

SWINDON GAY COMMUNITY SPEAKS OUT!

**Final Report
&
Research Findings**

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Introduction

The survey for this report was conducted in Swindon during November 2004. The survey was directed towards members of the 'gay community' and for that purpose the questionnaires were circulated on the evening of Friday 12th and Saturday 13th of November at established gay venues in Swindon. Three such venues were identified and these were the Cricketers, the Mail Coach and the London Street Club. At these venues, individuals were approached and invited to complete a self completion questionnaire, which asked them to respond to a range of questions primarily concerned with seeking to measure the degree to which they felt personally safe in using public space in the town and also the extent to which they were prepared to report any homophobic incident to the local police. They were also asked to identify any personal experience of victimisation over the previous year, and the extent to which any contact with the police concerning these incidents had generated greater (or less) confidence in the local police service. The questionnaire also provided an opportunity for participants to provide any additional information concerning the safety of members of the gay community in the area.

The survey period started in November and continued through until the end of December 2004 with the survey being accessible online via the Swindon Borough Council's LGBT website. A total number of 120 members of the gay community participated in this study by completing the questionnaire and details of these participants and their response to the questions can be found as follows.

Section 1: Participants Details.

1. Table: 1(a). The age range of participants.

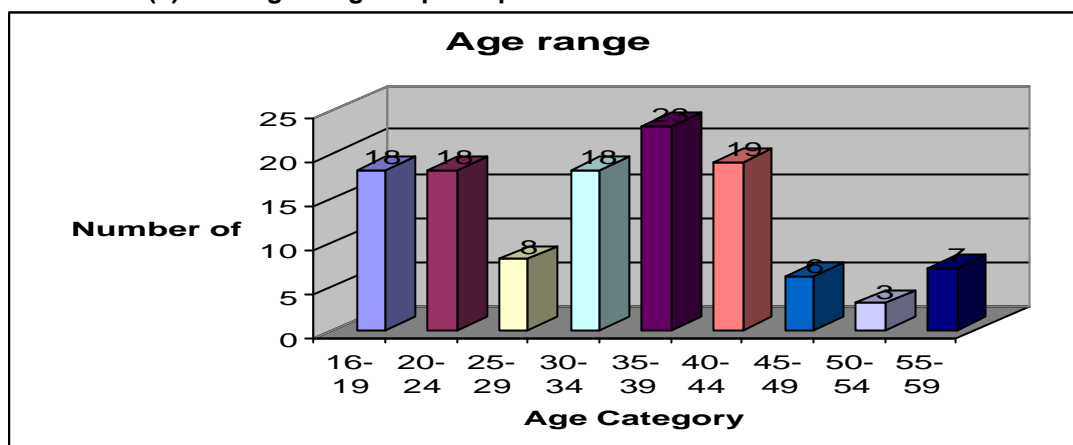


Table: 1 (b). Raw Data

		Swindon Participants
16-19	Count	18
	%	15.0%
20-24	Count	18
	%	15.0%
25-29	Count	8
	%	6.7%
30-34	Count	18
	%	15.0%
35-39	Count	23
	%	19.2%
40-44	Count	19
	%	15.8%
45-49	Count	6
	%	5.0%
50-54	Count	3
	%	2.5%
55-59	Count	7
	%	5.8%
Total	Count	120
	%	100.0%

As can be identified from the tables above there was a wide spread of participants in terms of age range. However, as might be expected there was a bias towards the younger age groups. This reflected the time and location of the survey which served to reflect a particular group catchment. This may be none the less of some value as survey work conducted elsewhere has highlighted the fact that young members of the gay community are much more likely to be the subject of victimisation and harassment than older members of the community (Arnold, 2003). It is nevertheless the case that within the survey both the 35-39 year and 40-44 year old cohorts are well represented here.

2. Table: 2. The gender of participants.

		Swindon Participants
Male	Count	68
	%	56.7%
Female	Count	52
	%	43.3%
Total	Count	120
	%	100.0%

Although it was intended to capture in terms of gender an equal number of gay males and females, there proved to be a slight bias towards gay males with 68 of participants being male (56.7%) and 52 participants being female (43.3%).

