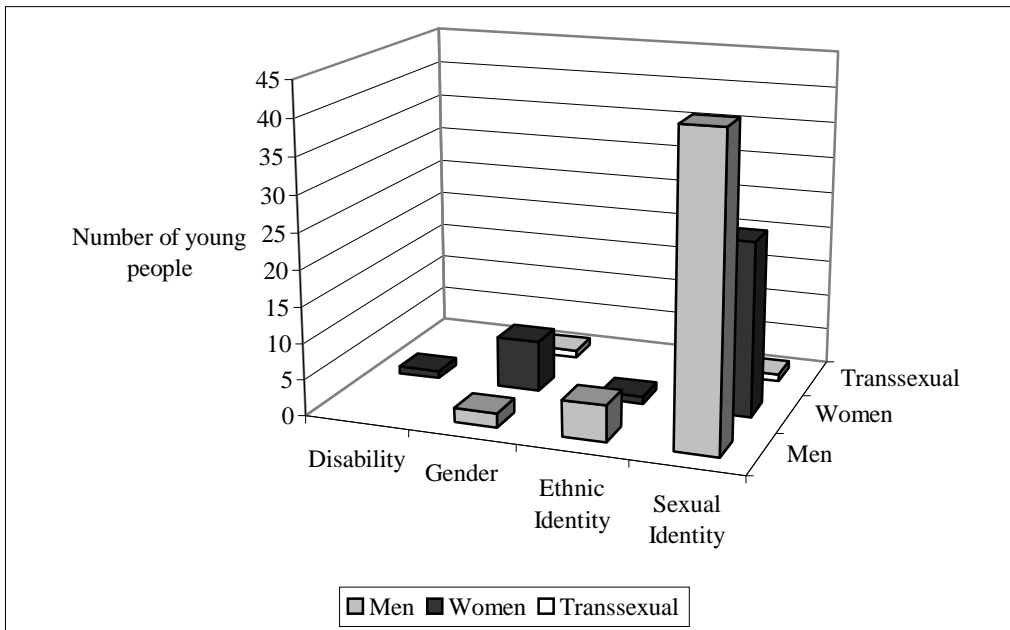
**Chart 31: Perpetrators of Verbal Abuse as Identified by Respondents**



- Fifteen per cent of respondents had been verbally abused by members of their family: 17 per cent of men and 13 per cent of women.
- Eleven per cent of respondents had been verbally abused by a friend: 18 per cent of men and one woman.
- Thirty per cent of respondents had been verbally abused by a gang: 32 per cent of men and 28 per cent of women.
- Six per cent of respondents had been verbally abused by a partner: eight per cent of men and one woman.
- Fifty per cent of respondents had been verbally abused by a stranger: 55 per cent of men, 41 per cent of women and one transsexual.

Chart 32 shows the reason why respondents were verbally abused.

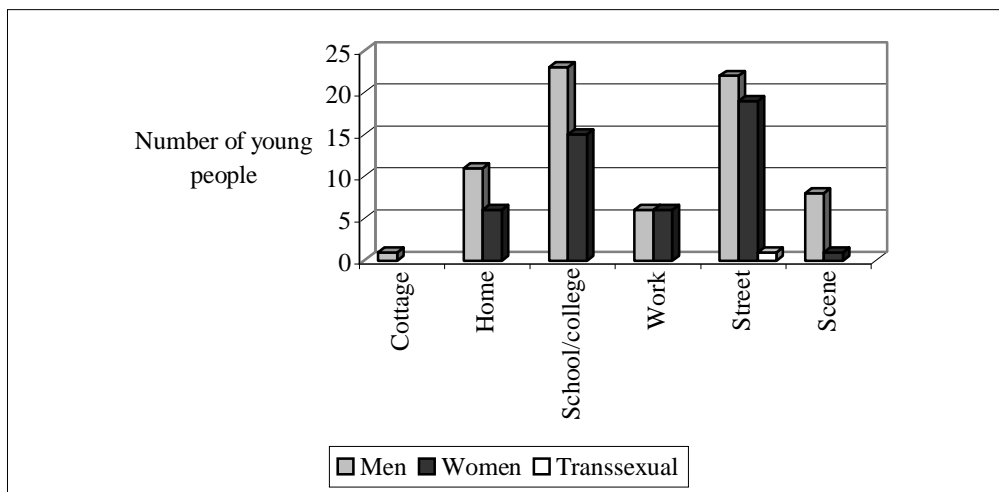
**Chart 32: Reason why Respondents were Verbally Abused**



- One woman had been verbally abused because of her disability.
- Nine per cent of respondents had been verbally abused because of gender: two men, 15 per cent of women and one transsexual.
- Six respondents had been verbally abused because of their ethnic identity: five men and one woman.
- Sixty-three per cent of respondents had been verbally abused because of their sexual identity: 70 per cent of men, 52 per cent of women and one transsexual.

Chart 33 shows where the verbal abuse occurred.

