

Homophobia and Violence against Gays and Lesbians in Slovenia

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The authors present and discuss empirical findings from various research projects on homophobic violence in Slovenia. Existing research on violence against gays and lesbians shows a high level of verbal, physical and sexual violence experienced by gays and lesbians and at the same time a low recognition of such violence in society. According to public opinion and the research results, Slovenia is still homophobic society. Violence is an all-pervading element of everyday life of gays and lesbians in Slovenia. More than half of respondents in the research on everyday life of gays and lesbians, for example, reported that they were at least once a victim of some form of violence due to sexual orientation. Most frequently homophobic violence happens in public space. For this reason, the first two parts of the paper discuss various forms of violence in school settings in particular, and in public space in general. In the third part of the paper, the authors discuss another form of violence, for which they argue to be the most problematic and probably the hardest to deal with. This is a socially hidden and invisible violence that arises from heteronormativity and the so-called heteronormative panopticon and which takes many forms, from constant fear of being “disclosed”, of being victim of violence, to self-violence accompanied by internalised homophobia.

Keywords: HOMOPHOBIA, VIOLENCE, GAYS AND LESBIANS, HETERONORMATIVITY, PUBLIC PLACE, SCHOOL

1. INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 2008 media widely reported on homophobic incidents during and after Pride parades, organized in several cities around Eastern Europe. There have been participants of pride parades attacked and injured in Budapest, Ljubljana, Zagreb, Sofia, Brno, Riga, Vilnius, and elsewhere. Some Pride parades – such as the one in Budapest and Ljubljana – have been organized for years without any homophobic incidents. In the recent years, such incidents have increased and now became a constitutive part of the gay and lesbian pride parades. Although, as Kuhar and Takács (2007) suggest, it is true that social and cultural homophobia remains a “unifying experience” of LGBT people in the East and West and therefore we need to look beyond such political and geographical divisions, it is also true that Western pride parades tend to become more playful, depoliticized and commercial, while pride parades in Eastern Europe – if they are at all allowed by local governments – are defined not only by coming out and acquiring equal rights but also by the fear of potential homophobic violence.

A significant share of gays and lesbians in Slovenia is exposed to violence due to their sexual orientation in public places (Švab, Kuhar, 2005; Velikonja, Greif, 2001; Kuhar, Magić, 2008). The research on everyday life of gays and lesbians (Švab, Kuhar,

2005), for example, showed that more than half of the respondents in the sample have already been a victim of violence at least once due to their sexual orientation. The most unsafe space for both, lesbians and gays, is the *public space* (the street, bars and the like), and in most cases the perpetrators of violence are strangers. Violence and homophobia are only the most visible, extreme reflections of how heteronormativity¹ influences everyday life of gays and lesbians, but there are also more subtle and implicit ways in which this social influence is carried out. For many gays and lesbians, a *fear* of violence is even more important than the actual physical experience of violence (Moran et al., 2003; Švab and Kuhar, 2005).

This article presents and discusses empirical data on homophobic violence in public space in Slovenia.² The first two parts of the paper discuss various forms of violence in school settings in particular, and in public space in general. In the third part of the paper, the socially hidden and invisible violence is discussed. We argue that such violence is the most problematic and probably the hardest to deal with. It arises from heteronormativity and the so-called heteronormative panopticon and takes many forms: from constant fear of being “disclosed”, of being victim of violence, to self-violence accompanied by internalised homophobia³.

The article uses findings of the following empirical studies on violence against gays and lesbians in Slovenia: research on everyday life of gays and lesbians (Švab, Kuhar, 2005)⁴; research on discrimination of young LGBT people (Kuhar et al., 2008)⁵; research on discrimination based on personal circumstances, including sexual orienta-

¹ Heteronormativity marks the omnipresence of the assumption of heterosexuality in literally every social institution. Heterosexuality is institutionalized as a praxis, which is seen and understood as fixed, stable and universal. Hennessy (1995) points out that heterosexuality as a social institution does not regulate only sexuality as such, but rather permeates all social norms, which frames our social reality.

² The focus on homophobic violence in public space does not imply that violence is not present in the private sphere as well. Geography of homophobic acts is also gendered – lesbians are more often than gays the victims of violence in private life, especially from the part of parents and friends. Therefore, while violence against men is more transparent (public), violence against women seems to be frequently hidden or hushed up. Nevertheless, both, gays and lesbians are most frequently the victims of violence in public place (Švab, Kuhar, 2005:119).