3. Table: 3. The ethnicity of participants.

		Swindon Participants
White English	Count	110
	%	91.7%
White Italian	Count	1
	%	.8%
White South African	Count	1
	%	.8%
White Welsh	Count	1
	%	.8%
Asian	Count	1
	%	.8%
Zimbabwean White	Count	1
	%	.8%
Chinese	Count	2
	%	1.7%
White European	Count	3
	%	2.5%
Total	Count	120
	%	100.0%

As can be readily ascertained and perhaps reflecting the general composition of the Swindon area, the participants were preponderantly to describe themselves as being 'White English' with 110 participants identifying themselves as such (91.7%). There were minority ethnic participants and these can be individually identified above.

4. Table: 4 (a). Participants considered sexual orientation.

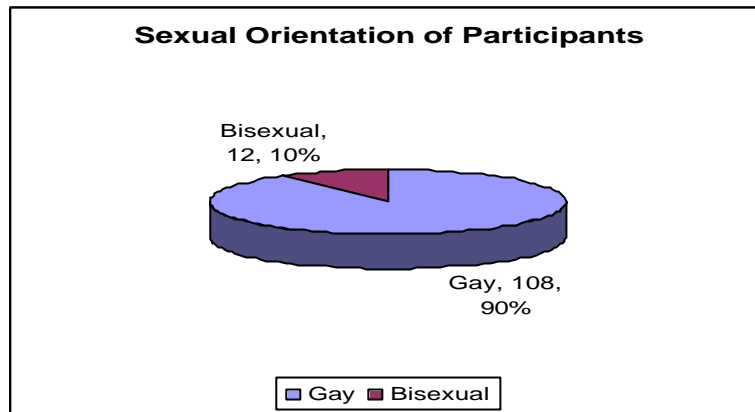


Table: 4 (b). Raw Data

		Swindon Participants
Gay	Count	108
	%	90.0%
Bisexual	Count	12
	%	10.0%
Total	Count	120
	%	100.0%

Participants within the survey were then asked to identify their perceived personal sexual orientation. The great majority of participants were to identify themselves as being 'gay' with 108 of the total participants identifying themselves as such (90.0%). A further 10% of participants were to identify themselves as being bisexual.

5. Table: 5. If you are gay or bisexual, are you 'OUT' about your sexuality and to whom?

Categories	Number Of Responses
To all friends	41
To a few friends	26
At work	16
To all family	17
To a few family	19
In the closet	1
Out totally	50

One of the most important aspects of the survey was to identify the number of members of the gay community who were openly 'out' about their sexual orientation and the corresponding number who were as yet unable to openly declare their sexual orientation (See

table above). For a number of reasons, the latter category is already recognised as being important in explaining the very low report rate among victims of homophobic crime. As the data demonstrates less than half of all respondents (n=50, 41.7%) felt able to openly state their sexuality. For the remainder, the survey demonstrated that there was a marked disinclination to make public their sexual orientation. For example only 17 (14.2%) of respondents stated that they were 'out as being gay' to all of their family. Even fewer were out in terms of their workplace (n=16, 13.3%). Thus the sexual orientation of many gay persons remains something that is often hidden for a variety of reasons. This must have implications for potential reporting of 'homophobic incidents' of which they may fall victim.

Section 2: Participants Experiences & Reporting.

Table: 6 (a). Over the past year, have you been a victim of homophobia by any of the following?

