

Free To Be Safe: LGBT+ people experiencing domestic abuse



September 2018

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About SafeLives



We are a national charity dedicated to ending domestic abuse, for good. We combine insight from services, survivors and statistics to support people to become safe, well and rebuild their lives. Since 2005, SafeLives has worked with organisations across the country to transform the response to domestic abuse. Last year over 60,000 victims at highest risk of murder or serious harm received co-ordinated support from interventions created by SafeLives and our partners, along with more than 100,000 children.

No one should live in fear. It is not acceptable, not inevitable, and together – we can make it stop.

Every year, more than two million people in the UK experience domestic abuse. There are more than 100,000 people at risk of being murdered or seriously harmed; at least 130,000 children live in those households.

Domestic abuse affects us all; it thrives on being hidden behind closed doors. We must make it everybody's business.

We want what you would want for your best friend

- ✔ Help made available wherever it's needed – whether from the police, GP or hospital, or where they live
- ✔ Early, consistent and tailored support that makes them safe and meets their needs
- ✔ The choice to stay safely in their own home and community
- ✔ The perpetrator challenged to change and held to account
- ✔ A response that reflects the fundamental connection between the experience of adults and their children
- ✔ Agencies work together to meet the practical needs that people have, providing help on areas such as housing, money and access to justice

We want this for each and every person living with abuse. Wherever they live, whoever they are.



What we do

- Create a platform for victims, survivors and their friends and family to be heard and demand change
- Test innovative projects and replicate effective approaches that make more people safe and well
- Combine data, research and frontline expertise to help services improve and to influence policy makers (locally and nationally)
- Offer support, knowledge and tools to frontline workers and professionals

How we do it

- We are independent
- We focus on the practical: we believe in showing people what they can do, not telling them what they should do
- We save time and money for local areas by solving common problems once and sharing the solutions
- We are informed by evidence of what really works
- We learn from local provision and respect local circumstances, but show how national replication can be achieved
- We work across organisational and sector boundaries

About SafeLives' Insights service

Insights is a 'whole family' outcomes measurement programme specifically designed for specialist domestic abuse services supporting adults and children who have experienced or are experiencing domestic abuse, both as victims/survivors and as perpetrators.

Insights enables services to understand who is accessing their service and identify gaps, to tailor interventions and support to meet the needs of their clients and to evidence the impact of their work on improving safety and wellbeing. Frontline practitioners collect information about the people they support and submit it to SafeLives for analysis and benchmarking against national comparators. You can find out more about Insights [on our website](#).

About the Spotlights series

This report relates to victims/survivors of domestic abuse identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT) plus. We use the term plus to denote the spectrum of sexual and gender identities that people have. These may include, but are not limited to polysexual, pansexual, queer, asexual, non-binary, intersex, and genderqueer.

While we use the term LGBT+, we recognise that LGBT+ people are not a homogenous group, and those who identify as LGBT+ will have widely different identities and experiences. It is essential that practitioners always seek to understand the unique identities and needs of the people they support.

The report is part of our 'Spotlight' series which focuses on 'hidden' groups of domestic abuse victims or those with unmet needs, and proposes recommendations for both practitioners and policy makers. The series brings together survivors, practitioners, academics and charities, and provides a platform for sharing good practice, new initiatives and the latest research. The series is available online to enable the material to be seen by a wide audience.

The evidence gathered as part of this spotlight is limited to England, Wales and Scotland; we hope to expand our reach to include evidence from Northern Ireland later in our Spotlights series.

We would like to thank all the practitioners, professionals and academics who participated in this Spotlight, and particularly our two expert partners: Stonewall (the LGBT+ charity campaigning for acceptance without exception), and Galop (the LGBT+ anti-violence charity).



Most of all, we would like to thank the survivors who spoke so honestly and bravely about their experiences. Without your insight, this report would not be possible.

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Definitions

Definition of Domestic Abuse (DA)

In England and Wales the cross-Government definition of domestic violence and abuse is:

“Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality. The abuse can encompass, but is not limited to, psychological, physical, sexual, financial and emotional.

Controlling behaviour is a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour.

Coercive behaviour is an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim.”¹

In Scotland, the definition of domestic abuse as set out by the Scottish Government is:

“Domestic abuse (as gender-based 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 women and are perpetrated against their will, including rape) and mental and emotional abuse (such as threats, verbal abuse, racial abuse, withholding money and other types of controlling behaviour such as isolation from family or friends).”

¹ In March 2018 the Government launched the consultation 'Transforming the Response to Domestic Abuse' which proposes introducing a new statutory definition of domestic abuse, which includes economic abuse as one example of the type of victim experience.

Domestic abuse sector terminology

Idva/Idaa – Independent domestic violence advisor, or Independent domestic abuse advocate in Scotland. This is a specialist worker who supports a victim of domestic abuse. The Idva/Idaa will support the victim with safety planning and help them to navigate the different agencies involved, including acting as the victim's advocate at Marac.

Marac – Multi-agency risk assessment conference. A Marac is a meeting where information is shared on the highest risk domestic abuse cases between representatives of local police, health, adult and children's social care, housing practitioners, Idvas, probation and other specialists from the statutory and voluntary sectors including substance misuse. After sharing all relevant information they have about a victim of domestic abuse, the representatives discuss options for increasing the safety of the victim and turn these into a co-ordinated action plan.

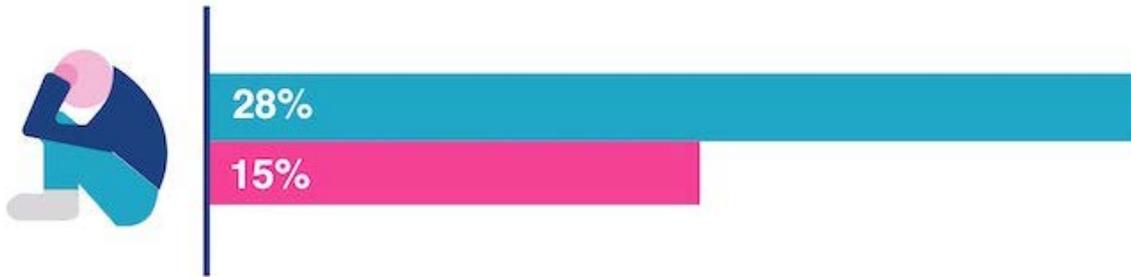
A note on language

While we use the term LGBT+, we recognise that LGBT+ people are not a homogenous group, and those who identify as LGBT+ will have widely different identities and experiences. It is essential that practitioners always seek to understand the unique identities and needs of the people they support.

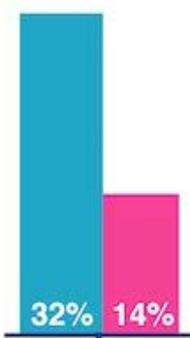
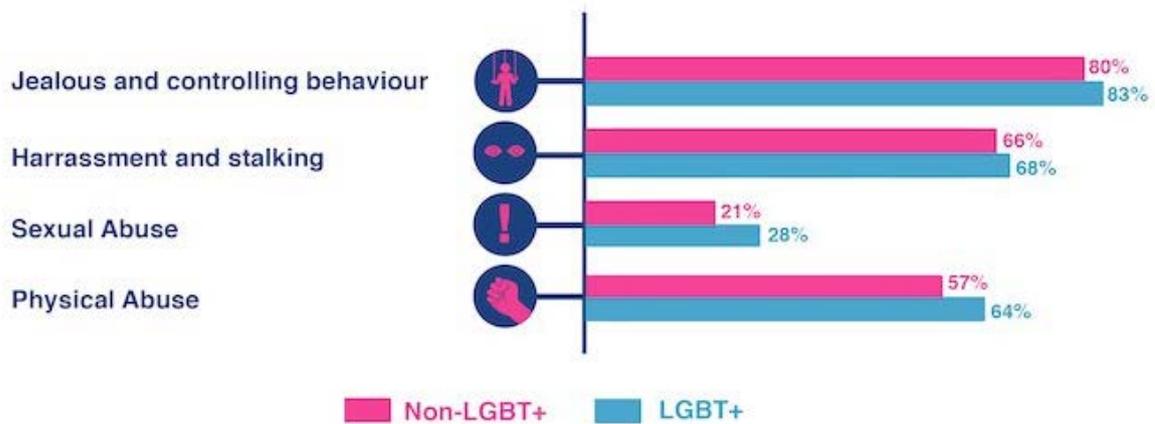
Language is fluid, we also know that the use of certain terms is disputed and can be cause for concern.