³ Internalised homophobia reflects stereotypes and prejudices about homosexuality, internalized during socialization. These manifest as either hatred towards oneself and one’s own homosexuality or hatred towards other homosexuals whose behaviour or public presentation is unacceptable to a person, who has not yet accepted his own homosexuality.

⁴ Research project “Family and Social Contexts of Everyday Life of Gays and Lesbians in Slovenia”, funded by the Ministry of the RS of Education, Science and Sport, the Ministry of the RS of Labour, Family and Social Affairs and the Open Society Institute New York (2002–2004); based at the Peace Institute, Ljubljana; project leader Alenka Švab. The research comprised of two empirical parts. The first, quantitative part included face-to-face structured interviews on the sample of 443 gays and lesbians carried out from April to June 2003. Sampling was done using the snowball method. The second, qualitative part of the research, was carried out from May to July 2004, included group interviews with seven focus groups (four male and three female) that included 36 people.

⁵ Research project “Everyday Life of Young LGBT Persons in Slovenia”, funded by the Ljubljana Council’s Office for Youth, Office for Youth of the RS, the Ministry of the RS of Health and the Ministry of the RS of Labour, Family and Social Affairs (2007–2008); based at the Legebitra, Ljubljana; project leader Simon Maljevac. The research comprised of three separate web-based questionnaires (for pupils, for students, for employees) targeted at LGBT persons 30 years old or younger. LGBT persons were invited to participate in the research through announcements in LGBT magazine *Narobe*, on LGBT forums, mailing

tion (Švab et al., 2008)⁶; research on experiences with homophobic violence (Kuhar, Magić, 2008).⁷

2. HETERONORMATIVITY, HOMOPHOBIA AND HOMOPHOBIC VIOLENCE

Originally, the term homophobia, coined by George Weinberg in 1972, represented a type of mental illness, expressed as fear or hatred of homosexuals. Weinberg claimed that he found new type of phobia, which is marked by “the dread of being in close quarters with homosexuals” (Weinberg, 1972:4). He defined homophobic people as exhibiting the same traits as claustrophobic or agoraphobic people, except that these traits were linked towards homosexuals. In accordance with constructivist approach to sexuality his primary goal was to de-medicalize homosexuality by showing that problems homosexuals face are not springing from some essentialist trait of homosexuality, but were rather consequences of social labelling and societal attitudes towards homosexuals. Subsequent research (Herek, 1984; 1992; 2000) showed that homophobic sentiments could not necessarily be interpreted as clinical phobia. Many perpetrators, who committed homophobic violence, did not display any reactions to homosexuality, which could be understood as typical phobic reactions.

Several authors have suggested alternative terms – such as heterosexism or sexual prejudice – but homophobia remained widely used term (as an adjective and noun). Some authors (Tomsen, 2006) suggest that the concept of homophobia enforces an understanding of homophobic sentiments as individual’s entity, one’s inner core, rather than deriving from social and cultural relations between different groups in the society. Nevertheless, the usage of this concept has changed over time and is now more or less detached from the original psychological meaning of phobia. Herek’s research, for

lists and web sites. The questionnaires were available on-line from March to May 2008. 221 young LGBT persons participated in the research, among them 21% of pupils, 51% of students and 27% of employees.

⁶ Research project “Consequences of Discrimination on Social and Political Inclusion of Youth In Slovenia”, funded by Slovenian Research Agency, Governmental Office for Equal Opportunities and Governmental Office for Growth (2006–2008); based at the Centre for Social Psychology, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana and carried out in association with the Peace Institute, Ljubljana, and Science and Research Centre Koper, University of Primorska; project leader Alenka Švab. The section on discrimination based on sexual orientation included two empirical parts: the quantitative part, carried out in co-operation with non-governmental organisation Legebitra (research project on everyday life of young LGBT persons in Slovenia; for details see footnote number 3 and Kuhar et al., 2008); and qualitative part, which included four semi-structured expert interviews with activists from gay and lesbian non-governmental organisations.

