

LGBT Domestic Abuse Forum: information sheet one

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) domestic abuse

What is the LGBT Domestic Abuse Forum?

The LGBT Domestic Abuse Forum is a network of practitioners, activists and researchers working around the issue of LGBT domestic abuse. It exists to provide a forum in which to meet, network and exchange good practice. This information sheet has been produced to identify some of these issues and should be read with reference to the [LGBT domestic abuse resource list \(information sheet two\)](#), which identifies some of the main organisations, research and practice materials working on or relating to this issue.

- You are welcome to use the information in this information sheet, but please cite the LGBT Domestic Abuse Forum as your source.

Defining LGBT domestic abuse

The UK Government defines domestic abuse as:

'Any incident of threatening behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional) between adults who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality.'

While most definitions of domestic abuse include a reference to sexual orientation or gender identity, there is often a lack of specific information on the services available to members of these communities or some of the unique needs they may face.

It is also important to recognise that most people think of domestic abuse as being perpetrated by someone's former or current partner (some agencies only work with this type of domestic abuse). However, abuse can also be perpetrated by other members of an individual's family, for example, by parents or siblings when someone discloses their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Within Scotland the definition of LGBT domestic abuse is slightly different¹:

Domestic abuse can be perpetrated by partners or ex-partners and can include physical abuse (assault and physical attack involving a range of behaviour), sexual abuse (acts which degrade and humiliate and are perpetrated against the person's will, including rape), and mental and emotional abuse (such as threats, verbal abuse, racial abuse,

¹ Information supplied by the LGBT Domestic Abuse Project in Scotland
<http://www.lgbtdomesticabuse.org.uk/>

homophobic/biphobic/transphobic abuse, withholding money and other types of controlling behaviour such as 'outing' or the threat of 'outing' or enforced isolation from family and friends).

In accepting this definition it must be recognised that children are witness to, and may be subject to the abuse, and children who witness or are used in the abuse, can experience stress and fear and may suffer a range of adverse effects, including physical injury, poor health and an array of psychological difficulties.

How many LGBT people experience domestic abuse?

Estimates of prevalence vary, usually because of the methodological difficulties of conducting rigorous research within the LGBT communities. Within the UK, there is limited research into this issue:

- One national survey into prevalence among lesbians and gay men reported that 29% of and 22% of women had experienced domestic abuse. Of these, 24% and 19% had experienced some recurrent abuse.²
- Most recently, Donovan et al³ carried out a national survey into the experience of domestic abuse among gay men and lesbians, in which around 38% of respondents reported they had experienced domestic abuse at some time in a same-sex relationship.
- An evaluation of a men's domestic abuse project in South Wales reported that 31.2% of gay men referred were assessed as being at high or very high risk, with 27% of gay men being experiencing repeat victimisation.⁴
- Our knowledge of the experience of trans community is limited, although one study found that one in ten transgender people had experienced domestic abuse, while another found that 50% of participants had been raped or assaulted by an intimate partner.⁵

For more examples of research, please see the [LGBT domestic abuse resource list \(information sheet two\)](#). It is important to remember that these reports are descriptive: they do not mean that this is the prevalence at which domestic abuse occurs in the LGBT communities. What we do know is that LGBT domestic abuse is clearly a significant problem.

² Henderson, L (2003). *Prevalence of Domestic Violence among Lesbians and Gay Men*. London: Sigma Research. <http://www.sigmaresearch.org.uk/projects26.html>

³ Donovan, C., Hester, M., Holmes, J., & McCarry, M. (2006). Comparing Domestic Abuse in Same Sex and Heterosexual Relationships. ESRC report. University of Sunderland and University of Bristol. www.bristol.ac.uk/sps/downloads/FPCW/cohsarfinalreport.pdf

⁴ Robinson, R. & Rowlands, J (2006). *The Dyn Project: Supporting Men Experiencing Domestic Abuse*. Cardiff: As author. http://www.caada.org.uk/library_resources.html#3

⁵ Ristock, J (2005). *Relationship Violence in Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender/Queer [LGBTQ] Communities: Moving Beyond a Gender-Based Framework, Violence Against Women Online Resources* <http://www.vaw.umn.edu/>

What's the problem?

Domestic abuse among the LGBT communities is often overlooked. At worst, members of the LGBT communities have received a hostile or ignorant response to their experience of domestic abuse. There is a lack of specialist service provision and many generic services are not geared to provide appropriate safety planning and support to LGBT people who have experienced domestic abuse.

