Crime, Peoples and Places

Perspectives on Rural Safety and Justice

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Chapter 28

Queering the rural

Tales from Poland and Sweden

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Tales from Poland and Sweden

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Introduction

Queer people (queer is an umbrella term for the LGBTQI+ group, namely lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning and intersex) are more exposed to discrimination, crime and violence than the rest of the population (Angeles & Roberton, 2020; BRÅ, 2017; Świder & Winiewski, 2017). Such events are stressors that impact individuals' mobility, health and life chances (MUCF, 2021). Even though feeling safe is a basic human need (Maslow, 1943) and a fundamental individual right (UN-Habitat, 2018), relatively little is known about the safety perceptions of LGBTQI+ people, this is particularly true in contexts beyond big cities.

To contribute to this knowledge base, this chapter reports on the conditions of victimisation among LGBTQI+ people with a focus on those living in rural areas of Poland and Sweden. The first section of this chapter consists of a brief literature overview of the factors that affect safety in rural areas and explains why safety among LGBTQI+ people is an important topic. Also discussed are LGBTQI+ people's perceptions about changes in attitude towards queer people in rural and urban areas. This is followed by a discussion of the sources used in this chapter along with findings and conclusions.

Poland and Sweden constitute interesting case studies. Both are European countries that reflect the extremes of the spectrum of LGBTQI+ rights yet are embedded in similar regional contexts (e.g. ILGA Europe, 2022; Świder & Winiewski, 2017). Historically in Sweden, equal rights and opportunities regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression have become fundamental rights of the individual (Bränström & van der Star, 2013). In 2019, Sweden celebrated the 75th anniversary of another key LGBTQI+ right – namely the decriminalisation of homosexuality. Yet, queer people are still disproportionately discriminated against and victimised (BRÅ, 2020), both in urban and rural areas. In Poland, the scale of criminalisation of LGBTQI+ people and victimisation in both private and public spaces have been extensively reported by various sources (ILGA Europe, 2022), and where queer advocates declare finding themselves often in danger (Budziszewska & Górska, 2016; Świder & Winiewski, 2017; Winiewski & Świder, 2021).

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Literature overview

Victimisation, safety perceptions and impact on individual's mobility and health

Although safety is a basic human need (Maslow, 1943), research shows that the safety needs of LGBTQI+ people are not always satisfied because queer people are continuously more exposed to discrimination and violence than the rest of the population. The literature on planning on rural spaces in the United Kingdom does not often address issues to the LGBTQI+ population, although other disciplines may have covered issues of vulnerable population in rural areas (Doan & Hubbard, 2019). In a study in the United States, Lubitow et al. (2017) found that transgender and gender-nonconforming individuals often experience harassment, which undermines their access to safe public transportation. Similarly, evidence from the Global South shows that sexual violence does differ among members of the LGBTQI+ community (Datafolha, 2014), but the main overall message is that LGBTQI+ as a group composes a vulnerable target for harassment, abuse, potential street crime in public places (Doan, 2007). Homosexual women declare being more exposed to violence than their male counterparts (Nourani et al., 2020), making them avoid certain places at certain times (Ceccato & Loukaitou-Sideris, 2020).

Knowledge about how identities intertwine in queer lived experiences and safety perceptions in space is important to expand our understanding of what constitutes safe public places for individuals that identify themselves as LGBTQI+. Victimisation may also interact with a range of other harmful behaviours experienced via digital platforms in which LGBTQI+ individuals experience higher rates of harassment as compared with the rest of the sample (Powell et al., 2019). Sexual identity may also be associated with significant risk of mental health disorder symptoms (Hafeez et al., 2017). Because of the stigma, discrimination and victimisation, it has been suggested that queer people run higher risks of suicidality compared to heterosexuals although the evidence is not conclusive (Miranda-Mendizábal et al., 2017; Świder & Winiewski, 2017); may not vary across sexual orientation categories (that is heterosexual, lesbian, gay and bisexual); and may be at higher risk for obesity, heart disease and cancer which are increasingly likely in individuals who experience multiple stressors to physical and mental health (SAMHSA, 2012).