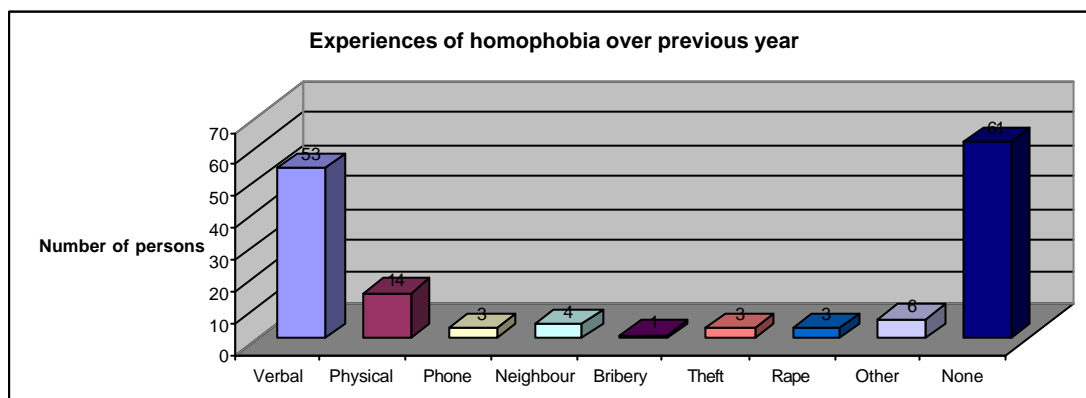


Table: 6 (b). Raw Data

	Number Of Responses
Verbal Assault	53
Physical Assault	14
Malicious Phone Calls	3
Neighbour Disputes	4
Bribery	1
Theft	3
Rape	3
Other	6
None	61

Participants were asked whether they had been the victim of homophobia over the previous year. As can be identified above the

incidents of homophobic victimisation was relatively low and 61 (50.8%) of participants were in fact to state that they had not been the victim of any of the types of offence identified in the survey. While this is somewhat reassuring, the same survey also highlighted the significance of 'verbal assaults', which a significant proportion of those surveyed had been subject to (n=53, 44.2%) It was also found that after verbal assault, a smaller proportion of participants had been subject to physical assault. The survey demonstrates however that a significant number of members of the gay community had experienced some form of assault ranging from verbal assault through to rape. The participants were asked to identify 'other' types of experiences and these were to include discrimination at work; prejudice and internet harassment and are presented below.

Table: 6 (c). Other types of experience stated:

		Swindon Participants
Held at gunpoint & knifepoint	Count	1
	%	16.7%
Work friends don't fully accept me	Count	1
	%	16.7%
Local Press- non helpful when reporting homophobic crime	Count	1
	%	16.7%
Discrimination in the workplace	Count	1
	%	16.7%
Prejudice	Count	1
	%	16.7%
Internet	Count	1
	%	16.7%
Total	Count	6
	%	100.0%

Table: 7(a). If yes, did you report this to the police?

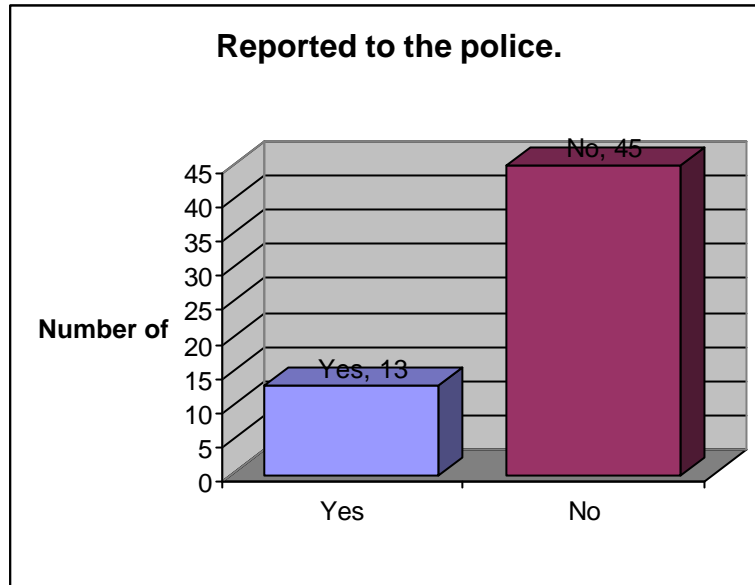


Table: 7 (b). Raw Data

		Swindon Participants
Yes	Count	13
	%	22.4%
No	Count	45
	%	77.6%
Total	Count	58
	%	100.0%

Where participants had experienced victimisation as a result of their sexual orientation, they were then asked whether they had reported the incident to the police. As the data above demonstrates, the report rate was very low with less than a quarter of those victimised actually reporting this to the police. The majority of victims did not report the offence to the police. The data once again demonstrates the nature and size of the dark figure of unreported and therefore unrecorded homophobic crime.

Table: 7(c). If no, why not?

			Swindon Participants
If no, why not?	See additional information	Count %	34 100.0%
Total		Count %	34 100.0%

Within the same question participants were asked 'if they had not reported the offence' why they had decided not to do so. Here a total of 34 responses were given which provided a variety of reasons for not reporting the offence to the police. The most frequent of which proved to be: -

- (1) the nature of the assault which was often verbal,
- (2) tolerance of often aggressive homophobic comments and
- (3) the perception that little would be achieved by reporting the incident.