In this document we use the definitions provided by **Stonewall**. Neither they nor we use any term pejoratively. We keep our use of language under close review.

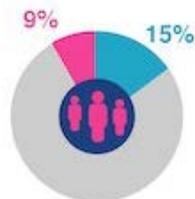
LGBT+ victims of domestic abuse are almost twice as likely to have attempted suicide



Prevalence of types of abuse for LGBT+ survivors



LGBT+ victims of domestic abuse are more than twice as likely to have self-harmed



LGBT+ victims of domestic abuse are more likely to be abused by multiple perpetrators



LGBT+ victims of domestic abuse are twice as likely to have experienced historic abuse by a family member

Executive Summary

The most common portrayal of domestic abuse is that of a male perpetrator and female victim within a heterosexual relationship. The public narrative of domestic abuse therefore can exclude those whose experience of domestic abuse does not fit this representation. While domestic abuse is most often experienced by women and perpetrated by men, it can happen to anyone, and can be perpetrated by anyone. This includes people of all gender identities and sexual orientations, and in many types of relationship.

There is very little information regarding domestic abuse within a lesbian relationship; everything seemed tailored to the heterosexual relationship, and I had to specifically look for information regarding my circumstances.

Sophie, 19, North East, quoted in Prescription for Change (Stonewall)¹

Our sixth Spotlight report explores the experiences of some of those who are not often considered in the public discourse or domestic abuse provision: those who identify as LGBT+. The government's national LGBT survey and Action Plan², launched in July 2018, identifies that there is far more to be done to support this group of victims and survivors, who will often be experiencing prejudice in their everyday lives alongside domestic abuse.

Hidden from services

We know that those who identify as LGBT+ face additional barriers to accessing support that are unique to their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. Evidence suggests that LGBT+ victims and survivors are not accessing services at the same rate as others in the population.

There is variation in estimates about the size of LGB populations, and even less data on transgender populations, but Public Health England's current estimate for the national LGB population is between 2.5% and 5.8%³. The results of research conducted in Scotland⁴ and Wales⁵ suggest that similar estimates could be made for these areas. Access to domestic abuse support is at the lower end of this scale:

- SafeLives' national dataset shows that just 2.5% of people accessing support from Insights domestic abuse services identified as LGBT+ⁱⁱ.
- In the 12 months to the end of March 2018, only 1.2% of cases discussed at Marac were noted to involve LGBT+ victims/survivors
- Over a quarter of Maracs (26%) recorded no LGBT+ victims/survivors at all during this period.

Maracs and domestic abuse services should expect to see more than 2.5% of referrals for LGBT+ people. The limited available research also suggests that some LGBT+ people experience domestic abuse at a higher rate than non-LGBT+ people⁶. This appears to be particularly the case for bisexual women and those who identify as trans or non-binary. It is likely that many LGBT+ victims and survivors remain 'hidden' from services.

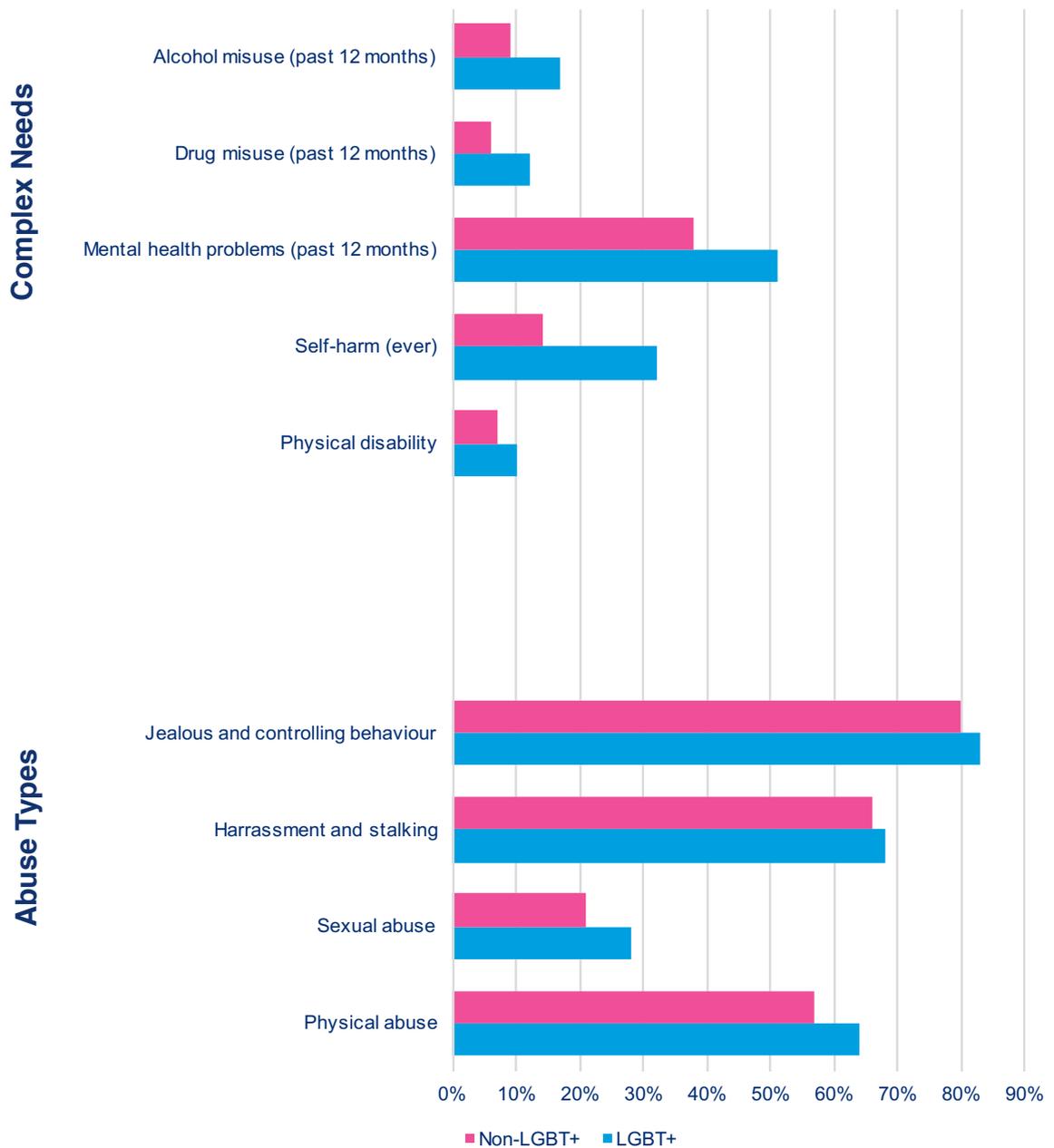
Discrimination in wider society

The government's national survey of LGBT+ people found that 40% of respondents had experienced a homophobic, biphobic or transphobic incident in the previous 12 months, committed by someone they did not live with.⁷ The daily range of institutional, structural and interpersonal abuses that LGBT+ people experience throughout their lives can deter them from accessing support for domestic abuse. There may be an assumption, based on past experience or anecdotes from others, that services will not be inclusive or even that individual professionals will be homo/bi/trans phobic. This can create a barrier to accessing support regardless of whether services are in fact inclusive and welcoming to those who are LGBT+. As this report explores, this is just one of many barriers experienced by LGBT+ people when they need to get help. Unless services proactively make themselves visibly LGBT+ friendly, a barrier remains between them and potential LGBT+ service users.