Places of queer vulnerability and resistance

A report in Sweden shows that LGBTQI+ people feel unsafe in classrooms and toilets in public transport while others work as 'oasis of resistance', illustrating the ways in LGBTQ people define their own placemaking (MUCF, 2021). Ahmed (2006, p. 563) remind us that 'spaces constitute disciplinary mechanisms for LGBTQI+(s)', serving as 'straightening devices'. Considering current understandings of the periphery, Ahmed's claim is particularly applicable to queer experiences of space in relation to victimisation and fear. In

Brazil, for instance, young LGBTQI+ people, especially girls, were overrepresented among those victimised by sexual harassment (LGBTQI with 31.7% of victims, 120% more than non-LGBTQI+) in transit environments, such as at bus stops and on the way to them. In this case study, the intersectionality is evident: women (250% more than men) and nonwhite groups (30% more than whites) were overrepresented among the victims. Little is written about the forms of resistance that manifest against structures of power in everyday queer lives in rural-urban continuum. In cities, outdoors places are experienced as unsafe by some, where they are exposed to the gaze of others or exposed to harassment (MUCF, 2021), much less is known about LGBTQI+ people in contexts beyond big cities.

Queer in rural-urban continuum

Initially, rurality was understood as a site of oppression and absence for queer individuals (Gorman-Murray et al., 2008). The rural 'other' has been presented in a number of studies that deal with sexuality and safety. McGlynn (2018) claims that LGBTQI+ individuals navigate urban and rural spaces for work and socialising, challenging the mechanical labelling of spaces as rural/urban. Bell (2000), for instance, shows how the rural/urban divide is blurred in one of the first studies on cultural constructions of rural gay masculinity in the United States. Conner and Okamura (2021) illustrate the advantages of living in rural areas for LGBTQI+ rights advocates and Hartal (2015) argues that activists have begun creating a distinct peripheral notion that diverges both from being an LGBTQI+ individual in rural areas, going against the dominance of being queer in big cities. Second, they subvert activist LGBTQI+ discourses that are being produced mainly in big cities and reject such understandings of their location and deviate from the passiveness, emptiness and restrictive forms of sexuality it generates.

LGBTQI+ people in rural areas in the United States

In the United States, LGBTQI+ individuals form an integral part of both rural and urban areas. Yet, there is a widespread notion that individuals within the LGBTQI+ community predominantly reside in large cities while portrayals of rural communities seldom acknowledge the presence of LGBT individuals, except in instances where they are cast as subjects of anti-LGBT violence. For many, rural communities represent their upbringing and their families' residences (Movement Advancement Project, 2019). A recent report shows that rural states are less likely to have LGBTQI+-inclusive hate crime laws which require law enforcement agencies to investigate and prosecute crimes committed with bias against LGBTQI+ people and they are also less likely to have laws protecting youth (16% in rural against 68% in urban states) such as LGBTQI+-inclusive school non-discrimination laws, anti-bullying laws and bans on conversion therapy (Movement Advancement Project, 2019).

Research design

The study area

Poland is a Central European country with 37.8 million inhabitants (Eurostat, 2022), while Sweden is three times smaller in population size with 10.4 million inhabitants (Eurostat, 2022) and is located in Northern Europe. Around 5 percent of Poles identify themselves as belonging to the LGBTQI+ community: 4.3 percent of women and 5.5 percent of men (Eurostat, 2022). In Sweden, the average share amounted to 1.6 percent between 2005 and 2012. Although Poland and Sweden are geographically close, these two countries represent very different contexts of LGBTQI+s rights in Europe. Sweden is one of the most gay-friendly countries in Europe. According to the ILGA Europe report (2022) that ranks 49 European countries annually on their LGBTI equality laws and policies – taking into account 71 human rights – Sweden is placed 6th after Malta which is at the top rank while Poland comes last at 44th. The overall score of achieved LGBTI human rights by Sweden is 68 percent and Poland 13 percent (the average for Europe is 38% and for the European Union 48%). For example, 15 percent of Polish and 10 percent of Swedish LGBTQI+ people experienced physical or sexual attacks in the preceding five years owing to being LGBTQI+ (FRA, 2020). Experiences of attacks due to an individual's sexual orientation or gender identity are just 'the tip of the iceberg' of many other daily challenges these individuals face, which are deeply rooted in the sense of exclusion and unacceptance of queer rights in society in both countries but to different degrees.