(Refer to Appendices, p. 18 for further information here).

Section 3: Participants perceptions of Safety.

Table: 8 (a). On a scale of 1 to 5 how safe do you feel in Swindon town during the day?

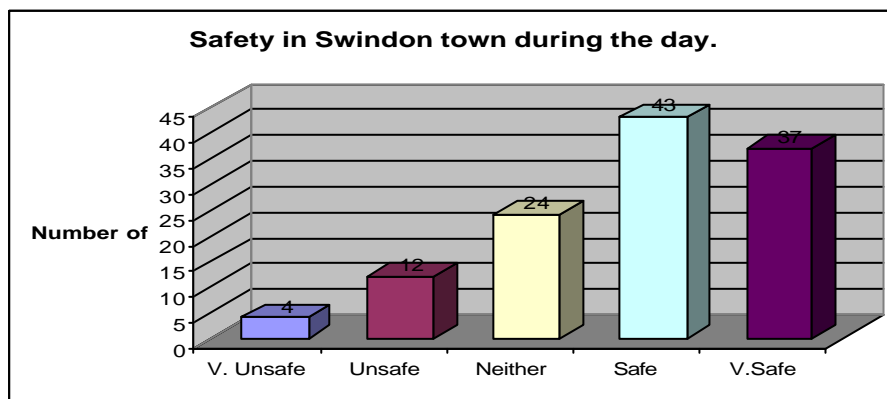


Table: 8 (b). Raw Data

		Swindon Participants
Very Unsafe	Count	4
	%	3.3%
Unsafe	Count	12
	%	10.0%
Neither safe/unsafe	Count	24
	%	20.0%
Safe	Count	43
	%	35.8%
Very Safe	Count	37
	%	30.8%
Total	Count	120
	%	100.0%

Perhaps not unsurprisingly, the majority of respondents were to state that they felt either 'safe' or 'very safe' in Swindon during the day. Nevertheless some 16% of participants were to state that they felt either 'unsafe' or 'very unsafe' in the town during the day. This might suggest that although involving only a small number of members of the gay community there would appear to be evidence suggesting that homophobia is a matter of concern to a number of those individuals participating here.

Table: 9 (a). On a scale of 1 to 5, how safe do you feel in Swindon town during the night?