⁷ Research project on experiences of LGBT people with homophobic violence was part of the project “Activate: Research, Monitoring, and Recording of Cases of Discrimination and Rights Violations against LGBT People in Slovenia”, funded by ILGA-Europe Human Rights Violation Documentation Fund, American Embassy in Slovenia, Ministry of the RS of Labour, Family and Social Affairs of Slovenia, Slovene Youth Office and Student’s organization of the University of Ljubljana (2007–2008); based at the Legebitra, Ljubljana; project leader Jasna Magić. The web-based questionnaire targeted at LGBT persons was available on-line from June to September 2008. Additionally, a printed version of the questionnaire appeared in the LGBT magazine *Narobe*. LGBT persons were invited to participate in the research through announcements in LGBT magazine *Narobe*, on LGBT forums, mailing lists and web sites. 149 LGBT persons participated in the research.

example, has showed that homophobic activity can also be rewarding for the person, expressing homophobic views, as it reinforces his understanding of the world and his own identity, based on anti-gay traits.

In this article, we employ a broader and more general definition of *homophobic violence*. Ranging from verbal to sexual and psychical violence, including hate crimes, we understand homophobic violence as violence, which has been stimulated by one's homosexual identity irrespective of whether such identity is known to the perpetrator or he just assumes it. The major impulse for the perpetrator to commit homophobic violence is therefore homosexuality – be it *internalized homophobia* or external manifestations of homosexuality and homoeroticism or both. By homophobic violence we do not only mean concrete forms of psychological, physical and sexual violence against lesbians and gays, but also implicit violence which arises from heteronormative organisation of social relations.

Everyday life of gays and lesbians is still strongly determined by heteronormativity, which has a twofold effect: it generates social exclusion (e.g. explicit and implicit stigmatization, homophobia and violence against gays and lesbians), and it puts psychological pressure on gays and lesbians to adjust to heterosexual social norms and behavioral patterns. The latter is typical for public space, which is discursively constructed and cannot be understood as sexually neutral or non-defined by specific assumptions about sexuality. Public space *is* heterosexualized. Heterosexualization of the street, for example, is manifested either in physical violence towards those, who dare to interpret the heterosexualization of the street by “homosexual signs” (such as two men holding hands) or by more subtle regulating processes, such as meaningful looks, stares, remarks and the like, targeted towards the interrupters. Bray (in Adam, 2004:267) claims that public expressions of affections (like kissing) have been stripped away from same-sex interactions in public space and made an exclusive heterosexual monopoly.

In this sense, the experiences of gays and lesbians can be interpreted in the context of Foucault's interpretation of Bentham's panopticon. The “all-seeing” space of prison, which is characterized by the continuous surveillance from the central location, where none of the prisoners can ever see the inspector, is in fact an experience of gays and lesbians in public space. The panopticon, as Foucault (1984) explains, establishes the conscious of being permanently visible – even in those instances when the action of surveillance is temporarily stopped. The panopticon therefore assures the automatic functioning of power, where the power is actually exercised by the prisoners themselves. Similarly the conscious of continuously being watched in public space leads gays and lesbians to self-perform surveillance of their own homosexuality in a way that homosexuality is abolished for the time when being “imprisoned” in the heteronormative panopticon of public space.

In the heteronormative geography of public space, where images of heterosexuality are omnipresent and for that reason become invisible, signs of homosexuality, which might emerge in these spaces, automatically present a disturbance to the system. The omnipresence of heterosexual signs in fact magnifies homosexual signs, which are then immediately accompanied by potential threats of homophobic violence.

Heteronormative panopticon can be seen as the most invisible and – precisely because of its invisibility – as the most dangerous and problematic form of violence against gays and lesbians. Heteronormativity is *per se* a social framework that creates through its subtle mechanisms numerous invisible, latent and subtle forms of violence against lesbians and gays. Research on violence against gays and lesbians in Slovenia (Švab, Kuhar, 2005; Kuhar, Magić, 2008) has showed many violent expressions of such implicit surveillance.

3. HOMOPHOBIA AND VIOLENCE IN SCHOOLS

The primary school curriculum in Slovenia does not list homosexuality as a topic to be discussed in primary schools (Komidar, 2008). Whether and how homosexuality is depicted and discussed in school left to a subjective decision of a teacher. Research on everyday life of gays and lesbians in Slovenia (Švab, Kuhar, 2005) showed that 79 % of gays and lesbians surveyed do not recall ever discussing homosexuality in primary or secondary school or only very limited amount of information was given. Among the respondents, who said that they have discussed homosexuality in schools, 18 % reported that homosexuality was presented as something negative and unacceptable.