Equally, the LGBT communities have been reluctant to address the issue of same-sex domestic abuse for fear of prompting, or exacerbating, homo/bi/transphobia. The reality is that domestic abuse can affect anyone, regardless of their sexual orientation, age, gender, race, religion or ability.

Action points

Talking about domestic abuse can be difficult. People may feel embarrassed, frightened or unsure of how agencies will respond. This may be even worse if someone is LGBT; in addition to disclosing their experience of abuse they will have to 'out' themselves by disclosing their sexual orientation or gender identity. The impact of homo/bi/transphobia (whether this is real or perceived) may prevent them from doing this. For example, there has traditionally been a mistrust of generic services (e.g. the Police) and some people may think that they will experience discrimination if they report their experiences.

Although every person's experiences will be unique, someone experiencing domestic abuse may feel some or all of the following:

- Isolation (for example, from family or friends)
- Confused (about why someone they love could treat them in a particular way)
- Depressed
- Always on edge (often described as 'walking on egg shells')
- Threatened (by their (ex) partner's behaviour or potential behaviour)
- Afraid of repercussions.

Issues about LGBT domestic abuse

Many of the issues that LGBT people face in relation to domestic abuse are comparable to their heterosexual counterparts. However, there are specific issues that can affect LGBT people which need to be addressed to increase safety and reduce risk. These may include:

- Threats to 'out'⁶

⁶ i.e. to disclose someone's sexual orientation or gender identify without their consent, for example to their employer or family

- Fears that no-one will help because someone 'deserves' the abuse (perhaps because of a belief that service providers are either homo/bi/transphobic or heterosexual)
- Claiming that domestic abuse is a 'normal' part of LGBT relationships
- Undermining someone's sense of identity
- Controlling someone's access to social networks, particularly with regard to sexual orientation or gender identity.

There are also specific barriers to accessing support which include:

- Real or perceived homophobia from service providers
- The need to 'out' oneself to access services
- The potential impact of internalised homo/bi/transphobia
- A lack of appropriate or specialist services (particularly access to crisis housing provision)
- A lack of training in relation to LGBT domestic abuse, including a failure to screen for alleged perpetrator and victim/survivor
- A lack of confidence in the Criminal Justice System, which can be a barrier to getting advice and support.

There are also a number of myths about domestic abuse which can prevent people getting help, especially if used by a perpetrator. Equally, they may stop some agencies taking the issue of LGBT domestic abuse seriously. For example, some myths suggest that:

- Abuse between people of the same-sex is 'mutual';
- If abuse occurs, both the person experiencing domestic abuse and perpetrator will 'play out' gender roles (for example, a gay male victim/survivor will be smaller and more effeminate);
- Abuse just 'happens' in LGBT relationships;
- That no one will help someone who is experiencing domestic abuse because they are LGBT;
- That someone experiencing domestic abuse who is LGBT is more able to leave a relationship, perhaps because there are no children.
- That domestic abuse does not happen to trans people⁷

All these myths are based on misconceptions. Where someone is experiencing domestic abuse it is because one person (their partner) is attempting to exert power and control over them. *It is important to remember that nobody should have to live with violence or the fear of abuse and that domestic abuse is a crime.*

⁷ For more information on trans domestic abuse go to <http://www.survivorproject.org/>

Safety planning

For someone experiencing LGBT domestic abuse, recognising that they are experiencing domestic abuse is an important first act.

Some websites with information about safety planning include:

- **Another Closet** (<http://ssdv.acon.org.au/>): This Australian website deals with same-sex domestic abuse, but is beneficial to any LGBT person experiencing domestic abuse. It has information on assessing if your partner is abusive, safety planning and how to look after yourself after the abuse has ended.
- **Broken Rainbow** also has information on safety planning at <http://www.broken-rainbow.org.uk/content/safetyplan.htm>

Signposts

There are a number of organisations who provide support to LGBT people experiencing domestic abuse. These are listed in the [LGBT domestic abuse resource list \(information sheet two\)](#) and are either LGBT specific or have dedicated resources for the LGBT communities.

Locally, support and advice may also be available from:

- LGBT helplines or groups, as well as organisations like the Citizen's Advice Bureau who may be aware of other resources.
- Police forces should have a unit which works specifically with the LGBT communities *and/or* a domestic abuse unit (sometimes called a family support or community safety unit) which can offer direct advice and support, or refer on to other more appropriate organisations.
- In an emergency, always contact the police on 999.

Where can I get more information about the LGBT domestic abuse forum?

For more information, go to <http://www.gldvp.org.uk/> and click on the link to LGBT Domestic Abuse Forum or email the Co-Chairs at lgbtforum@gldvp.org.uk

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