ⁱⁱ Insights data identifies trans people through a question on gender identity followed by 'was this the gender that the client was assigned at birth?' Monitoring of gender identity is being reviewed as part of the 2017-18 redevelopment of Insights.

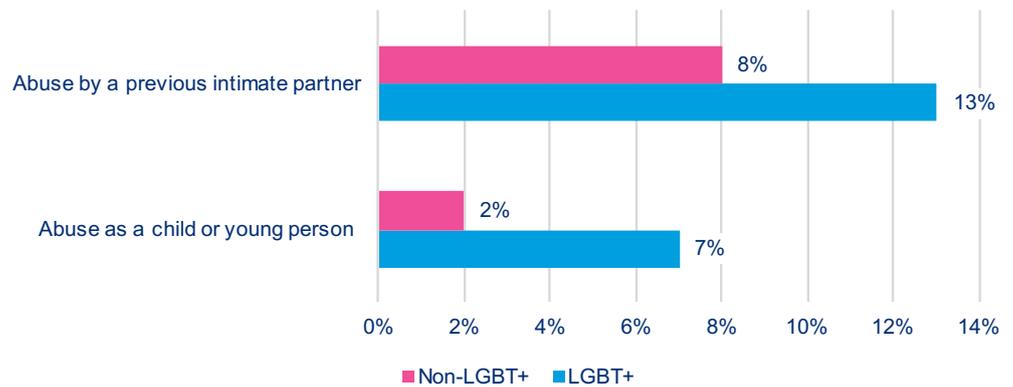
Seeing the whole person

LGBT+ victims/ survivors present with higher levels of risk and complex needs by the time they access supportⁱⁱⁱ, as highlighted by SafeLives' Insights data:



ⁱⁱⁱ With the exception of harassment and stalking, these differences were found to be statistically significant.

We also know that LGBT+ victims/survivors are not experiencing domestic abuse in isolation. There are high rates of poly victimisation; repeat experiences of abuse and discrimination over their lifetime, again highlighted by SafeLives' Insights data:



Repeated experience of abuse and prejudice may lead to or exacerbate complex needs such as substance use and mental health problems, as well as domestic abuse and the decision to respond to it.

The dynamics of abuse for LGBT+ people

LGBT+ people may also experience unique forms of coercive control targeted at their sexual orientation or gender identity. For instance, for those not 'out' to wider networks, the threat of 'outing' gender identity or sexual orientation can be a source of power and control for the perpetrator. Research by Stonewall found that over half (51%) of transgender people who had experienced domestic abuse in the last year reported that their partner had ridiculed their gender identity.⁸

These experiences affect how LGBT+ people experience and respond to domestic abuse, and as such the best ways for services to help LGBT+ victims and survivors to stay safe. Importantly, additional needs and wider experiences of abuse and discrimination will affect LGBT+ victims/survivors and perpetrators alike and will need to be considered in the response to both.

The importance of specialist support

Well-resourced specialist LGBT+ support within the domestic abuse sector is key to effective support for LGBT+ victims and survivors. Specialist services or dedicated practitioners are best placed to engage with those who have little or no trust in non-LGBT+ domestic abuse services. They can also act as a bridge between their clients and these non-LGBT+ services. However specialist services are extremely limited; it is vital that non-LGBT+ domestic abuse services are adequately trained and equipped to respond to victims/survivors confidently and sensitively.

Our data shows that where non-LGBT+ services are engaging with LGBT+ people, there is a bias towards female bisexual women who have experienced abuse from a male partner. SafeLives' Insights data shows that almost half (46%) of the LGBT+ victims/survivors accessing non-specialist domestic abuse support were female and bisexual, and the vast majority of those (85%) were experiencing abuse from a male perpetrator. It is important that the domestic abuse sector is better able to support individuals whose experience differs from male to female abuse.

The first step towards helping people who identify as LGBT+ to access support must be raising awareness within society as a whole that domestic abuse can happen to anyone regardless of sexual orientation and/or gender identity, as this report will explore.

Recommendations

LGBT+ victims and survivors of domestic abuse need services to show an understanding of their experiences and to be 'culturally competent' in their response. This also needs to be understood by those funding, commissioning and shaping domestic abuse services. Below are our recommendations for change, which stem from the findings outlined in this report:

Recommendations for national governments

- 1. Central and local governments** should make funding available for specialist LGBT+ domestic abuse support.
- 2. Central governments** should provide funding to develop second-tier capacity in the specialist LGBT+ domestic abuse sector. This would enable specialist services to support the wider domestic abuse sector in improving consistency of support, for instance through developing ways to measure and monitor quality and impact of services.
- 3. The UK Government Equalities Office** should fund specialist LGBT+ domestic abuse services to provide training to statutory agencies to increase their understanding of the experience of domestic abuse for LGBT+ people. This will increase the confidence of these agencies to identify and refer victims and survivors to support services.
- 4. Central and local government strategies, plans and imagery** should reflect the range of relationships in which domestic abuse can take place.
- 5. Central governments** should ensure guidance on Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) is fully LGBT+ inclusive; this includes:
 - For younger children: different types of families (including same-sex parents) and tackling gender stereotypes.
 - For older children: issues facing LGBT+ young people such as healthy relationships, safe sex, consent, abuse and online safety. Those aged 13+ need to be taught specifically about what domestic abuse is and how it might manifest in their own relationships, including LGBT+ relationships.

Recommendations for commissioners (including Local Government and Police & Crime Commissioners)

6. **Local commissioners** should ensure that they explicitly consider the needs of LGBT+ victims and survivors. This includes: when undertaking consultations to identify which services are needed locally; in forums for victims and service providers to share their views and experiences; and when undertaking an Equality Impact Needs Assessment (EINA)
7. **Local commissioners** should ensure they have sufficient local specialist support for LGBT+ victims and survivors. This should include seeking to commission specialist LGBT+ domestic abuse provision, so that victims and survivors have a choice. To make provision sustainable, this may involve working across local areas to develop regional pathways and working with and developing existing local LGBT+ organisations.
8. **Local commissioners** should support the non-LGBT+ specialist domestic abuse services they commission to ensure staff are confident to work with LGBT+ victims and survivors. This may include funding training or appointing a 'champion' who can take a lead in ensuring all staff members are aware of how sexual orientation and gender identity can impact on or intersect with the experience of abuse. This champion should also ensure there are robust links with local and national LGBT+ specialist domestic abuse services. Where a non-LGBT+ specialist domestic abuse service is the principle local provider of LGBT+ specialist support, the scope needs to go beyond direct work with victim/survivors and also encompass training and development work both within local statutory and third sector partners (such as health, mental health, substance use, housing) and local LGBT+ people in their networks, scene or Pride spaces.

Recommendations for multi-agency partnerships and forums

9. **Local domestic abuse forums** should ensure their membership includes LGBT+ specialist services. They should also review their awareness raising campaigns and ensure that they reflect the relationships and experiences of LGBT+ victims and survivors. Consider use of language and imagery, as well as explicit statements. For example, the '[love is many things' campaign by Durham Constabulary](#)⁹.
10. **Local multi-agency training strategies** should embed an understanding that domestic abuse can happen to LGBT+ victims and survivors and cover the unique circumstances for LGBT+ people. Training should include:

- How domestic abuse and controlling behaviour might look different for people who identify as LGBT+. Examples include forms of identity abuse, such as the threat of being 'outed' or implying or insisting a victim/survivor should behave like a 'real' LGBT+ person (as discussed in section 4).
- Specific needs or context that should be considered when developing safety plans, such as historic family abuse.
- Barriers to disclosing abuse, such as historic treatment of LGBT+ people by professionals and wider experiences of homophobic/biphobic/transphobic behaviour, leading to a distrust of mainstream services

11. Crime and Disorder Strategic Assessments, Joint Strategic Needs Assessments and comparable documents should include data on LGBT+ victims and survivors of domestic abuse. For instance, the data provided by SafeLives to monitor the number of LGBT+ people being discussed at Marac, any data from the local Police Force or data on LGBT+ victims and survivors accessing local specialist domestic abuse services. If gaps are identified, work must take place with local domestic abuse services to address these.