Similar results were found in the research on young gays and lesbians in Slovenia (Kuhar et al., 2008)⁸. 61.4 % of young gay and lesbian pupils surveyed reported that homosexuality was not discussed during their primary and secondary schooling, while 36.4 % reported having discussed homosexuality, but only as a minor topic.⁹

The absence of education on homosexuality can be one of the generators of homophobic violence in schools. Education cannot prevent it, but it can play a key role in destigmatization of homosexuality and destabilization of heteronormative matrix of everyday life. For these reasons, the access to relevant information on homosexuality is also of high importance. On average 81 % of pupils and 74.8 % of students surveyed reported not being satisfied with information provided by schools (teachers, library etc.) or no information were mediated at all (Kuhar et al., 2008). It seems that school debates about homosexuality and providing information on homosexuality are sporadic and are still often interpreted as “promotion of homosexuality” rather than “education on homosexuality”.

The research on everyday life of gays and lesbians in Slovenia (Švab, Kuhar, 2005) showed that 53.3 % of gays and lesbians reported having already experienced violence due to their sexual orientation. Among them 22.5 % listed schoolmates as perpetrators. There are statistically significant gender differences: gay men are more

⁸ The sample of gay and lesbian respondents was remodelled in order to analyze the responses of only those gays and lesbians who are either pupils or students. The new sample consists of 160 respondents: 47 pupils and 113 students. There are 40.1 % of gays, 28.8 % of lesbians, 25.3 % of bisexuals, and 3.8 % of queers in the sample. The rest (1.2 %) did not revise their sexual identity.

⁹ It has to be noted that besides the very small sample – experiences of which cannot be by any means generalized – and besides the fact that these respondents are still in the process of education and therefore potentially will learn something about homosexuality in the future, the general impression is consistent with the factual absence of homosexuality from school curriculum.

often targets of violence in schools compared to lesbians: while 8.3 % of lesbians reported being victims of schoolmates' violence, there are 30.3 % of gays who reported schoolmates as perpetrators.

The research on young gays and lesbians in Slovenia (Kuhar et al., 2008) did not find statistically significant differences between sexual identities of respondents: 26.6 % of gays, 15.9 % of lesbians and 7.7 % of bisexuals surveyed reported having experienced violence in school settings. Nevertheless, gay men remain to be the only identity group in our sample who have experienced physical violence in school setting (9 % of gays surveyed reported having such experience). There are statistically significant differences between experiences of pupils in secondary schools and students at the universities. Pupils more often experience homophobic violence: while 35.6 % of gay, lesbian and bisexual pupils have experienced violence in their school settings, in the context of universities such experiences were reported by 10.9 % of students surveyed. The research showed a relatively high level of verbal and physical violence: almost 11 % of pupils surveyed often experience verbal violence in school settings (as opposed to 2 % of students having the same experiences). Furthermore, 2 % of pupils reported being often exposed to physical violence due to their sexual orientation. Almost 9 % of pupils and a bit less than 1 % of students have been victims of physical violence due to their sexual orientation at least once (see table 1).

Table 1: Types of violence performed by schoolmates (by types of schoolings) (in %).

	Often		Once or several times		Never	
	Pupils	Students	Pupils	Students	Pupils	Students
Verbal violence	10.9	1.8	43.5	15.3	45.7	82.9
Non-verbal violence	8.9	3.6	31.1	25.0	60.0	71.4
Physical violence	2.2	/	8.7	0.9	89.1	99.1

[Source: Kuhar et al., 2008]

It is interesting to note that experiences of violence are not essentially correlated to whether the pupils and students are out about their sexual status or not. Although it is true that more pupils and students who are out of the closet have experienced homophobic violence, there is a considerable share of those who have been victims of homophobic violence because they were assumed or ascribed to be "a faggot". 57.2 % of out pupils and students have violent homophobic experiences as opposed to 42.9 % of those, who are not out, but were assumed to be homosexuals and were therefore victims of homophobic violence caused by their schoolmates.

Violence in school settings usually involves peer group pressure, where the designation "faggot" is often used to stigmatize and exclude individuals who cannot or do not want to follow the gender and sexual norms inside a group or whose behaviour is constructed as such. Although homophobic violence in school settings is mostly performed by schoolmates, young gays, lesbians and bisexuals also reported their teachers as perpetrators of homophobic violence. Almost 9 % of pupils have at least one ex-

perience of verbal violence performed by their teacher due to their sexual orientation, while there are 2.7 % of students who have reported their professors to be verbally homophobic.

