



What is Violence?

Violence can take on many forms and does not necessarily begin with physical injury. There is physical, mental, economic, verbal and sexualised violence. Discrimination, degrading someone's way of life, harassment and verbal hostility are all forms of violence. They injure, restrict, render insecure, leave behind psychological scars and have health and financial consequences. Our clients seek counselling because they are experiencing homophobia, transphobia and racism. They may also experience violence/discriminations based on impairment, age, origin or because they have little or no money. People often describe some combination of these diverse forms of discrimination and experiences of violence.

Violence can be perpetrated by individuals, but it can also be carried out by public authorities and other institutions, such as schools or hospitals. Violence can also be seen at a structural level, when access to society's cultural, social and economic resources is denied: not providing barrier-free access to buildings or limiting adoption rights for same-sex couples, for example.

Lesbian/bisexual women and trans* people¹ experience **interpersonal violence and discrimination**: on the street, at work or in their families of origin. Lesbian/bisexual women and trans* people also perpetrate violence. Therefore, people in lesbian/gay/bisexual/trans*/intersex organisations, friendships and relationships also experience violence.

¹ Trans* designates all those who cannot or do not want to live as the gender that they were assigned at birth. This includes individuals who are transsexual, transgender, drag queens and kings, transidentities, crossdressers and many more.

In the case of the perpetration of violence by government employees and laws, we are speaking of **state** and **structural violence**. For example, people experience violence by police officers when personal documents are examined without cause, when the police use extreme physical violence during operations, or when selective individuals, for example people of colour² and/or trans* people, are treated as criminals.

We therefore speak of structural discrimination when apparently neutral policies or criteria are used to discriminate against individuals or social groups. For instance, when exclusively heterosexual people are portrayed in TV series, and no lesbian, bisexual or gay people are depicted, that is an example of structural homophobia.

The German Transsexual Law [*Das Transsexuellengesetz*] is an example of violence that results from legal policies: trans* people who would like to avail themselves of the legal and medical possibilities offered by sex reassignment surgery are labelled as ill and are forced to undergo psychological evaluation.

We consider every form of racism, sexism, ableism (discrimination based on disability/impairment), ageism, classism (discrimination based on social status), homophobia and transphobia to be an act of violence.

So what can be done about it?

We are convinced that all forms of violence must be addressed together. We question whether it makes sense to demand stricter laws and punishments

² People of Color is a political self-definition for people who are affected by racist discrimination based on skin colour, language, name, origin and/or religion. Source: MRBB "Leben nach Migration", Oct. 2009–Dec. 2011.

for violence against lesbians, bisexuals and trans* people. We doubt that these kinds of policies actually lead to less violence or that they offer those affected the appropriate way in which to process their experiences. In fact, we fear that the forms of state violence will continue, unchallenged.

We believe that, in the end, the people who have experienced violence are the ones who know best what they need. They should be able to choose the best path for them out of the possible courses of action. In our work, it is important for us to fortify those who wish it in whatever way they have chosen to deal with their experiences, and to support them along their own self-determined path. We consider supporting people dealing with violence to be a shared responsibility.

We condemn all acts of violence. Violence is too often tolerated by bystanders or those close to the affected people. We want people to not look away, but to instead actively work against violence, both individually and collaboratively. One of the many ways to do this would be to provide people with the support they need to stop their violent behaviour. The focus should not be placed on punishing the person. The goal is for the affected person to get better and to make sure that the person who perpetrated the violence does not repeat it.

We want violence to be dealt with in such a way that the needs of the person who experienced or is experiencing violence are central, and in a way in which the collective structures and societal conditions which maintain and promote violence will be fundamentally changed and transformed.

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