Recommendations for statutory agencies

12. All statutory agencies should review their protocols for recording relationship status and for monitoring sexual orientation and gender identity. The LGBT Foundation has published a [good practice guide to monitoring sexual orientation](#)¹⁰ and to monitoring gender identity¹¹.

13. Police forces, courts and prosecutors should consider implementing recording practices which clearly identify domestic abuse where the parties are of the same sex and clearly record sexual orientation. Greater Manchester Police have devised a [coding system](#) to tackle this issue of recording LGBT+ domestic abuse incidents¹².

Recommendations for domestic abuse services and other specialist services

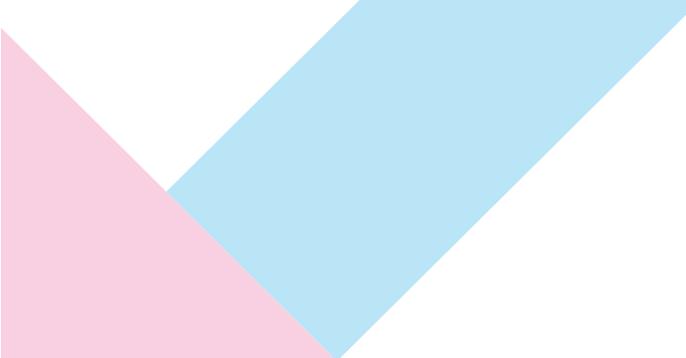
14. LGBT+ organisations (both specialist domestic abuse and other LGBT+ services) and non-LGBT+ domestic abuse services should make links with each other, to ensure that referral routes are established and understood. They should also consider mutual development opportunities such as arranging reciprocal training and awareness raising.

15. Agencies undertaking direct work with perpetrators should seek training and guidance from [Respect](#) and [Galop](#) around work with LGBT+ perpetrators

- 16. Domestic abuse services** should consider risks that are specific to LGBT+ people during risk assessment. The SafeLives Dash is suitable for risk assessment with LGBT+ victim/survivors of domestic abuse, but practitioners must consider the additional risks and needs that an LGBT+ client could be facing, such as abuse targeted at sexual orientation or gender identity. For instance, Stonewall Housing have developed an [LGBT+ specific risk tool](#) to use alongside the Dash when supporting LGBT+ clients¹³.
- 17. Domestic abuse services** should review their policies and processes to ensure they do not embed an assumption that clients could only identify as heterosexual and/or cisgender. Services should have a clear policy on LGBT+ inclusion, and specific statements about inclusivity on promotional material.
- 18. Domestic abuse services** should develop and display promotional material in LGBT+ spaces, though not exclusively. Many LGBT+ people won't use LGBT+ only spaces so a more universal approach is needed.

Recommendations for everyone

- 19. Domestic abuse services, Maracs and multi-agency partners** should review their information sharing policies in light of the possible anxieties and concerns LGBT+ people may have about disclosing their identity. Timely and appropriate information sharing is crucial for safeguarding victims of domestic abuse; this is what domestic homicide reviews and serious case reviews frequently demonstrate. However in recording and in sharing sexual orientation and/or gender identity professionals must treat this information as carefully as they would other highly sensitive disclosures.
- 20. All agencies in a position to identify domestic abuse** should familiarise themselves with guidance, such as the [factsheet by Galop](#)¹⁴, on the unique aspects of LGBT+ domestic abuse.
- 21. Domestic abuse services and national and local commissioners** should ensure survivor groups who are asked to feed into commissioning decisions or help to shape service provision are inclusive of LGBT+ victims and survivors of domestic abuse; hearing and responding to the voice of the victims/survivors is crucial to effective service provision. This feedback should be used to identify barriers to accessing support, and ensure policies and practices are informed by the views and experiences of LGBT+ victims and survivors.



Introduction

Our sixth Spotlight report focuses on victims/survivors of domestic abuse identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or trans (LGBT) plus. We use the term plus to denote the spectrum of sexual and gender identities that people have. These may include, but are not limited to polysexual, pansexual, queer, asexual, non-binary, intersex, and genderqueer.

While we use the term LGBT+, we recognise that LGBT+ people are not a homogenous group, and those who identify as LGBT+ will have widely different identities and experiences. It is essential that practitioners always seek to understand the unique identities and needs of the people they support.

The experience of domestic abuse for LGBT+ people will be similar in many ways to those who do not identify as LGBT+. For instance, research has found that the role of power dynamics, the cyclical nature of abuse, and the escalation of abuse over time, are similar between same-sex and heterosexual relationships^{15 16}. However, evidence also suggests there are some aspects of domestic abuse that are unique to the experience of LGBT+ people¹⁷, such as abuse that is targeted at sexual orientation or gender identity. As this report will discuss, LGBT+ people often experience multiple forms of disadvantage and abuse, which will influence the experience of seeking support and recovering from domestic abuse.

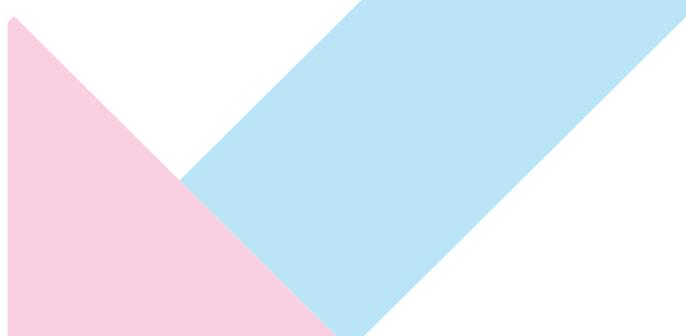
This report will use SafeLives' Insights national dataset and wider evidence to help demonstrate the nature of domestic abuse that LGBT+ people can experience. Our Insights dataset is collected by specialist domestic abuse services who support people aged 16 and over.

The report will draw on evidence gathered during the Spotlight series to help understand the experiences of victims and survivors who identify as LGBT+, and the support that they need. This includes evidence from practitioners, experts and, most importantly, the views of domestic abuse survivors themselves.

Due to the wide scope of the topic this report will focus on five key findings that arose from the evidence which was contributed to our Spotlight. We have used this evidence to make recommendations for change.

She hits you. Once, then again and almost every day and you feel so weak inside. Your dad takes you to one side and tells you to get a grip, to be a man and act like one. There are no trannys in our family he says.

Suzie, Trans survivor of domestic abuse*



Policy context: recognition and rights of LGBT+ people

There has been considerable progress in the recognition and rights of LGBT+ people in the UK over the last fifty years. In 2018, following a survey of over 100,000 LGBT+ people within the UK, the government released their 2018 LGBT Action Plan, which contains a number of key recommendations including some specifically related to help for LGBT+ people experiencing domestic abuse. However the legacy of previous prejudiced attitudes and legislation is still influencing the lives of LGBT+ people, and more needs to be done to ensure protection from discrimination and abuse.

Many people alive today will be able to remember a time when sexual acts between men were criminalised. It was not until 2001 that age of consent equality came into law in England, Scotland and Wales. Sexual acts between women were not similarly criminalised, in large part because legislators failed to even conceive of them existing.

It is not only criminalisation of certain acts that has historically marginalised and oppressed LGBT+ people. Until 2001 (Scotland) and 2003 (the rest of the UK) the Local Government Act 1988 prevented Local Governments, and by association schools, from 'promoting homosexuality'. This prevented LGBT+ young people from receiving information and support about same-sex relationships in schools. As this report will explore, without recognising same-sex relationships and ensuring they can be discussed openly, we risk young LGBT+ people growing up without a clear understanding of what a healthy same-sex relationship looks like.