In conclusion, collected data on homophobic violence in school settings in Slovenia show that primary and secondary schools are primarily the context where homophobic violence takes place. These schools therefore do not provide safe space for their gay, lesbian and bisexual pupils. More than one in ten same-sex oriented pupils surveyed is often a victim of homophobic violence, while over 35 % same-sex oriented pupils have already experienced violence due to their sexual orientation. The absence of discussions on homosexuality in schools cannot be attributed as the only reasons for the violence. However, it is certainly one of the key missing elements in the context of prevention of homophobic violence in schools.

4. VIOLENCE IN PUBLIC SPACE

The research on everyday life of gays and lesbians in Slovenia (Švab, Kuhar, 2005) showed that 53 % of gays and lesbians surveyed had at least one violent experience due to their sexual orientation. In majority of cases, the form of homophobic violence was verbal violence (91 %), followed by physical violence (24 %) and sexual violence (6 %). More men than women experienced physical violence, while women were more often victims of verbal violence. Looking at the geography of homophobic violence, public space turns out to be the most dangerous place for gays and lesbians as majority of homophobic attacks took place in public space and were committed by strangers (61 %).

The latest research into homophobic violence (Kuhar, Magić, 2008) showed that 67.6 % of GLBT persons surveyed have experienced discrimination or violation of human rights due to sexual orientation or gender expression.¹⁰ The most often occurring forms of discrimination are scolding (including provocations, usage of offensive nicknames etc.), ignoring, intentional exclusion and threats with physical violence. None of the respondents experiences physical violence performed by police. While gay men experienced all other listed forms of violence and discrimination, lesbians did not report being rejected by health and other public services due to their sexual orientation, they did not report being attacked by gun or being retained by police without a reason (see table 2).

Respondents, for example, reported about “drunken people”, who snubbed at visible or only suppositional signs of homosexuality (i.e. holding hands). Some respondents were told that they “act improperly” as they were holding hands with their same-sex partner. In similar circumstances gays and lesbians were also scolded, (i.e. “damned queers!”) or affronted and marked as degenerated (i.e. “look, there are two poofs”). One of the female respondents reported: “While I was walking hand in hand with my girlfriend, a group of young men scolded us with ‘dykes’. They were sending

¹⁰ The results from the 2005 and 2008 survey cannot be compared due to the different methodology and the non-representative sample used in the surveys.

us to different locations and suggested what we should do there.” Another respondent reported that people throw stones into him and his boyfriend as they were holding hands. A female respondent mentioned an incident with street musicians who refused to continue playing on the street once he realized that “a lesbian is listening to him” (Kuhar, Magić, 2008). Similar incidents were reported also in the research on everyday life of gays and lesbians in Slovenia (Švab, Kuhar, 2005).

Table 2: Forms of violence (“% within form” represents proportions of types of violence/discrimination, “% within gender” represents the occurrences of different types of violence within one gender group)

Forms of violence / discrimination	Men		Women		Trans		Total
	% within form	% within gender	% within form	% within gender	% within form	% within gender	
Name-calling	43.6	83.7	34.0	74.4	2.1	100	79.8
Intentionally excluded from a group or ignored	20.2	38.8	14.9	32.6			35.1
Threat of physical violence	20.2	38.8	10.6	23.3	1.1	50.0	31.9
Stalking or chasing	7.4	14.3	8.5	18.6			16.0
Sexual harassment	6.4	12.2	6.4	14.0			12.8
Personal belongings stolen or otherwise vandalized	7.4	14.3	4.3	9.3			11.7
Pushed, hit, kicked or beaten	9.6	18.4	2.1	4.7			11.7
Other types of violence	4.3	8.2	7.4	16.3			11.7
Thrown objects at	6.4	12.2	2.1	4.7	1.1	50.0	9.6
Spat at	5.3	10.2	3.2	7.0			8.5
Sexually abused	4.3	8.2	3.2	7.0			7.4
Refusal of health care services	5.3	10.2			1.1	50.0	6.4
Turned away or dismissed from work	5.3	10.2	1.1	2.3			6.4
Harassed by the police (without use of physical force)	4.3	8.2	1.1	2.3			5.3
Refusal of housing	4.3	8.2	1.1	2.3			5.3
Refusal of another public service	4.3	8.2					4.3
Attacked or injured by weapon	2.1	4.1					2.1
Detained by the police without reason	2.1	4.1					2.1
Beaten or attacked by the police							
TOTAL	52.1	100	45.7	100	2.1	100	100

[Source: Kuhar, Magić, 2008]

The research on homophobic violence (Kuhar, Magić, 2008) showed that majority – over 92 % of those who have experienced homophobic discrimination or violence – did not report it. Respondents who have reported homophobic incidents have no negative experiences with the police when reporting the violence. Sixty percent of respondents reported police officer being neutral and 40 % described the police officer as supportive. It seems that the fear of police officers' negative reactions to gays and lesbians is anticipated rather than based in factual experiences. However, the fear of reporting homophobic violence is also a sign of insufficient efforts on the side of police to ensure that the procedure will be professional, effective and non-homophobic.