Data and method

The answers from a survey carried out by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA, 2020) from 2019 for Sweden, Poland and for the EU countries have been analysed descriptively. The sample was 139,799 persons aged 15 years or older from all EU member countries and the candidate countries of North Macedonia and Serbia, who described themselves as LGBTI. The survey was conducted online from May to July 2019.[1] Also used as sources of information are reports from several national organisations. For Poland, this analysis is mostly based on the survey by Winiewski and Świder (2021), and for Sweden the source was a report from a survey from the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (BRÅ, 2020) and from the website of RFSL, the Swedish Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex Rights. Inspired was also derived from the discussions during the webinar series *Queering the City*,[2] in particular in the webinar guided by Dr Gilly Hartal, Senior Lecturer in the Gender Studies Program at Bar-Ilan University, and Mikael Jonsson, from RFSL in Sweden.

Findings

Victimisation of LGBTQI+ people in Poland and Sweden

In both countries, crime underreporting is high but is particularly so in Poland. For example, in 2019, there were 972 hate crimes recorded for the whole country, among which 16 were related to sexual orientation or gender identity (ODIHR, 2023). The key observation from the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights is that Poland has not reported on hate crimes separately from cases of hate speech. The situation of LGBTQI+ people in Poland was assessed in a study by Winiewski and Świder (2021) who conducted a survey on sample of 13,093 people and showed that 68 percent of LGBTQI+ respondents experienced violence because of their sexual orientation, including 68 percent transgender persons, 70 percent lesbians, 70 percent gay men, 69 percent bisexual men, 67 percent bisexual women and 62 percent asexual persons (Winiewski & Świder, 2021, p. 131). In Sweden, sexual orientation (homosexuality, bisexuality and heterosexuality) was also a motive of 625 crimes in 2013 and 756 in 2018 (an increase of 21%). The most common crimes were threats and harassment (44%) followed by defamation (15%), vandalism/graffiti (13%) and violent crimes (13%).

Public places are the most common types of places where LGBTQI+ people are victimised. In Poland, crimes against LGBTQI+ people were committed in public places (23%) followed by on the Internet (20%), at home or in the areas nearby (11%), by telephone/SMS (9%), at school (8%), on transport (5%) and in the workplace (4%) (Winiewski & Świder, 2021, p. 147). In Sweden, there are differences by type of offence. For instance, acts of verbal violence occur mostly in public outdoor spaces such as in streets and at parks (37%), online (11.5%) and in school/at university (10%). Threats happen in public places (40%), in a car/on public transport (14%) and online (9%). Vandalism occurs in public places (25%), online and in someone's home (11%). Public places (51%), other outdoor places (10%), cafés and clubs (7%) and public transport means (6%) are the most common places of physical violence. Sexual violence occurs at someone else's home (20%), public places (13.1%) and clubs and cafés (12%). In most cases, in both Poland and Sweden, the perpetrator was unfamiliar to the victim.

Both in Poland and in Sweden, strangers are the most common type of offender. More specifically, in Poland, perpetrators varied: 45 percent was a stranger, 14 percent a colleague, 11 percent a football fan, 8 percent unrelated loved fans, 6 percent were an immediate family member, 5 percent a member of an extremist group, 2 percent a different relative, 2 percent a coworker, 2 percent a neighbour, and others such as a supervisor at work, patient or suppliant, police officer, client, teacher, different public servant or security guard (Winiewski & Świder, 2021: 146). In Sweden, 42 percent was a stranger, 31 percent of cases superficially familiar (neighbour, colleague, famous person/group, schoolmate) and 10 percent of cases crime was committed by

related parties such as a partner, former partner, family member or friend (BRÅ, 2020).

