



Committee Secretary
Standing Committee on Family, Community, Housing and Youth
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26 October 2009

Dear Madam/Sir,

Re: Inquiry into the impact of violence on young Australians

The Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations (AFAO) represents Australian HIV/AIDS community-based organisations at a national level. AFAO members include AIDS Councils in each state and territory, the National Association of People Living with HIV/AIDS, the Australian Illicit and Injecting Drug Users League, the Anwernekenhe Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander HIV/AIDS Alliance (ANA), and Scarlet Alliance (the national organisation representing sex workers). AFAO advocates for its member organisations, promotes medical and social research into HIV/AIDS and its effects, develops and formulates policy on HIV/AIDS issues, and provides HIV policy advice to Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments.

AFAO welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Inquiry into the Impact of Violence on Young Australians. We have a particular interest in the effect of violence on same-sex attracted and transgender young people – particularly for young gay men living with HIV, who may have faced homophobic stigmatisation, discrimination and violence since early childhood, and who now must deal with stigmatisation relating to their HIV status.

Perceptions of violence and safety

Same-sex attracted young people are often victims of homophobic violence, either verbally or physically, at home, school and in the community.¹ Same-sex attracted young people of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander or other cultural or linguistic backgrounds, young people with disability and young people from rural or isolated communities, may be doubly victimised because of their cultural background.

¹ Hillier, L., Turner, A. & Mitchell, A. (2005) Writing Themselves In Again—Six Years On: The Second National Report on the Sexuality, Health and Well Being of Same-sex Attracted Young People, Australian Research Centre in Sex Health and Society, La Trobe University, Melbourne (Hillier).

A safe environment in childhood and adolescence is essential to the development of strong self-esteem, self-respect and respect for others. Developing and maintaining these qualities can be challenging, or impossible, for same-sex attracted young people growing up in environments characterised by homophobic verbal and physical abuse. Such abuse has direct and long-term effects on a person's health (physical, mental and emotional) and sense of security.²

Same-sex attracted young people who leave home prematurely due to estrangement from family, and/or violence, are also at risk of homelessness.³ Homelessness then exposes same-sex attracted young people to the risk of entrenched poverty and disadvantage.

Bullying

Many same-sex attracted and transgender young people are victims of bullying in school and other educational settings, and in employment. Alienation from family, and failure of school administrations to adequately deal with homophobic bullying, means that many young people suffering trauma as a result of bullying receive no support regarding bullying, even when explicitly reported. This can hinder development of self-esteem and a sense of self-worth⁴, due to the bullying itself and the absence of care, concern and a proper response on the part of authority figures.

Drug and alcohol use

It is important to note that illicit drug use and alcohol abuse is associated with violence against same-sex attracted young people, and that the extent of the substance abuse by same-sex attracted young people is directly linked to the severity of the violence endured.⁵

Suicide

The rate of suicide among same-sex attracted young people is strongly linked to their experience of violence.⁶ The Suicide Prevention Australia Position Statement: *Suicide and Self Harm among Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Communities*, stated that gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people attempt suicide at between 3.5 and 14 times the rate of their heterosexual peers.⁷ For young HIV positive young people, the risk of suicide is manifold.

Strategies to reduce violence and its impact among same-sex attracted people

Strategies seeking to address homophobia are necessary to stop violence against same-sex attracted young people, and thereby address the issues that flow from violence. AFAO supports the following recommendations from the Suicide Prevention Australia Position Statement:

“For progress to occur, heterosexism, homophobia and transphobia must be addressed at the interpersonal, sociocultural, and institutional level. This will require a comprehensive

² Hillier (n 1).

³ *Coming Out Alone: An Assessment of the Needs of same Sex Attracted Youth, their families, and Service Providers in Western Australia*, accessed 22 October 2009
<<http://www.rainbowvisions.org.au/ComingOutAlone.pdf>>

⁴ Pitts, M., Smith, A., Mitchell, A. & Patel, P. (2006) *Private Lives: A report on the health and wellbeing of GLBTI Australians*. Melbourne, Gay and Lesbian Health Victoria and The Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health & Society, LaTrobe University

⁵ Hillier (n 1).

⁶ Bontempo, D.E. and D'Augelli, A.R. (2002) Effects of at-school victimisation and sexual orientation on lesbian, gay or bisexual youths' health risk behaviour. In: *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 30: 364-374

⁷ Suicide Prevention Australia (2009) Position Statement: *Suicide and self harm among gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender communities*. Sydney (SPA).

approach, ranging from community education campaigns through to legislative measures to end discrimination in all areas (including marriage and parenting rights).

“The Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) to lead the development of a ‘whole of school’ approach to address homophobia and transphobia in education settings across Australia; building on the success of frameworks such as the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood’s *Supporting Sexual Diversity in Schools* project. Additional areas for action in education include: Curriculum development; Professional and/or pre-service training for teachers to identify and respond to bullying and harassment on the grounds of sexual orientation and/or gender non-conformity; and Development of targeted resources through initiatives such as *MindMatters*.

“Provide greater capacity for the delivery of services and support services for parents and families dealing with sexuality and gender issues.”⁸

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Inquiry. If you require further information on any aspect of our submission, please contact Ms Abi Groves, Manager, Policy and Communication, on (02) 8568 1110.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Don Baxter". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Don Baxter
Executive Director

⁸ SPA (n 6) pp. 8-9.