Respondents who have not reported the incidents most often believed that reporting makes no sense, as they would not gain anything by reporting it. It is interesting to note that some kind of rationalization of homophobic violence – as shown in research on violence against women – is also taking place among victims of homophobic violence. Over 36 % of respondents believed that the homophobic discrimination or violence, which they have experienced, was not “big enough” to be reported. The respondents minimized the importance of violence (see table 3).

Table 3 – Reasons for not reporting violence (in %)

Reason for not reporting	%
The extent of violence was not that big	36,4
It makes no sense, I wouldn't achieve anything	27,3
Being afraid of more violence after reporting it	9,1
Other	9,1
I didn't know/didn't think of this option	6,1
I don't trust the police	6,1
I would have to reveal my sexual orientation	3,0
They wouldn't believe me	3,0

[Source: Kuhar, Magić, 2008]

5. HETERONORMATIVE PANOPTICON: SUBTLE MECHANISMS OF HETERONORMATIVE CONTROL AND HOMOPHOBIC VIOLENCE

General consequence of the heteronormative panopticon for gays and lesbians is *constant awareness* of the fact that their sexual orientation and identity do not “fit” into the heteronormative social framework. The incongruity that arises from heteronormative organisation of social relations leads to behaviours and ways of thinking, which are in various forms conformed to such social context. This puts immense psychological and emotional pressures on gays and lesbians in their everyday lives (Herek et al., 1997). In the continuation of this article, the most common consequences of the heteronormative pressure are presented and illustrated by findings from focus groups research on everyday life of gays and lesbians in Slovenia (Švab, Kuhar, 2005).

One of the consequences of the heteronormativity is the *constant presence of fear of expressing gay/lesbian identity and of being disclosed*, as homosexuality is understood socially unacceptable. Consequently, gays and lesbians often hide their sexual orientation, especially in public place:

“I cannot imagine expressing tenderness in the street just like that. It’s not to say that I wouldn’t do it, but I’m always aware of people around me.” (Maruša, 27, on acting as a couple with her partner on the street)

Violence against gays and lesbians is the extreme form of heteronormativity, which establishes the *constantly present fear of being victim of homophobic violence* (Švab, Kuhar, 2005; Jugović et al., 2007). Such fear plays important role in the production of social divisions and exclusions with the psychological, physical and economic influences on individuals, which consequently withdraw into the private sphere (Moran et al., 2003) through the process of privatisation (Švab and Kuhar 2005). This, however, does not mean only withdrawal in a physical sense, but has also significant psychological, political and other consequences and symbolic meanings. In such a way, the constant fear of being a victim *imposes self-control* and the *adoption of coping strategies*. Gays and lesbians *self-control* their behaviour in public space by using *rationalization and calculation* as the coping strategies:

“There is always that controller who whispers inside your head: ‘Be careful now, they are watching you...’ Then you don’t want it any more, because it is no longer an intimacy, but just an odd gesture and you don’t really know if it is sensible any more. One time you’re cool, but your boyfriend isn’t. Another time he is cool, but you aren’t. And then just when both of us seem cool, you come across a school-mate, and you really wouldn’t do it right then ... These are the types of coming out that are unpleasant in a way. I always make a check. If the environment is such that I can have control over it if there is an incident, then yes, otherwise rather not.” (Gašper, 27, on holding hands with his boyfriend in public space)

Strategies of concealment and mimicry are interwoven in practically all social relations in everyday life of gays and lesbians in order to blend into heteronormative public space. They are closely connected with the coming out. In these sense strategies of concealment can be a result of a fear of being disclosed as gay or lesbian individual or a couple:

“I was considering what to say. I won’t say ‘a friend,’ and ‘partner’ sounds as if I said, ‘this is a hypotenuse.’ (laughter). For some time I even agreed to introduce him by his name. So you can think whatever you want. So now, when I’m totally scared, I introduce him by his name. On other occasions I say ‘this is my boyfriend.’ But I’m still very scared. ... I’m scared that I won’t be accepted...” (Borut, 30, on introducing his intimate partner to other people)

Sometimes, gays and lesbians express ideas, such as *“having things under control”*, which can be understood as a sort of minimalisation of the meaning of stigma and at the same time as a coping strategy:

“If I wish to kiss him, I do it in the middle of Ljubljana or in the bus. I really don’t care what they think.” (Boštjan, 31)

“I expected more negative responses [when I walked with my boyfriend holding hands], but in fact that didn’t happen. Someone yelled across Prešern Square ‘Damned faggot!’ so everybody heard it, and everybody looked. But I thought to myself ‘well, they cannot do anything to me, not in broad daylight.’” (Patrik, 20)

On the other hand, many gays and lesbians admit that a rejection on the part of society is a psychological burden not easy to deal with:

“I’m scared that I won’t be accepted. That it will be a reason for picking on me or some cold acceptance ... Well, I know, theoretically, if they reject you they are not worthy of you, so goodbye. But that doesn’t work like that. These theories do not work in practice.” (Borut, 30)

As already shown in the research on homophobic violence (Kuhar, Magič, 2008) *minimization of the importance of violence* is also one of the coping strategies, gays and lesbians used when faced with homophobic violence:

“I also remember such cases of bothering on the street ... But you can ignore such things. And then you forget it relatively quickly”. (Monika, 24)

“To me, violence is also if people let you know that in fact you are not really normal... and this can happen very often in everyday situations. But one can tolerate that ...” (Borut, 30)

Another strategy of dealing with heteronormative panopticon is *internalised homophobia and conformism*. Gays and lesbians themselves sometimes express conformist ideas about how gays and lesbians should behave in public space. Here a presumption that being non-heterosexual is something ‘out of order’ is often latently present. This is a sort of projection, which could be seen as an internalized homophobia.¹¹ It functions as self-control in order not to “provoke” the social order of heteronormativity.

“It’s not good if that [homosexuality] is the first thing they learn about you. That is the first impression. Will you go to a job interview unshaven and untidy, or will you take care to appear smart?” (Boštjan, 31)

“We simply do not feel the need to expose ourselves ... to attract attention. I love him in my heart, and he does the same, and I do not feel any need to publish this, especially because it is a gay love.” (Boštjan, 31)

¹¹ Projection of prejudice on gays and lesbians themselves is often present for example in reproductive views of gays and lesbians. Rejection of parenthood, denial of the right to parenthood and sometimes even ideological (and homophobic) ideas about parenthood and raising children in same-sex families are all mechanisms to deal with the heteronormative organisation of reproduction and family relations and with obstacles that arise from social contexts that are unfavourable to gay and lesbian parenthood (Švab 2007:220).

(Internalised) homophobia puts pressures on gays and lesbians and has large impact on their mental health, way of thinking and behaviour. It can also lead to various forms of *self-violence*, which is a way of disciplining oneself. Self-violence is present primarily during the initial stages of self-recognizing homosexual orientation in an attempt to become “normal” and socially acceptable.

“[Self-violence] is another form of violence that we all experienced due to wrong socialisation. At least at the beginning, when you are alone with yourself, because of all these false information or lack of information from environment, school, family, you begin to perform a very serious form of violence against yourself. In fact, I don't believe that even a beating would be comparable to the sort of violence I used against myself for some years.” (Matjaž, 25)

Sexual shame (Warner, 1999) is another element of homophobic violence that is reported by gays and lesbians in Slovenia. Gays and lesbians are frequently reduced to sexual objects. This sexual image serves as a screen onto which a whole range of stereotypes, simplified “scientific” findings about homosexuality (e.g. homosexuality is a mental disease), images of perversity or sin or of homosexuals as sexual perverts is projected. The reduction of a homosexual to a sexual object produces reservations in interpersonal relations that did not exist before someone's coming out. It involves an irrational fear of a person who is in contact with a homosexual that he/she has become an object of his/her sexual desire. So lesbians and gays are often seen solely as sexual beings, and their sexual orientation becomes the only defining element of their subjectivity:

“For me the most painful thing is the fact that they look at me in this, sexual way. This renders me powerless. [...] To be a lesbian, that's as if you had sex written across your face.” (Ksenja, 30)

8. CONCLUSION

The article attempted to show how gays and lesbians remain a stigmatized social group in Slovenia due to the heteronormative social context and prevailing homophobia. In Slovenia, as in Croatia (Jugović et al., 2007), studies have showed a high level of violence and the continual fear of violence experienced by gays and lesbians.