Rural-urban divide in victimisation of LGBTQI+ people

In the street, square or other public places are the most common places of hate-harassment against LGBTQI+ people. According to a survey by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2019), fewer incidents of hate crimes in Europe were recorded in rural areas than in urban: the difference is smaller in Poland. For older adults, the rural public places are problematic: 44 percent of those who are 55 years old and older declare being victimised in these public places. However, note that over the internet, the pattern is inverse: incidents of hate-motivated harassment over the Internet were higher among people who live in rural areas than urban ones. The largest difference is found in Sweden (32% against 13%), particularly for the older group of the population (55 years old and older). For young people, school is the main type of environment where more often the last incident of hate-motivated harassment most happened – and this pattern is the same for all countries in Europe. This may not be surprising since young people spend most of their awake time on schools and sports facilities. Table 28.1 provides a rural versus urban breakdown of victimisation by places of last incident of hate-motivated harassment against LGBTQI+ people in the European Union, Sweden and Poland.

Safety perceptions among of LGBTQI+ people in rural and urban areas

Table 28.2 shows places where openness about individuals' gender identity/sexual orientation is avoided for fear of being assaulted, threatened or harassed by others. On public transport and in the street, square and other public places are more highly feared. The private sphere (home, around their family) and semiprivate sphere (school/work) tend to be perceived as the safest, regardless of country or location, rural or urban. Note that in Poland, especially rural Poland, people often avoid disclosure of their gender identity to medical doctors than those living in urban areas. Older adults tend to be the most affected both in Sweden and Poland.

Rural-urban divide in attitudes towards LGBTQI+ people

Violence against LGBTQI+ people in Poland happens more often in smaller towns and villages than in large cities. The aforementioned types of forms of violence have been aggregated into five dimensions: (i) verbal violence (experienced by 59% of respondents); (ii) threats (36%); (iii) vandalism and refusal (26%), (iv) sexual violence (22%) and (v) physical violence (14%) (Winiewski & Świder, 2021, p. 132). Unfortunately, this information is not available for Sweden. However, the European Union Agency for European

Table 28.1 Victimisation (places of last incident of hate-motivated harassment against LGBTQI+ people) in the European Union, Sweden and Poland (% of positive answers) by place of residence and age, 2019

	EU		*Sweden*		*Poland*	
Place of residence	*Urban*	*Rural*	*Urban*	*Rural*	*Urban*	*Rural*
My home	5	6	6	1	6	14
School. university	6	11	4	4	7	19
Workplace	7	9	9	14	6	2
A café, restaurant, pub, club	9	9	9	10	6	1
Public transport	10	5	13	0	7	4
In the street, a square or other public place	46	32	41	36	49	43
In a healthcare setting[a]	1	2	1	0	1	0
Internet – social media	12	21	13	32	13	16
Age	*15–17*	*55+*	*15–17*	*55+*	*15–17*	*55+*
My home	6	8	6	5	6	5
School, university	42	1	64	0	31	10
Workplace	0	10	0	16	0	0
A café, restaurant, pub, club	3	8	3	7	1	0
Public transport	4	8	2	5	5	7
In the street, a square or other public place	26	41	6	44	32	36
In a healthcare setting[a]	0	2	1	0	0	7
Internet – social media	16	16	14	12	21	20

Source: European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights.

Note

[a] Hospital or other medical service.

Fundamental Rights shows clear differences in attitudes towards LGBTQI+ people in Poland and Sweden.

Table 28.3 shows motives for an increase in prejudice, intolerance and/or violence in the European Union, Sweden and Poland by place of residence and age. Note that Poland shows much less tolerance towards LGBTQI+ people than Sweden and other countries in Europe. In Poland, motives for the increase in prejudice, intolerance and/or violence are for more than 80 percent of the respondents associated with negative discourse by politicians since the mid-2010s, both in urban and rural areas. For 60 percent of those who live in rural areas in Sweden, the most important reason for the increase in prejudice, intolerance and/or violence was the lack of enforcement of existing laws and policies. In Poland, half of the respondents believe that negative changes in law and policy lead to more prejudice, intolerance and/or violence against LGBTQI+ people, with no large difference between urban and rural areas. Table 28.3 also shows some differences in responses by country and areas by age of respondents: 91 percent of those that are above 55 years old