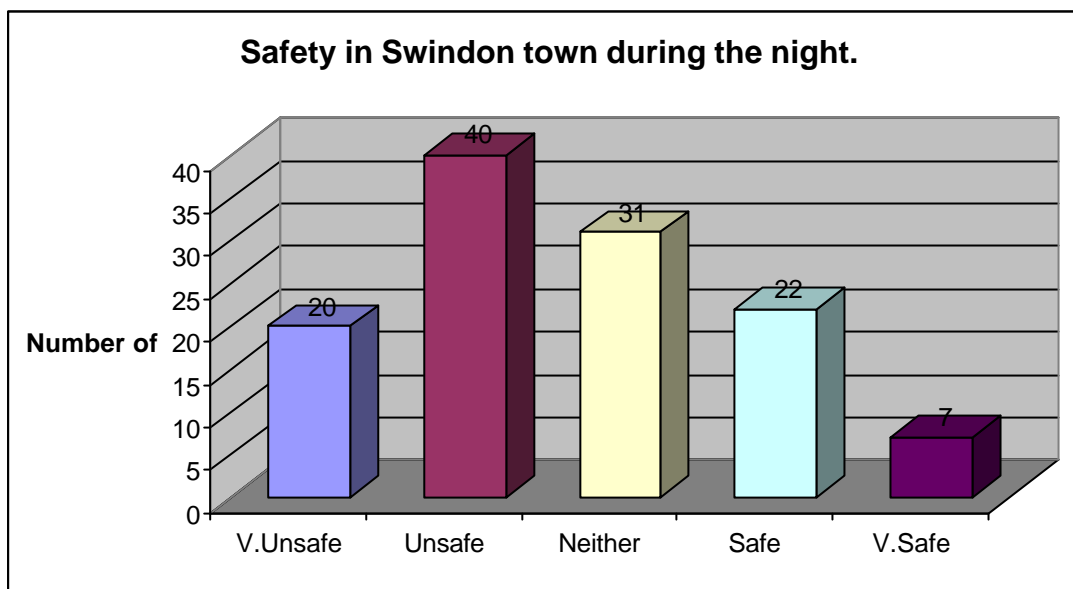


Table: 9 (b). Raw Data

		Swindon Participants
Very Unsafe	Count	20
	%	16.7%
Unsafe	Count	40
	%	33.3%
Neither safe/unsafe	Count	31
	%	25.8%
Safe	Count	22
	%	18.3%
Very Safe	Count	7
	%	5.8%
Total	Count	120
	%	100.0%

The relative safety identified by most participants in the day was not to be replicated in relation to 'night time' in Swindon. Here the response rate was reversed with a half of the participants (n=60, 50%) stating they felt either 'unsafe' or 'very unsafe' at night. Only 24% (or just under a quarter) of respondents were to state they felt either 'safe' or 'very safe' in Swindon at night. This clearly raises issues for both a Crime Reduction Partnership and particularly the police as this suggests that the perceived potential threat of victimisation is high amongst members of the 'gay community'.

Table: 10 (a). Are there any areas in this town you would not frequent during the day?

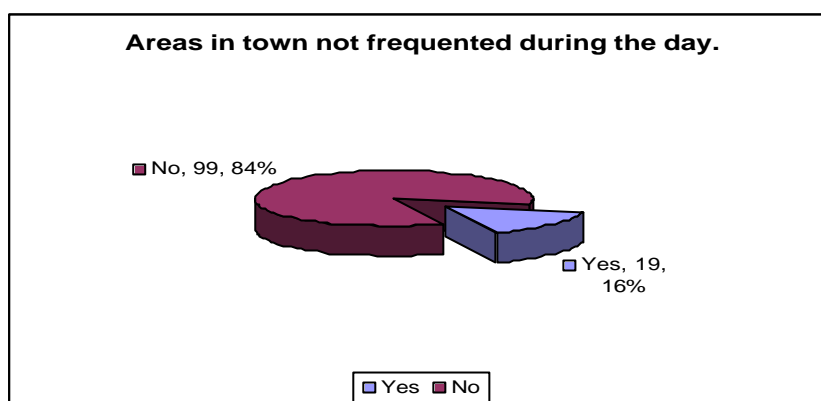


Table: 10 (b). Raw Data

		Swindon Participants
Yes	Count	19
	%	16.1%
No	Count	99
	%	83.9%
Total	Count	118
	%	100.0%

Participants were then asked to identify if there were any specific areas in Swindon that they would not frequent during the day. While it is reassuring to discover that the majority of participants (84%) were to state that there were no areas in the town which they would not frequent during the day, a minority of participants (16%) were to identify areas where they would not. These areas were identified as: -

- Penhill
- Walcot
- The Parks
- Pinehurst
- Faringdon Park
- Queens Park
- Cavendish Square

(See Appendices, p. 20 for further information here).

Table: 11 (a). Are there any areas in this town you would not frequent during the night?

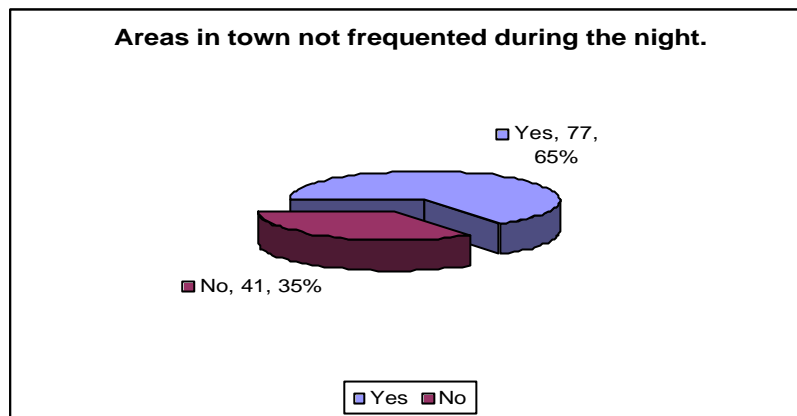


Table: 11 (b). Raw Data

		Swindon Participants
Yes	Count	77
	%	65.3%
No	Count	41
	%	34.7%
Total	Count	118
	%	100.0%

