

Sexual orientation ranks third in bias crimes FBI stats fail to report scope of problem, activists say

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By ELIZABETH PERRY

Sexual orientation is the third most prevalent motivation in bias-related crimes, according to an analysis of 2005 incidents recently released.

The FBI Hate Crime Statistics 2005 report, released Oct. 16, was published by the Uniform Crime Reporting Program and showed race played the largest factor in bias crimes.

The analysis examined 7,160 single-bias incidents, 5,190 of which were classified as hate crimes. Some 54.7 percent of incidents were motivated by race, 17.1 percent by religion, and 14.2 percent by sexual orientation, the report said.

In 2004, 15.7 percent of reported hate crimes were motivated by sexual orientation.

Some gay rights groups have said the number of sexual orientation-based bias crimes is disproportionate considering the number of gays, lesbians, bisexuals and trans people in the United States.

“We are roughly 4 percent of the population, and you can see by the numbers that it’s the tip of the iceberg,” said Matt Foreman, executive director of the National Gay & Lesbian Task Force.

Clarence Patton, executive director of the New York City Anti-Violence Project, said the FBI’s statistics reflect only a fraction of the hate crimes against gays.

“If a state doesn’t have a mandate to send statistics to the FBI they don’t submit them,” he said. “Even in states where there are hate crime laws and mandates, you find they don’t report, they report erroneously or they willfully don’t report [hate crime statistics].”

Patton said his organization released its own statistics for 2005 in April under the auspices of the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs, which based its data on information from victim service organizations. The report included almost 2,000 hate crimes committed against gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgendered people in 13 cities and states. He said the coverage area is one-tenth of the United States, but that the coalition study ends up with more reported cases on the average. Georgia was not included in the NCAVP report.

“Even places with hate crime laws don’t always include sexual orientation,” he said. “It suppresses any effective way to get halfway decent data on FBI statistics.”

The FBI statistics came just three days after the death of Michael Sandy, 29, a gay black man from New York. Sandy went to a parking lot in Plum Beach, Brooklyn the night of Oct. 8, thinking he was going to connect with a man he met online. He was jumped and beaten by a group of men who chased him into traffic on the Belt Parkway, where a car struck him. He was hospitalized in critical condition until Oct. 13, when he was taken off life support and died.

“To move toward environmental change you have to raise awareness,” Patton said. “One example of how it can work is looking at how we have strategized and responded to domestic violence. While hate crimes bills provide a good punitive response to an event that has already occurred, it won’t prevent other future incidents.”