Table 28.2 Safety perceptions (places where openness is avoided for fear of being assaulted, threatened or harassed by others) in EU, Sweden and Poland (% of positive answers) by place of residence and age, 2019

	EU		*Sweden*		*Poland*	
Place of residence	*Urban*	*Rural*	*Urban*	*Rural*	*Urban*	*Rural*
My home	10	15	5	3	15	46
Around my family	27	29	13	12	37	62
School	19	23	12	15	28	46
Workplace	34	33	24	29	48	39
A café, restaurant, pub, club	38	37	34	34	52	54
Public transport	60	52	53	43	77	72
In the street, a square or other public place	61	57	62	70	75	72
In a healthcare setting[a]	28	26	16	23	53	56
Public premises or buildings	44	40	29	35	65	60
Age	*15–17*	*55+*	*15–17*	*55+*	*15–17*	*55+*
My home	33	7	22	3	36	5
Around my family	53	17	30	13	56	13
School	50	7	40	3	54	13
Workplace	20	29	22	22	21	49
A café, restaurant, pub, club	34	31	16	26	40	51
Public transport	48	50	34	42	56	76
In the street, a square or other public place	50	54	53	59	62	77
In a healthcare setting[a]	26	19	13	15	35	53
Public premises or buildings	41	37	29	32	47	65

Source: European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights.

Note

[a] Hospital or other medical service.

Table 28.3 Motives for the increase in prejudice, intolerance and/or violence in EU, Sweden and Poland (% of positive answers) by place of residence and age, 2019

	EU		*Sweden*		*Poland*	
Place of residence	*Urban*	*Rural*	*Urban*	*Rural*	*Urban*	*Rural*
Negative changes in law and policy	23	16	22	25	52	54
Lack of enforcement of existing laws & policies	36	33	39	60	37	34
Negative discourse by politicians	68	63	65	75	90	87
Age	*15–17*	*55+*	*15–17*	*55+*	*15–17*	*55+*
Negative changes in law and policy	24	13	22	15	47	40
Lack of enforcement of existing laws & policies	33	35	37	47	32	46
Negative discourse by politicians	59	50	40	43	80	91

Source: European Union Agency for European Fundamental Rights.

