

## Working with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender communities

This section has been written by the LGBT Domestic Abuse Forum and is taken from the Stella Project's *Domestic Violence, Drugs and Alcohol – Good Practice Guidelines* available to download or purchase at [www.avaproject.org.uk](http://www.avaproject.org.uk)

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. For more information email [lgbtforum@avaproject.org.uk](mailto:lgbtforum@avaproject.org.uk) or go to [www.avaproject.org.uk](http://www.avaproject.org.uk)

### Defining LGBT domestic abuse

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.

### How many LGBT people experience domestic abuse?

Estimates of prevalence vary, usually because of the methodological difficulties of conducting 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 men and 22% of women had experienced domestic abuse. Of these, 24% and 19% had experienced some recurrent abuse<sup>i</sup>
- Most recently, Donovan et al<sup>ii</sup> 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<sup>iii</sup>
- 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<sup>iv</sup>

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.

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 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.

### **LGBT domestic abuse and substance use**

Many of the issues for LGBT people will be the same as their heterosexual peers in terms of substance use and domestic abuse. There is controversy about reports of high levels of substance misuse among LGBT people. Some research has suggested that this is true, with people pointing to the central role that bars and clubs can occupy for many LGBT people. Another explanation is the impact of homophobia and heterosexism, which may exacerbate the use of alcohol and other substances as a coping mechanism for dealing with discrimination.<sup>v</sup> However, research on the levels of use and associated problems remain inconclusive.

However, there are specific issues that can affect LGBT people which need to be addressed to increase safety and reduce risk around domestic abuse and substance use. These may include:

- Threats to 'out'<sup>vi</sup>
- 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 heterosexist)
- 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 in both sectors which include:

- Real or perceived homophobia from service providers
- The need to 'out' oneself to access services or to discuss how violence and abuse is impacting on alcohol or drug problems
- 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 and/or substance use, including a failure to screen for alleged perpetrator and victim/survivor
- Unsafe practice in drug/alcohol agencies due to the fact that staff are unaware that an accompanying 'friend' of a service user could be an abusive partner
- A lack of confidence in the Criminal Justice System, which can be a barrier to getting advice and support

For survivors with problematic substance use further issues arise:

- Controlling substance use or remaining abstinent often requires staying away from the drug, alcohol or party 'scene' which the survivor may rely on to meet other LGBT people. In the immediate, this could lead to isolation and fears of not meeting a new partner or new LGBT friends
- Drug or alcohol use may be linked to stress and trauma associated with not being able to seek support mechanisms of family or colleagues for fear of being 'outed'

### Michelle's Story...

*“She even told me that if I'd do more social drinking/recreational drugs, I'd be more fun and she could enjoy me more. There was never any physical abuse, but the emotional abuse was constant and extensive.”*

<http://www.dvirc.org.au/HelpHub/Stories/Michelle.htm>

### 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 abuse, safety planning and advice for when the relationship has ended
- **Broken Rainbow** also has information on safety planning at <http://www.broken-rainbow.org.uk/content/safetyplan.htm>

### Useful contacts

There are a number of organisations who provide support to LGBT people experiencing domestic abuse.

Broken Rainbow: t 0300 999 5428; [www.broken-rainbow.org.uk](http://www.broken-rainbow.org.uk)

London LGBT Domestic Abuse partnership; [www.galop.org.uk](http://www.galop.org.uk)

SOLA – Survivors of Lesbian Partner Abuse t 020 7328 7389 (ask for SOLA)

Email: [solalondon@hotmail.com](mailto:solalondon@hotmail.com)

Ending the Silence – LGBT Domestic Abuse Project: [www.lgbtdomesticabuse.org.uk](http://www.lgbtdomesticabuse.org.uk)

There is one specialist drug/alcohol treatment agency in London operated by Turning Point's Hungerford project:

Antidote: <http://www.thehungerford.org/antidote.asp> or tel 020 7437 3523

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

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<sup>i</sup> Henderson, L., 2003. *Prevalence of Domestic Violence among Lesbians and Gay Men*. London: Sigma Research.

<sup>ii</sup> Donovan, C., Hester, M., Holmes, J., & McCarry, M., 2006. *Comparing Domestic Abuse in Same Sex and Heterosexual Relationships*. University of Sunderland and University of Bristol, London: ESRC

<sup>iii</sup> Robinson, R. & Rowlands, J., 2006. *The Dyn Project: Supporting Men Experiencing Domestic Abuse*. Cardiff: The Dyn Project

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

<sup>v</sup> Fish, J., 2006. *Heterosexism in Health and Social Care*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan,

<sup>vi</sup> i.e. to disclose someone's sexual orientation or gender identity without their consent, for example to their employer or family.