**Chart 33: Place where the Verbal Abuse Occurred**



- One young man had been verbally abused at a cottage (public sex environment).
- Sixteen per cent of respondents had been verbally abused at home: 18 per cent of men and 13 per cent of women.
- Thirty-six per cent of respondents had been verbally abused at school/college: 38 per cent of men and 33 per cent of women.
- Eleven per cent of respondents had been verbally abused at work: ten per cent of men and 13 per cent of women.
- Thirty-nine per cent of respondents had been verbally abused on the street: 37 per cent of men, 41 per cent of women and one transsexual.
- Eight per cent of respondents had been verbally abused on the scene: seven per cent of men and one woman.

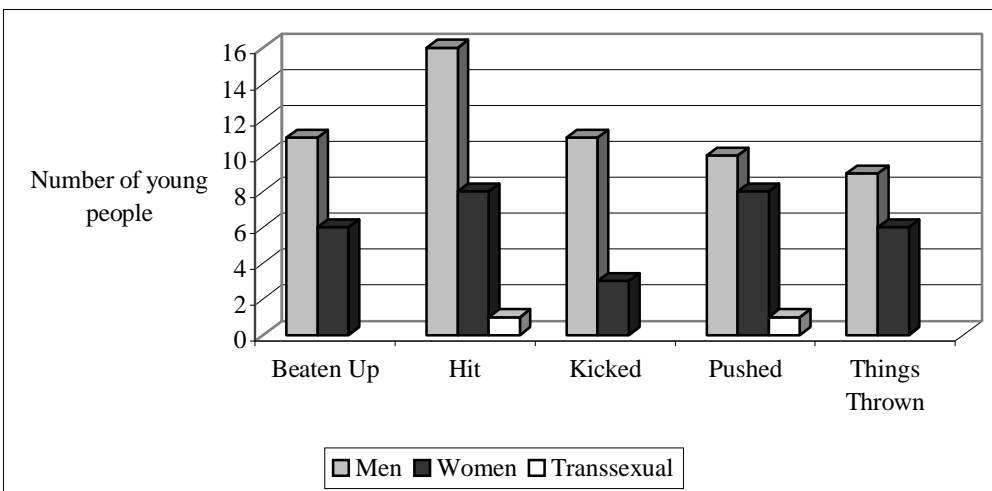
- Only nine per cent of respondents reported verbal abuse incidents to anyone (managers, parents, teachers, etc.): 12 per cent of men and seven per cent of women.

### Physical Abuse

- Forty-two respondents (39 per cent) had been physically abused: 24 men (40 per cent of men), 17 women (37 per cent of women) and one transsexual.

Chart 34 shows the type of physical abuse experienced by respondents.

**Chart 34: Type of Physical Abuse Experienced by Respondents**



Note:  $n = 42$

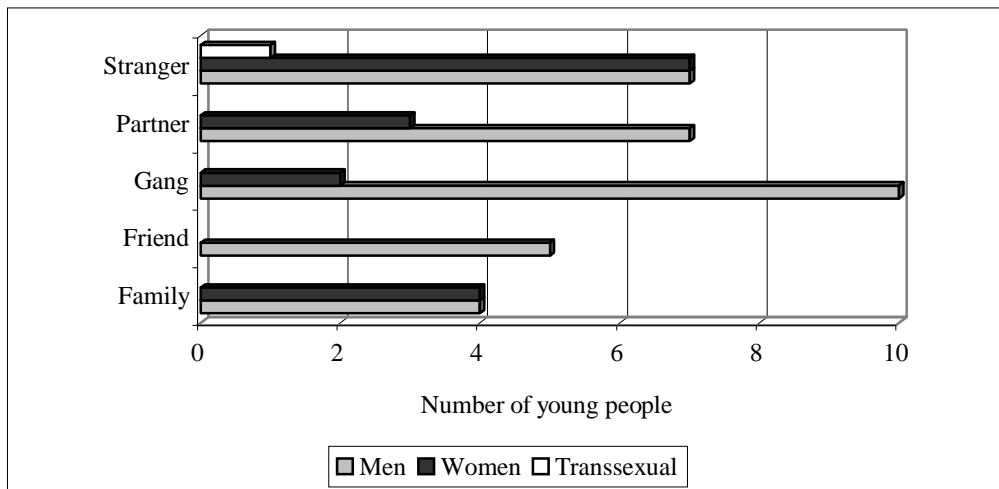
- Sixteen per cent of respondents had been beaten up: 18 per cent of men and 13 per cent of women.



- Twenty-three per cent of respondents had been hit: 27 per cent of men, 17 per cent of women and one transsexual.
- Thirteen per cent of respondents had been kicked: 18 per cent of men and seven per cent of women.
- Eighteen per cent of respondents had been pushed: 17 per cent of men and women and one transsexual.
- Fourteen per cent of respondents had had things thrown at them: 15 per cent of men and 13 per cent of women.

Chart 35 shows those responsible for the physical abuse.

**Chart 35: Perpetrators of the Physical Abuse as Identified by Respondents**



- Seven per cent of respondents had been physically abused by someone within their family: seven per cent of men and nine per cent of women.
- Five men had been physically abused by a friend.

- Eleven per cent of respondents had been physically abused by a gang: 17 per cent of men and four per cent of women.
- Nine per cent of respondents had been physically abused by a partner: 12 per cent of men and seven per cent of women.
- Fourteen per cent of respondents had been physically abused by a stranger: 12 per cent of men, 15 per cent of women and one transsexual.