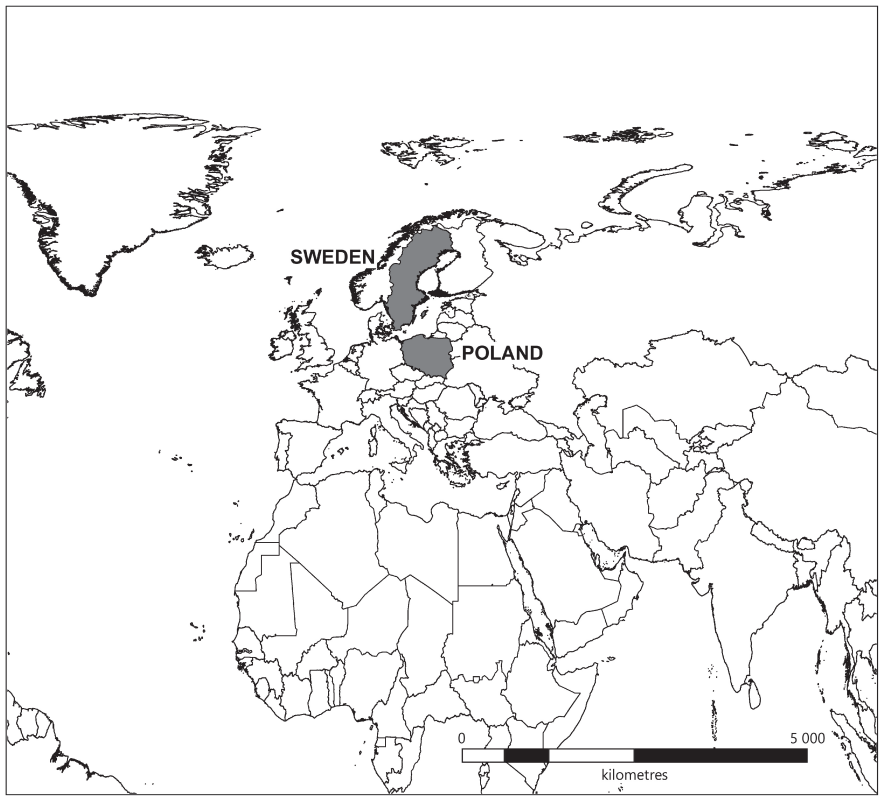

Figure 28.1 (a) The study area. Action and reaction in favour of LGBTQI+ people – examples from Poland (b, c) and Sweden (d, e) (*Continued*)

Figure 28.1 (Continued)

Figure 28.1 (Continued)

and live in rural areas in Poland declare that negative discourse by politicians has been the reason for the increase in prejudice, intolerance and/or violence against 43 percent of the population in the same age bracket in Sweden.

Action and reaction against LGBTQI+ in Poland and Sweden

The first example from Poland are anti LGBTQI+ actions taken by local governments. For instance, LGBTQI+ free zones were established in some Polish towns by the resolutions of town councils with a majority of right-wing councillors. This is an expression of opposition to the so-called queer ideology, which, in the understanding of its supporters, is aimed at destroying traditional values such as the family understood as the union of a woman and a man. The act has a visual representation in space. At the entrance to the town, under the plaque with the name of the town, there is a sign, see Figure 28.1(a), declaring 'LGBT-free zone' in four languages – Polish, English, French and Russian.

As a consequence of introducing zones, some foreign towns or communes suspended or terminated cooperation with these towns/areas. Moreover, the towns have been punished with serious financial consequences, such as a loss (or threat of a loss) of funds from the European Union or the Norwegian

funds. This resulted in many towns/communes in rejecting the resolutions (OKO Press, 2022). A full list of anti-LGBT resolutions or actions are listed in the Atlas Nienawiści (Gawron et al, 2023), founded by a group of activists. It is noteworthy that establishing LGBT-free zones in Poland resulted in the adoption of the LGBTQI Freedom zone in the European Union by the European Parliament (2021). It means that local governments should refrain from encouraging tolerance towards LGBTQI+ people and ban financial assistance from organisations, promoting non-discrimination and equality.

As a reaction, Poznań is the hometown of the Stonewall group, an LGBT+ organisation founded in 2015, that supports equal rights of LGBTQI+ people and combating discrimination and violence towards them. The group for instance provides legal and psychological help for LGBTQI+ people and their families, conduct training workshops about equality for schools and businesses, cooperate with local theatres, organise free testing for sexually transmitted diseases, run a shop with rainbow gadgets, a hostel and a drink bar (Stonewall Group, 2023). Taking part in events for LGBT+ people is one way to support the group. There is an estimate that 67 percent of LGBTQI+ people take part in pride events while the vast majority (94%) of non-LGBTQI+ do not take part in such events. The positive example is the support of minorities developed by 'Tęczowe seniorki' ('Rainbow seniors'). The group of elderly activist women, full of energy, participate in various events, wearing colourful rainbow dresses: Figure 28.1(b) shows a picture of 'Tęczowe seniorki' in the equality parade in Poznań.

Although visibility and acceptance of LGBTQI+ individuals in Swedish rural areas are similar to those in urban areas, in some villages traditional values and conservative attitudes may prevail, making it challenging for individuals to openly express their sexual orientation or gender identity. Figure 28.1(c) illustrates homophobic attitudes in rural Sweden. Access to LGBTQI-specific resources, including healthcare, mental health services and support organisations, may be more limited in some areas but the support of by the Swedish Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex Rights (RFSL) which is a non-profit organisation founded in 1950 (which makes the organisation one of the oldest in the world) makes a difference by providing support. As of 2018, it had approximately 7,000 members and 36 regional offices spread over the country (RFSL, 2020). Figure 28.1(d) shows a regular meeting of RFSL in Sweden. Sweden is one of Europe's most gay-friendly countries and an indication is that the EuroPride has held three times in the country since the turn of the twenty-first century, often occurring in larger cities.