As schools in England prepare to implement a new statutory Relationships & Sex Education curriculum, the content of which is currently under consultation¹⁸, LGBT+ and domestic abuse groups alike are working to ensure this adequately covers diversity of gender, sexuality and related issues around healthy relationships. Unfortunately the implementation of this new curriculum has been delayed by a year, from 2019 to 2020¹⁹. It will also be important to consider LGBT+ inclusivity as the Welsh government considers the recommendations of the Sex and Relationships Education Expert Panel, held in 2017.

During this time there has also been progress for the recognition and rights of trans people. The Gender Recognition Act 2004 afforded trans people legal recognition of their gender by obtaining a Gender Recognition Certificate (GRC). This meant that a trans person could have their birth certificate reissued with the appropriate gender, which ensures that they can have their insurance and pension policies administered correctly, and get married or enter a civil partnership in their gender identity. However obtaining a GRC is expensive, bureaucratic, medicalised and emotionally taxing, and so many trans people feel unable to apply for one. The Act is not open to everyone: it does not cover legal recognition for non-binary people, or under 18s.

Of particular relevance to trans people in abusive relationships, trans people who are married before they transition must either divorce or ask their partner for consent before being able to change their legal gender via a GRC. This can put trans people who are experiencing abuse under further power and control of their abusive partner. On 3rd July 2018 the UK government launched a consultation which seeks to understand how government can reform the legal recognition process for transgender people.²⁰ This presents an important opportunity to address gaps in the existing policy.

In respect of accessing gender specific services such as women's refuges, the Equality Act (2010) mandates services to be trans inclusive. However, the wording may be interpreted in such a way as to exclude any trans person who has not undertaken surgery. This is not the case; the Equalities Act states 'a person has the protected characteristic of gender reassignment if the person is proposing to undergo, is undergoing or has undergone a process (or part of a process) for the purpose of reassigning the person's sex by changing physiological or other attributes of sex'²¹. The process may include changing name or pronouns, for instance. However, the Act provides an exemption for single-sex services to provide a different service, or refuse a service, to a trans person in cases where they can demonstrate that doing so constitutes a 'proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim'. This does not permit single-sex services to have a blanket ban on trans service users. In practice a number of services report that they have already developed practical arrangements to create an inclusive service. This remains a very mixed picture across the UK and the subject of significant debate.

While wider legislation on LGBT+ rights has been developing, there have also been developments in the policies and legislation that protect LGBT+ victims of domestic abuse. The Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004 improved the protection offered to victims of domestic violence in England and Wales, and particularly to victims in same-sex relationships, by ensuring cohabitants and those in civil partnerships could obtain appropriate protection orders and that arrests for breaches of non-molestation orders were less problematic to secure.²²

In recognition of disproportionate numbers of domestic abuse victims/survivors being women and girls, the UK Government's approach to and provisions around tackling Domestic Abuse have been entwined with its Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) strategy since its inception in 2010. The renewed 2016 strategy does recognise the 'multiple forms of discrimination and disadvantage or additional barriers to accessing support' that LBT women face. It also highlights effective local commissioning as the answer to ensuring the full range of local needs are met.²³

The Scottish Government's approach to domestic abuse is similarly entwined with their VAWG strategy, and the Government definition of domestic abuse states that it is a gender-based form of abuse. In 2017, the Scottish Government published a delivery plan to ensure the ambitions of the VAWG strategy, Equally Safe²⁴ are achieved. This includes an action to deliver the 'Voices Unheard' programme. This programme will support LGBT+ young people experiencing violence and build capacity within violence against women services to ensure that they are LGBT+ inclusive.

In England and Wales the forthcoming Domestic Abuse Bill and its surrounding non-legislative package is a chance to embed an entitlement to services for LGBT+ victims and survivors, as well as appropriately funded and resourced specialist LGBT+ domestic abuse support. The expected refresh of the National Statement of Expectations (NSE)²⁵ could also include a stronger statement for commissioners to ensure they provide the requisite services for LGBT+ victims and survivors. Currently, the NSE requires that commissioners should ensure "access to a broad diversity of provision" and consider how services will be accessible to LGBT+ victims and survivors. This could be strengthened to say that commissioners should ensure all survivors, including those who identify as LGBT+, can access both specialist LGBT+ support as well as specialist domestic abuse support which has had the requisite help to ensure they are equipped to meet the needs of LGBT+ survivors. There is also a role for the proposed Domestic Abuse Commissioner in tracking the provision of specialist LGBT+ provision for victims and survivors to ensure commissioners are upholding their responsibilities under the NSE – providing mapping and needs analysis work across England and Wales.

We are pleased that the recent Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) Priorities for Domestic Abuse Services²⁶ expects local authorities to commission services that "responds to the needs of diverse groups" including LGBT+ victims and survivors. Without effective monitoring of whether this is happening in practice, however, and adequate funding to support what will in most local areas represent an increase in provision, it is unlikely that much will change in practice. This is true throughout the UK.

Key Findings

1. Statutory and non-statutory services are missing opportunities to identify LGBT+ victims, survivors and perpetrators of domestic abuse.

Evidence suggests that LGBT+ victims and survivors are not accessing services at the same rate as others in the population. There is variation in estimates about the size of LGB populations, and even less data on transgender populations, but Public Health England's current estimate for the national LGB population is between 2.5% and 5.8%²⁷. The results of research conducted in Scotland²⁸ and Wales²⁹ suggest that similar estimates could be made for these areas. Access to domestic abuse support is at the lower end of this scale:

- SafeLives' national dataset shows that just **2.5%** of people accessing support from Insights domestic abuse services identified as LGBT+^{iv}.
- In the 12 months to the end of March 2018, only **1.2%** of cases discussed at Marac were noted to involve LGBT+ victims/survivors and
- **Over a quarter** of Maracs (26%) recorded **no LGBT+ victims/survivors** at all during this period.

Maracs and domestic abuse services should expect to see more than 2.5% of referrals for LGBT+ people. In some cases, such as those Marac recording no LGBT+ cases, the rate of referrals is likely to reflect inaccurate identification and recording, as well as low numbers of LGBT+ victims and survivors accessing support.

Wider research suggests that some LGBT+ people experience domestic abuse at a higher rate than others in the population. Research from Stonewall³⁰ suggests that 11% of the LGBT+ population have experienced domestic abuse in the last year; twice as high as the population as a whole (4.5% as recorded by the Crime Survey England and Wales)³¹. For bisexual women this increases to 13%, and for trans or non-binary people to 19%.

^{iv}Insights data identifies trans people through a question on gender identity followed by 'was this the gender that the client was assigned at birth?' Monitoring of gender identity is being reviewed as part of the 2017-18 redevelopment of Insights.

There is little other data on the prevalence of domestic abuse among different LGBT+ identities, but in 2013 the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey³² (a study conducted in the United States) found bisexual women had significantly higher lifetime prevalence of rape, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner when compared to both lesbian and heterosexual women. Lesbians and gay men reported levels of intimate partner violence and sexual violence equal to or higher than those of heterosexuals. Although the available information is limited and therefore should be treated with caution, on the basis of this research we might expect LGBT+ victims and survivors to make up an even higher percentage of clients within domestic abuse services and Maracs than the population estimates.

We also know that, like the wider population, LGBT+ people are unlikely to report the abuse to the police. Research suggests that 78% of gay and bisexual men³³ and 80% of gay and bisexual women³⁴ who have experienced domestic abuse have never reported incidents to the police. This is in line with the wider population of victims and survivors³⁵, but the reasons behind non-reporting are even more complicated, and perhaps more entrenched. A lack of reporting may be related to the historic criminalisation of same-sex sexual acts or it may be influenced by wider and more recent experiences of homophobia and transphobia from the police and other services. In his Spotlights podcast Berkeley Wild, the founder and director of The Diversity Trust, describes his experience of reporting abuse within a same-sex relationship:

It was probably around 18 years ago, I think, when I first made contact with the police around the experience I was having of DV, and initially was on the telephone and I got laughed at and I think that was about the police officer at the time... not recognising perhaps that DV happens in same-sex relationships particularly amongst two men.