As with perceptions of safety day and night, so to with frequenting areas day and night, the survey was to highlight how a significantly greater number would not frequent specific areas at night in comparison to the numbers revealed as being prepared to frequent these areas during the day. The areas which were perceived as being most threatening proved to be other than the town centre pubs and bars,

- Faringdon Park and other alley / park areas
- Penhill
- Manchester Road
- Walcot
- Bridge Street

Of these, Swindon town centre and Faringdon Road Park would appear to be 'hotspots' in terms of participant's perceptions of encountering victimisation. This would appear to include large parts of the town centre and adjoining areas. (See Appendices, p. 21 for further information here).

Section 4: Police Relations.

Table: 12 (a). On a scale of 1 to 5 how confident are you in Swindon Police dealing with homophobic crime?

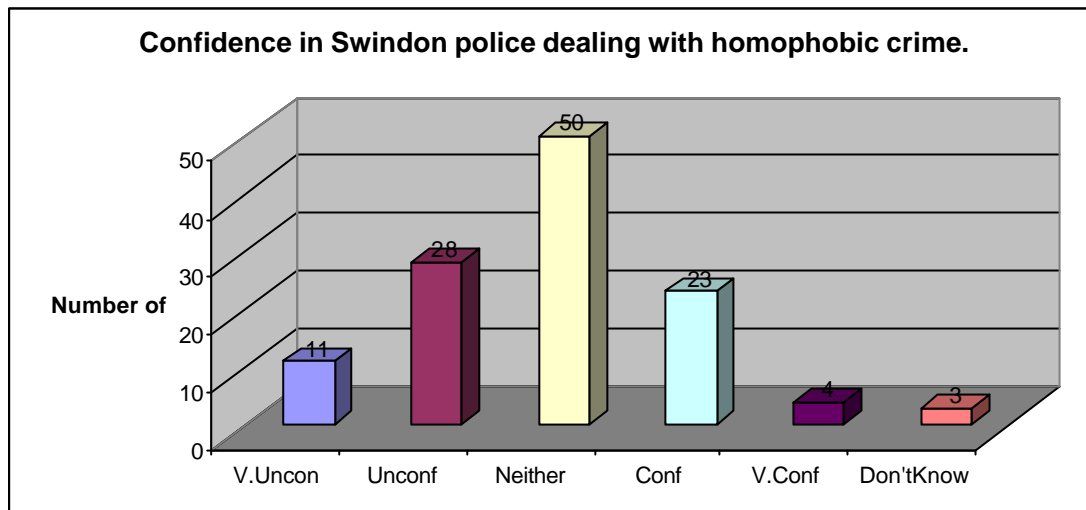


Table: 12 (b). Raw Data

			Swindon Participants
Very Unconfident	Count		11
	%		9.2%
Unconfident	Count		28
	%		23.5%
Neither confident/unconfident	Count		50
	%		42.0%
Confident	Count		23
	%		19.3%
Very Confident	Count		4
	%		3.4%
Don't know	Count		3
	%		2.5%
Total	Count		119
	%		100.0%

As the survey was to demonstrate there appeared to be a lack of confidence in the local police dealing with 'homophobic' incidents with just under a third of respondent stating they were either 'not confident' or 'very unconfident' in relation to the police dealing with homophobic crime. Of the total number of respondents a substantial minority (42%) proved to be uncommitted in terms of their confidence in the police dealing with homophobic incidents. This might suggest that there is some way to go before the Swindon police have the full confidence of the gay community in terms of dealing with homophobic crime. See table 12 & 12(a) above.

Table 13 (a). On a scale of 1 to 5 how do you rate police relations with the gay community here?