Conclusions and recommendations

This chapter set out to report on safety of LGBTQI+ people in Poland and Sweden with a focus on rural areas. Data on victimisation suggests underreporting of crimes, particularly in Poland, where shifting attitudes towards LGBTQI+ individuals have influenced reporting patterns. Both in Poland and in

Sweden, strangers are the most common type of perpetrator. Variations exist in victimisation from sexual harassment and violence of different types in both countries. In Poland, more than 80 percent of respondents believe that the reason for the increase in prejudice, intolerance and/or violence is associated with negative discourse by politicians, both in urban and rural areas. For 60 percent of those who live in rural areas in Sweden, the most important reason for the increase was the lack of enforcement of existing laws and policies, only 39 percent of those living in urban areas believe that. In the United States, rural states are significantly more likely to have harmful, discriminatory policies against LGBTQI+ people than more urbanised states (MAP, 2019).

Hate harassment against LGBTQI+ individuals is most rampant in public spaces, such as streets and squares, according to a 2019 survey by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. Surprisingly, rural areas generally report fewer hate crimes, with Poland showing a narrower urban-rural disparity. However, the online landscape tells a different story, revealing higher incidents in rural areas, especially in Sweden, notably among the older population. The fear of assault or harassment prompts individuals to keep their gender identity/sexual orientation concealed, particularly in public transport and spaces. Regardless of country or location, the private and semi-private spheres are perceived as safer, although rural Poland sees a reluctance to disclose identification even with medical professionals.

The close-knit nature of rural communities can have both positive and negative effects. On one hand, it may foster a sense of community and support, but on the other it may also lead to increased scrutiny and potential backlash for those who do not conform to traditional norms.

Being a victim of strangers in public places is the most common condition where one is victimised because of its sexual status/identity. Limited research highlights that specific locales within communities, such as dimly lit streets or secluded spots like public toilets, can instil fear and anxiety in LGBTQI+ individuals, who are often targeted in these spaces (MUCF, 2021; Nourani et al., 2020). Paradoxically, these same places can function as 'safe oases' for the queer community, offering privacy for gatherings and transforming into arenas of everyday resistance and empowerment. Meanwhile, international evidence suggests that while some rural areas may pose challenges for LGBTQI+ individuals, others can be inclusive and welcoming.

Actions and reactions against discrimination and violence targeting the LGBTQI+ community in rural areas can take various forms as it was illustrated in this chapter in two ways. There exist examples of strong agency and actions from organisations advocating for inclusive policies at the local level that protect LGBTQI+ individuals against discrimination, such as through establishing support groups or safe spaces for LGBTQI+ individuals in rural areas. Another example is the gay parade in both countries which promotes visibility and creates a sense of community pride.

It is acknowledged that the way in which this chapter has been written is somewhat superficial given the aggregated level of the statistics but it is

hoped that it may be sufficient to spark the interest for new research questions and more in-depth research on the topic. An example would be to focus on a better understanding of the types of public places that are now perceived as unsafe by LGBTQI+ communities in both urban and rural areas. In rural areas, the focus could be on older adults while in urban areas the focus could be on young people and schools. For those living in rural areas, it is important to address the urgent issue of LGBTQI+ harassment online and emphasise the significance of inclusivity and safety for all individuals, given the pervasive impact of online harassment on mental health and well-being.

In rural areas, remoteness and/or geographical isolation can have several implications for responses to LGBTQI+ safety needs, including limited resources, less training and fewer specialised units. This can impact on the capacity of rural communities to address the unique challenges faced by LGBTQI+ communities. This also requires basic indicators (the collection of data, improved reporting mechanisms and increased accountability) but also cultural change. By framing the issue as a collective responsibility and promoting understanding, increased efforts can be motivated to combat LGBTQI+ harassment and foster a more inclusive and safer environment for all.

Notes

1 Survey data explored is available online at https://fra.europa.eu/en/data-and-maps/2020/lgbti-survey-data-explorer
2 Available at https://www.sakraplatser.abe.kth.se/queering-the-city/

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