Berkeley Wild, Founder and Director of The Diversity Trust

In her interview for this Spotlight, Carol Stringer of the Dyn Project in Wales reports more recent discrimination against a gay survivor by statutory services; speaking of her client's experience of a housing provider she recounts:

They wouldn't accept that he was in a gay relationship. He felt very outraged... When the person behind the counter spoke to my client, he said, "oh your friend", it wasn't his friend, it was his partner, and that's still happening out there, even in the professional sector.

Carol Stringer, Idva, The Dyn Project

To get better at supporting LGBT+ victims and survivors of domestic abuse, we must first make sure they are visible. This is not only about helping LGBT+ victims and survivors come forward, but professionals understanding and acknowledging a client's relationship or gender identity when they do. SafeLives National Scrutiny Panel on LGBT+ people³⁶ (a multi-agency review of Marac cases involving LGBT+ people, hosted by the Home Office) advises that services may need to review recording practices. For instance, Greater Manchester Police introduced a new coding system to better capture and report on domestic abuse incidents within same sex relationships. Alongside training, awareness raising and clear referral pathways this has increased the understanding and evidence of domestic abuse within LGBT+ relationships in the local area.³⁷ Case workers should ensure they are clearly recording a person's sexual orientation or gender identity as reported by the individual themselves. Assumptions can lead to decreased visibility for some groups, as well as placing the burden on the victim/survivor to contradict any assumptions. For instance, a respondent to the government LGBT survey³⁸ provided the following example in relation to their experience of healthcare:

Healthcare providers often just make an assumption of heterosexuality meaning that you have to disclose. For example, if you say 'my partner...' when discussing something, I always get the GP/mental health worker/counsellor/nurse saying 'he' in their response, automatically assuming it is a man, when it is a woman. This has been ongoing for years. Training needs to be provided to healthcare professionals to not make assumptions.

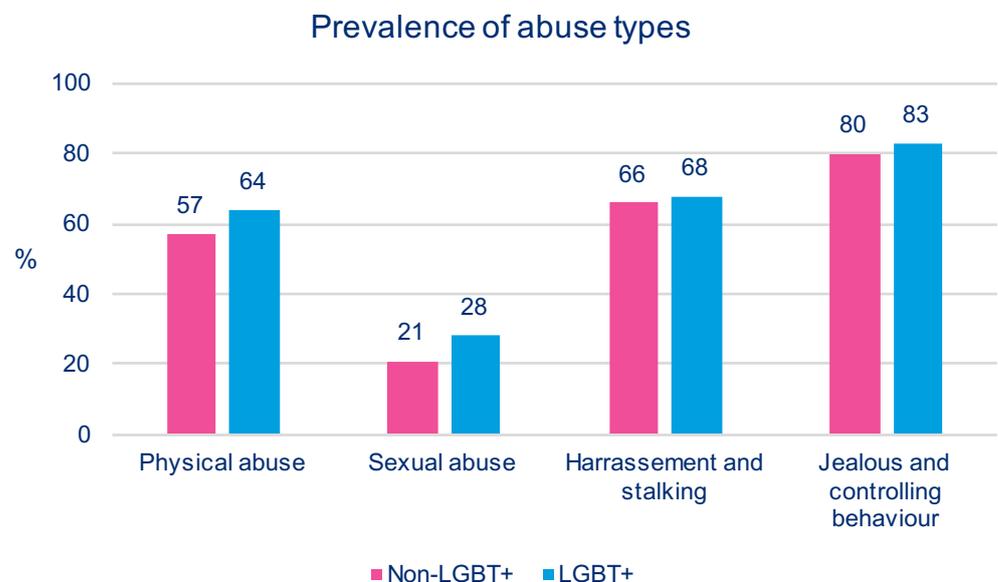
Woman, queer, 25-34, South East (as quoted in National LGBT Survey Summary Report)³⁹

The Government Equalities Office, the Office for National Statistics and the Government Statistical Service will be working together on a cross-government project to develop monitoring standards for sexual orientation and gender identity across central government⁴⁰. Until these standards are in place, other guidance and examples are included in the recommendations section of this report. Additionally, the 2018 LGBT Action Plan⁴¹ commits the Crown Prosecution Service to working with partners to improve the recording and monitoring of equalities data for LGBT+ victims of domestic abuse, rape and hate crime in England and Wales.

The National Scrutiny Panel noted that Maracs commonly receive repeat referrals for LGBT+ couples in which the identification of the victim/survivor and of the perpetrator is unclear, or changes over time (i.e. the victim/survivor is subsequently labelled as the perpetrator). This suggests that agencies are also struggling to properly assess the dynamics within these relationships. As this report will explore, the dynamics within LGBT+ relationships can differ in some ways to dynamics within non-LGBT+ relationships. Appropriately identifying abusive experiences for LGBT+ people is key to making sure they are seen and heard, and that the victim is believed rather than mislabelled as the perpetrator. This includes understanding the experiences of LGBT+ perpetrators; their own experiences of homophobia/biphobia and/or transphobia might influence the dynamics and tactics of abuse. As such, appropriate challenge to change their behaviour and address their needs may also differ to other perpetrators.

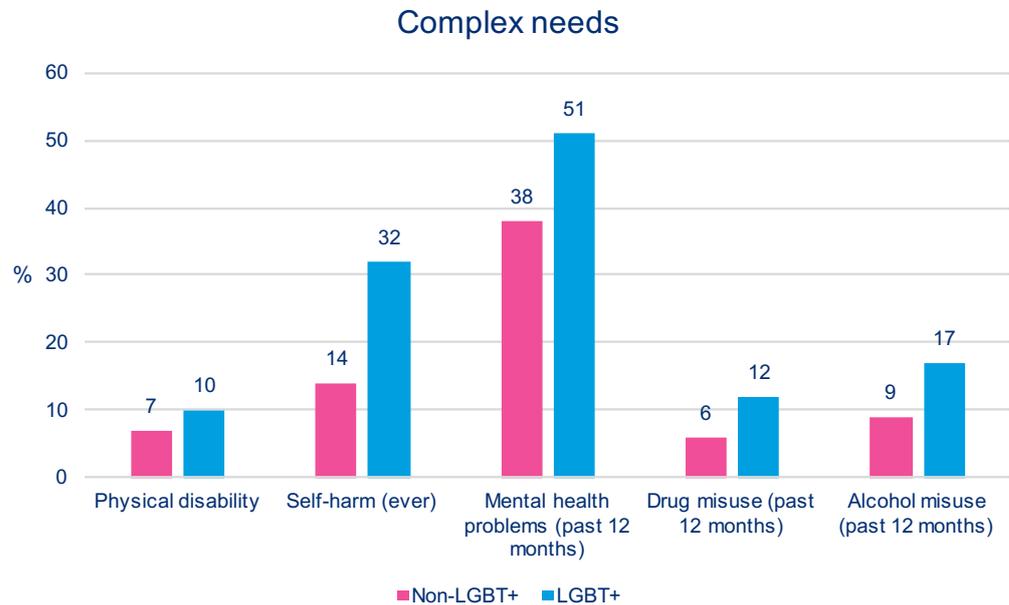
2. LGBT+ victims and survivors are experiencing high levels of risk and complex needs before they access support

SafeLives Insights data reveals that LGBT+ victims/survivors are experiencing some of the highest levels of risk and complex needs at the time they access support. Prevalence of all abuse types among LGBT+ victims/survivors is higher than those who do not identify as LGBT+, but particularly for sexual abuse^v. We need to better understand the dynamics of abuse experienced by LGBT+ people in order to fully understand the reasons for these differences; the evidence is currently too limited and further research is vital to reducing inequities.



