

Anti-gay Violence Is a Problem in Amsterdam

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AMSTERDAM, Netherlands (AP) -- Amsterdam faces an ingrained problem of violence against gay men, despite its reputation as a haven of tolerance, according to a study released Thursday.

Town councilman Freek Ossel said the University of Amsterdam study, commissioned by the city, said the Dutch capital must improve protection of gays, increase education, and encourage reporting of problem of discriminatory incidents.

"Amsterdam's title as a gay capital, according to some people, has already been gone for years, and according to others in any case is at stake," he said.

The study said 67 attacks were reported in Amsterdam in 2007. Police commissioner Leo Wilde said the number was about average for recent years and "is not decreasing."

The figure is difficult to compare with other cities. Amsterdam, with 750,000 people, has tried for years to improve reporting of anti-gay incidents, but police believe most still go unreported.

The study found that most attacks were carried out spontaneously by poorly educated young man who feel their masculinity has been questioned.

"In 40 percent of cases the trigger is if people think that they're being targeted" for seduction, said Laurens Buijs, one of the study's authors. Attackers "see gays as predatory animals that can strike at any moment."

The study drew its title "As Long As They Keep Away From Me" from that fear. It concluded that the tolerance often professed by Dutch youth is only a veneer: gay men are accepted only as long as they don't display stereotypically gay behavior.

The study combined a broad survey of Amsterdam youth with in-depth interviews with smaller groups. Authors also interviewed individual attackers and reviewed recent cases.

"It's very sad confirmation of what we already suspected," said Dennis Boutkan, chairman of the Union for Homosexual Integration. "The layer of social acceptance of homosexuality is exceptionally fragile and thin."

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