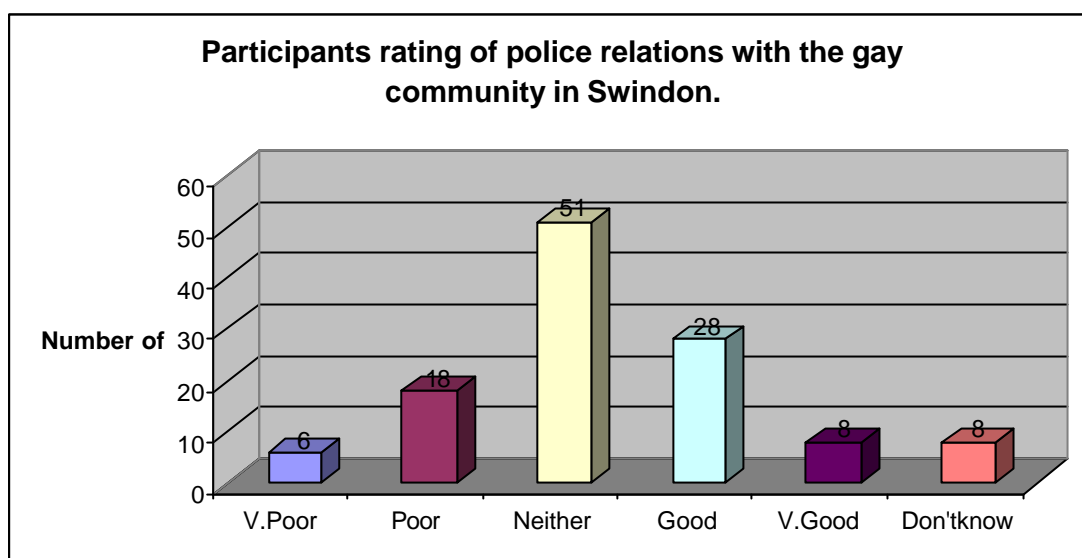


Table: 13 (b). Raw Data

		Swindon Participants
Very Poor	Count	6
	%	5.0%
Poor	Count	18
	%	15.1%
Neither Good/Poor	Count	51
	%	42.9%
Good	Count	28
	%	23.5%
Very Good	Count	8
	%	6.7%
Don't know	Count	8
	%	6.7%
Total	Count	119
	%	100.0%

Finally participants were asked to assess police relations with the gay community. Interestingly while remaining unsure as to the ability of the police to deal with homophobic crime a significant minority of those surveyed were to state that police relations with the gay community were either 'good' or 'very good' (n=36, 30.2%). However, as with the earlier issue of police response to homophobic crime, a substantial number of participants were to state they were uncommitted, identifying police relations with the gay community to be neither 'good' nor 'poor' (n=51, 42.9%). A further 20% of participants (n=24) were to state that police relations with the gay community were either 'poor' or 'very poor', whilst 6.7% (n=8) stated they did not know (See table 13 & 13(a) above).

Conclusion

The survey data suggests that while the police are seen as attempting to respond to the problem of homophobic crime, there would appear to be some way to go before they enjoy the full confidence of the gay community in relation to this problem. There would appear to be specific locations which may be described as 'hotspots' in terms of gay victimisation where a greater and more frequent visible police presence would be an immediate advantage. Those locations are identified within the report – some with great frequency. There would appear to be a need for greater police presence particularly in areas in close proximity to gay venues. It is interesting to note that in relation to this, this problem has been addressed by pro active visible policing in other areas. This has reflected a need to provide equal protection to all members of the community, irrespective of their sexual orientation.

The survey also demonstrates the continuing problem of under-reporting of homophobic crime. This in part is a reflection of the confidence of the gay community in the ability of the police to deal with the incident(s) successfully (or at all). The problem may be compounded by the fact that as the survey demonstrates a number of those belonging to the gay community are not fully open about their sexuality, which therefore can expect to impinge on the likelihood of reporting incidents of personal victimisation.

The survey demonstrates however, that there is a perception among the gay community that the police are less than efficient in responding to and dealing with homophobic crime. This would appear to be a matter which the Swindon police will need to address in the future. Nevertheless the survey provides evidence that police relations with the gay community are perceived by many members of that community as being positive. A third of respondents were to state that police relations were to state that police relations with the gay community were either 'good' or 'very good'. It remains the case however, that the majority of respondents were uncommitted. This might suggest that there is a further need for greater police consultation with members of the gay community. To support of this, eighteen persons who participated in this survey provided their contact details, expressing a keen interest to work with Wiltshire Constabulary on an advisory level. Such an expanded form of consultation is valuable for a

number of reasons, but not only would this provide information concerning known areas of victimisation it would further help to improve the dialogue between police and the gay community. This has great potential and would undoubtedly serve to significantly improve police relations here.

End