ⁱⁱⁱ With the exception of harassment and stalking, these differences were found to be statistically significant.

At the point of accessing services, LGBT+ victims/survivors also had high levels of complex needs, compared to non-LGBT+ victims and survivors.



We know that LGBT+ people are more likely to experience all of these difficulties, regardless of whether they have also experienced domestic abuse. The Mental Health Foundation highlights that LGBT+ people are more likely to experience a range of mental health problems such as depression, suicidal thoughts, self-harm and alcohol and substance misuse. Research also suggests there is a higher rate of disability among the LGBT+ population⁴² The Mental Health Foundation notes that the higher prevalence of mental ill health in LGBT+ people can be attributed to factors including discrimination, isolation and homophobia.⁴³ Although the causes of higher disability rates are more complicated, research on the health outcomes of lesbians and bisexual women has highlighted the links between health outcomes (such as disability), certain behavioural risks (such as drug and alcohol misuse), and the conditions (such as isolation and discrimination) that might cause those behaviours. Dr Justin Varney, National Lead for Adult Health and Wellbeing England and co-author of the report spoke about these issues in his Spotlights podcast:

There is very strong evidence around the mental health inequalities affecting lesbian and bisexual women, particularly around suicidal intent and ideation and high levels of depression, stress and anxiety.

Dr Justin Varney, National Lead for Adult Health and Wellbeing, Public Health England

Many of our Spotlights contributors discussed the wider forms of abuse and discrimination experienced by LGBT+ people throughout their lives. The National LGBT Survey (2018)⁴⁴ identified that 70% of LGBT+ people had avoided being open about their sexual orientation for fear of a negative reaction. Experiences of oppression and discrimination both cause the complex needs described above, as well as have a profound influence on a person's life in their own right. In her Spotlights blog specialist LGBT Idva Sajida Bandali describes the following example, in which many forms of abuse and disadvantage intersect:

The client is a young woman who belongs to a prominent family in a tight knit religious community. The closet remains tightly shut on her lesbian identity, for she fears shaming her community. Hiding her sexuality has been difficult and it is having a detrimental effect on her mental health. She has been signed off work due to poor mental health after being 'outed' by her line manager.

Sajida Bandali, LGBT Idva, Birmingham LGBT

This is only one of many examples of wider abuse and discrimination that Sajida encountered during the week she recounts in her blog. This backdrop to the domestic abuse can also be identified in our Insights data; 7% of LGBT+ victims/survivors accessing support for domestic abuse had experienced direct abuse as a child or young person (compared to 2% of non-LGBT+ victims/survivors), and 13% had experienced abuse from a previous intimate partner (compared to 8% of non-LGBT+ victims/survivors).

The government's commitment to address domestic abuse of LGBT+ people with multiple and complex needs (as stated in the 2018 LGBT Action Plan⁴⁵) is a key step towards addressing this issue. Additionally, for those working with perpetrators of abuse or developing perpetrator provision it is important to remember that these higher prevalence levels of complex needs, and wider experiences of abuse and discrimination, are likely to be experienced by perpetrators too. The next section addresses what more should be done to reach victims earlier in their abusive relationship.

3. LGBT+ victims and survivors need support tailored to their needs and circumstances

Wider abuse and discrimination does not only lead to poor health and wellbeing outcomes but effects the experience of the domestic abuse itself and the best ways to keep LGBT+ victims and survivors safe. This section explores some of the additional experiences for LGBT+ victims and survivors of domestic abuse and how to respond to them.

Family breakdown and/or family abuse

Isolation from family and community, as experienced by Sajida's client, is a common experience among LGBT+ people, particularly those who go on to experience domestic abuse. A study on LGBT+ people in Brighton and Hove found that over a quarter of those who had experienced domestic abuse described their current relationship with their family of origin as 'poor' or 'very poor' compared to less than a tenth of those who had not experienced domestic abuse (Browne, 2007)⁴⁶. The study also found that only a third (32%) reported their families of origin as supportive of their sexual orientation and/or gender identities. When a victim of domestic abuse becomes ostracised from sources of support such as family, the resulting isolation makes the presence of the abusive partner more significant. This can create a juxtaposition of the abusive partner presenting both a level of acceptance and solidarity in the face of hostility from family, whilst at the same time presenting a risk to their partner. When fleeing family violence, people may end up in abusive relationships as the result of a range of circumstances. These may include needing somewhere to sleep and having to make quick decisions or being targeted by perpetrators. Assessment of the risk will be influenced by the person's previous experience, for instance perceiving the abuse as 'less bad' than what had been threatened by others.

Greater risk of homelessness

Circumstances such as family abuse have an impact on the needs of the victim/survivor, and how to address them. Housing is one such area of need. One study has estimated that around one third of the homeless population in urban areas is LGBT+⁴⁷. In her Spotlights podcast Leanne, a domestic abuse case worker from Stonewall Housing, looked at the housing needs of young LGBT+ people, and how they relate to other experiences of abuse.

A lot of the clients that we support are fleeing abuse from their family members, but, even if they're fleeing abuse within a relationship, they maybe have had a negative relationship with their family in the past, so don't have them to fall back on.

Leanne, Domestic Abuse Case Worker, Stonewall Housing

As well as being susceptible to homelessness, Leanne notes that due to previous experiences of abuse or hate crime based on their sexuality or gender identity, LGBT+ people are more likely to 'sofa surf' with someone they feel accepted by, rather than find other forms of accommodation. As discussed in SafeLives [Spotlight on Homelessness](#), sofa surfing can lead to victims/survivors being even less visible to services than those who access hostels or sleep rough.

Finding alternative accommodation as an LGBT+ person can also be complicated. It may be particularly important to the victim/survivor that they remain in their current location; a report by Shelter and Stonewall Housing explains that many young LGBT+ people in the UK migrate to often urban, cosmopolitan areas to try to meet other young LGBT+ people (for example, Brighton, London and Manchester).⁴⁸ Such cities tend to have a more developed LGBT+ community with support services for people discovering their sexuality and/or gender. Understanding why clients have made certain decisions about where and how to live, and asking about the places in which they do and do not feel safe, must be a starting point for the support that is provided. Importantly, the government has made a commitment (as part of the 2018 LGBT Action Plan⁴⁹) to understand the causes of LGBT+ homelessness and how government can better support LGBT+ homeless people's needs.

Insecure immigration status

SafeLives Insights data suggests that immigration issues are more common among LGBT+ victims/survivors, compared to non-LGBT+ victims/survivors. LGBT+ victims/survivors were twice as likely to need to apply for indefinite leave to remain (4%) compared to non LGBT+ victims/survivors (2%), and were more likely to have no recourse to public funds (7% vs. 5%). This issue was highlighted by case workers Millie and Iain from Galop, the LGBT+ anti-violence charity, in their Spotlights podcast; Iain explains:

A large proportion of my clients are not originally from the UK, whose immigration status is their primary concern, and that ends up being a locus of control that the abuser can use... they're very fearful of being deported back to a homophobic or transphobic country, so it's a significant risk factor for them.

Iain, Case Worker, Galop

[SafeLives Spotlight on so called 'Honour'-based violence and forced marriage](#) explores the additional difficulties faced by migrant communities, such as increased fear of reporting abuse. It includes discussion of the particular risks for LGBT+ people in this situation; for instance, gay men can be at increased risk of forced marriage.

Different experiences of abuse

LGBT+ people are not a homogenous group and our data suggests nuances in the experience of domestic abuse. For instance, SafeLives Insights data shows that those identifying as gay men were experiencing physical abuse at the highest rate; 75% of gay men within the Insights dataset had experienced physical abuse, compared to 65% of other LGBT+ groups. This is in line with findings from Galop, whose analysis of case work indicates that 76% of gay male clients experience physical abuse, compared with 69% of lesbian clients and 60% of bisexual clients.⁵⁰ This again highlights the need to better understand the dynamics behind the abuse experienced by LGBT+ people, in order to fully understand these differences and provide effective support.