Besides the explicit forms of violence that are present in (but not limited to) public space, the article attempted to show how the heteronormativity of public space itself functions as a panopticon. The threat of violence as a form of subtle regulating process contributes to self-control. This compels gays and lesbians to use a degree of mimicry when in public spaces. Heteronormativity creates a vicious circle of homophobia, violence and fear: “the withdrawal generates the decline and deterioration of the community and the public realm, which in turn gives rise to more crime in the public places” (Hale, in Moran et al., 2003:176).

Stigmatized images of and ideas about homosexuality influence not only the (homophobic) reactions of people responding to the presence of gays and lesbians

in their environment, but also gays and lesbians themselves. Socialization in circumstances in which socializing agents do not supply information about homosexuality, or where this information comes with a stigma attached to it, creates fertile ground for the internalization of homophobia.

What seems problematic in Slovenian case is the politically apathetic situation with the absence of any systemic policy to legally protect gays and lesbians and carry out measures to promote tolerance and equal opportunities in order to reduce homophobia and violence against gays and lesbians. To borrow the words of one participant in focus group (Švab, Kuhar, 2005):

“To me violence is everything. For example, the state does not provide us our rights ... The state is not prepared to solve these questions irrespective of political orientation ... The state sends you a clear message that you’re not welcome. You are welcome as a taxpayer and that is about everything. This is one form of violence and it is huge and present all the time.” (Borut, 30)

The politics of homosexuality should urgently include measures aimed at reducing homophobia, providing information and creating an open debate on homosexuality among the wider public and within various professional circles, including schools. It would be necessary to ensure access to relevant information on sexuality in schools, and to make school a safe place for gays and lesbians. In order to achieve this, teachers and other education specialists and counselors should receive relevant training and information. The same applies to employers, since the workplace is still not a safe environment for gays and lesbians, despite the anti-discriminatory laws. Raising the awareness of parents is another necessary measure, since they are frequently, intentionally or unintentionally, the agents of psychological violence against their homosexual children. All these means that the *politics of homophobia*, which is based in silent acceptance of homophobic violence and toleration of homophobia as a social value, should be changed into the active politics of *mainstreaming* homosexuality. Only by surpassing the binary division between heterosexuality (understood as good and socially appreciated) and homosexuality (as its negative opposite) the negative effects of heteronormativity can be abolished.

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HOMOFOBIA I NASILJE NAD GEJ I LEZBIJSKOM POPULACIJOM U SLOVENIJI

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Autori prezentiraju i kritički analiziraju niz različitih empirijskih istraživanja o homofobičnom nasilju u Sloveniji. Postojeća istraživanja o nasilju nad gej i lezbijskom populacijom pokazuju veliki stupanj verbalnog, fizičkog i seksualnog nasilja koje su doživjeli pripadnici te populacije, te istovremeno ukazuju na slabo prepoznavanje tog nasilja u društvu. Prema javnom mnijenju i rezultatima istraživanja Slovenija je i dalje homofobično društvo. Nasilje je sastavni dio svakodnevnog života gej i lezbijske populacije u Sloveniji. Više od polovice ispitanika, uključenih u istraživanje svakodnevnog života te populacije, reklo je da su barem jednom bili žrtve nekog oblika nasilja. Najčešće se homofobično nasilje događa na javnim mjestima. Zbog toga prva dva dijela ove studije obrađuju temu različitih oblika nasilja u školama kao specifičnoj sredini te općenito na javnim mjestima. U trećem dijelu studije autori obrađuju drukčiju vrstu nasilja za koju tvrde da je najproblematičnija i protiv koje se vjerojatno najteže boriti. To je društveno skriveno i nevidljivo nasilje koje proizlazi iz heteronormativnosti i takozvanog heteronormativnog panoptikona. Pojavljuje se u različitim oblicima: od stalnog straha od "otkrivanja" i straha pred nasiljem do samopovređivanja zbog internalizirane homofobije.

Ključne riječi: HOMOFOBIA, NASILJE, GEJEVI I LEZBIJKE, HETERONORMATIVNOST, JAVNO MJESTO, ŠKOLA