

## **European Action Day for Victims of Hate Crime: LGBT discrimination**

Three years on from the hate fuelled attack in Norway, which cost the lives of 77 people, by Anders Brevik, hate is still causing the death and pain of millions of innocent people throughout Europe simply based on ignorance and xenophobia. It is a problem that often goes unnoticed until a tragedy, such as the massacre in Norway, occurs. It shouldn't take a tragedy for victims of hate crime to be recognised and supported, victims should be supported regardless, and by helping victims and challenging the perpetrators, we can help to eradicate hate crime for good.

Hate crime towards LGBT people in Europe is an increasingly pressing issue, with the most recent survey of over 93,000 across Europe showing that on average over half the people who participated in the survey believed expressions of hatred or aversion to the LGBT community were widespread in their country. This shows how serious the problem is in so many countries across Europe.

Homophobic slurs are used on a regular basis, calling something "gay" is a common derogatory term. People make jokes about transgender people on live television without any implications, and young kids are being taught transphobic slurs which they shout at members of the community. Bisexual erasure happens constantly in the media, with openly Bi celebrities being branded as gay or straight, for example Angelina Jolie and Tom Daley.

In only 26 of 49 European countries, there is hate crime legislation based on sexual orientation, and in only 14 of 49 there is hate crime legislation based on gender identity. This is only worsening the situation and makes it that much harder for victims of hate crime to report it to the authorities. Only one in five LGBT hate crimes are reported, that means that 80% of hate crimes go unpunished, allowing the perpetrators to continue the abuse of the community. And recently in Russia, the homophobic laws banning LGBT "propaganda" have made it almost impossible for anyone inside the country to speak out against the open violence towards the LGBT community.

By allowing hate crime to go ignored and unpunished, society is making hate crimes seem acceptable. Young people grow up in a world where it is acceptable to harass the whole LGBT community, and so they continue the cycle. To the point where an openly LGBT individual is unable to leave their home due to harassment and violence. And when it does happen, the ramifications of reporting the crime are enough to dissuade four out of five victims from reporting the crime to the authorities. This can be out of fear of revenge from the perpetrators, fear of institutionalised homophobia and transphobia, fear of being exposed to more hate crimes due to outing or exposure, or doubt that reporting the crime will end in justice.

As a member of the LGBT community this scared me. It made me afraid of acting like myself in public. It made me scared to go outside for fear of people harassing me because I was different. It prevented me from coming out a lot earlier and made my life extremely painful for a very long time, and prevented me from being who I am for far too long. Even now I have been a victim of harassment both outside and via the internet simply for being a member of the LGBT community, by people who don't know me, and people who don't understand what they are saying.. And that isn't fair. It's not fair that we have to hide. It's not fair that we have to pretend to be something we're not. We deserve to be treated equally to anyone else, and we have the right to express ourselves as we are, not as society tells us to. I firmly believe that hate is born of ignorance, and that if hate crime is ignored and goes unpunished, it will only get worse. It is therefore vital that today we make an

effort to draw attention to victims of hate crime, and help to eradicate discrimination once and for all.

Holly Shirras

**References:**

<http://fra.europa.eu/DVS/DVT/lgbt.php>

<http://www.freetoexpress.me/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Hatecrime-3.jpg>