Bisexual women who are victims or survivors appeared to have other specific risks, with Insights data indicating that those identifying as bisexual women experienced the highest rates of complex needs including suicidal ideation and self-harm. Similarly, research from Public Health England on lesbian and bisexual women's health and wellbeing showed much poorer mental health for bisexual women, compared to lesbian women.⁵¹ Contributors to the Spotlight note that bisexuality can be one of the most isolating sexual identities, which may account for some of this difference. Speaking in our Spotlights podcast on bisexual women, Ruth explains:

It's really erasing. It feels like almost every space that you're in, a part of you doesn't exist. If you're in the LGBT world – you're in a gay club or wherever – then you're being your same sex attracted self but then when you're with your heterosexual partner, it's like that part of you just doesn't exist.

Ruth, bisexual woman

Sophie*, a bisexual survivor of domestic abuse recounts a similarly isolating experience:

One girl who was a lesbian told me like, "Straight people don't want you because they think you're gay and we don't want you because we think you're straight."

Sophie, bisexual survivor of domestic abuse*

There are many more experiences highlighted throughout our Spotlight which must be understood in order to meet specific needs for people of different identities, such as the subculture of the chemsex scene (use of drugs such as Mkat, crystal meth, mephedrone and GHB during sexual encounters). We also recognise that there are significant gaps in our evidence and understanding and that more research needs to be funded.

There are also specific circumstances to be aware of for those working with the perpetrator of abuse. For instance, the SafeLives National Scrutiny Panel⁵² noted that running perpetrator group programmes with both LGBT+ and non-LGBT+ participants may be unsafe and create anxiety which is not conducive to facilitating change. There are currently no accredited LGBT+ specific group programmes for people who perpetrate domestic abuse in LGBT+ relationships. Information from Respect⁵³ advises that most domestic violence perpetrator programmes have been designed for men in heterosexual relationships, although some of these programmes also work with women (in heterosexual or same-sex relationships) and with gay/bi men, in a one to one setting.

The National Scrutiny Panel saw evidence of limited knowledge amongst non-LGBT+ domestic abuse services of the specific issues faced by LGBT+ survivors.⁵⁴ It is important for all those funding, commissioning and delivering domestic abuse services to understand the wider circumstances that often exist for LGBT+ victims and survivors and perpetrators, in order to provide effective person-centred support. This includes how these wider circumstances will differ for people with specific identities. Commissioners must consider the specific needs of LGBT+ victims and survivors when planning local provision and ensure there is adequate specialist support to meet their needs and to help all practitioners become 'culturally competent'.

4. A victim's sexual orientation or gender identity can sometimes be targeted as part of the abuse

Sexual orientation and gender identity does not only influence circumstances surrounding the abuse but can become targeted as part of the abuse itself. This form of 'identity abuse' can be particularly harmful and isolating. As part of this Spotlight, Suzie*, who is a trans woman, described her experience of domestic abuse from her ex-partner. She experienced this abuse at a time when she was not yet living openly as a woman, and her story shows how this became a tool for the perpetrator to use:

Life is spent feeling as if you're walking on egg shells. She's moody, and irritable and it's easier to have sex than to tell her you don't want it because you'll be ridiculed and accused of being queer... She constantly tells you to man the fuck up, and stop being such a submissive Sally.

Suzie, Trans survivor of domestic abuse*

Research by Stonewall found that over half (51%) of transgender people who had experienced domestic abuse in the last year reported that their partner had ridiculed their gender identity.⁵⁵ There are other unique forms of abuse that trans people experience and all are an attack on their sense of identity and their confidence. This can include their partner deliberately using the wrong pronouns, forcing someone to perform a gender they do not wish to present as or preventing them from medically transitioning (for instance hiding hormones or creating barriers – such as controlling finances – to accessing surgery).

Power and the misuse of power is key to understanding the dynamics of domestic abuse. In LGBT+ relationships, the perpetrator's misuse of power can sometimes be in the form of 'experiential power'. Experiential power comes when one person feels able to dictate the dynamics of the relationship on the basis that the other person has less experience with which to confidently challenge the rules they have set. Donovan et al. (2014) explain that LGBT+ relationships have more nuanced experiential forms of power which can go against the more recognisable social markers of power (e.g. age, money and gender). The authors go on to explain that a partner may be more experienced in terms of same-sex, bisexual and/or trans relationship experience; they may already be 'out'; or they may have connections to LGBT+ peer groups. This gives rise to a level of social or cultural 'capital' which the less experienced partner is excluded from⁵⁶. Research by Chan (2005) also suggests the abuser may use the 'close-knit' dynamic of the LGBT+ community and the lack of support for LGBT+ people outside the community to further pressure the victim into compliance⁵⁷.

The use of experiential power puts LGBT+ people in their first LGBT+ relationship, regardless of their age at that time, at greatest risk of abuse. Donovan et al. (2006), comparing same sex domestic abuse to heterosexual domestic abuse, found that being in a first same sex relationship was a particular risk factor⁵⁸. Examples of such experiential power can be seen in the following instance, recounted by Sajida Bandali, an LGBT Idva, in her Spotlights blog:

One of our Idvas is at the Crown Court today supporting a young client for a GBH [grievous bodily harm] trial. This is his first same sex relationship. His partner would frequently make him question his sexual identity and reinforced that no one would believe him if he reported the abuse, and that he would experience homophobia through the court process.

Sajida Bandali, LGBT Idva, Birmingham LGBT

Many of our Spotlights contributors highlighted that threatening to 'out' LGBT+ status can also be used as a form of control. Research has identified that LGBT+ people often hide outward expression of their sexual orientation or gender identity for fear of stigma and discrimination; abusive partners may exploit this fear through the threat of forced outing⁵⁹. Ard and Makadon (2011) found that 'outing' someone's sexuality or/and gender identity may be used as both a tool of abuse and a barrier to seeking help.⁶⁰ While research by Stonewall found that more than one in ten LGBT+ people (13%) who had experienced domestic abuse in the past year reported that their partner had threatened to 'out' them.⁶¹ The concept of 'outing' does not only apply to sexuality, but can also apply to HIV status, and HIV status has been shown to influence gay and bisexual men's decision making about staying in abusive relationships.⁶²

As well as recognising these abusive experiences for LGBT+ victims and survivors, it is important that all services working with LGBT+ people are aware of inadvertently similar behaviours on their own part that may cause the client further distress. For instance, it is important when sharing information to remember that for LGBT+ people there may be anxieties and concerns about disclosing their identity. Practitioners should avoid the assumption that sexual orientation and/or gender identity are aspects of self that are easy to talk about and of little consequence. We know that timely and appropriate information sharing is crucial for safeguarding victims of domestic abuse; this is what domestic homicide reviews and serious case reviews frequently demonstrate. Practitioners shouldn't avoid conversations about sexuality or gender because of embarrassment or uncertainty in how to ask the question, as a comprehensive response for someone can only be provided if you understand their particular situation. In recording and in sharing professionals should however be particularly aware of these issues and must treat this information as carefully as they would other highly sensitive disclosures.

Professionals should also be conscious of the use of pronouns, ensuring they ask the client which pronoun they wish to be addressed by and adhere to these wishes. In their Spotlights podcast Tara Stone, founder and director of Be: Trans Support and Development North (a trans community support, development and campaigning organisation), explains that in cases of historic abuse which occurred before a gender transition, mis-gendering can not only be upsetting but re-traumatising for the client.

So if you get something wrong, it's not just about you've got something a little bit wrong, well actually what you've done is you've just re-traumatised that person.

Tara Stone, the founder and director of Be

In their Spotlights podcast Iain and Millie, caseworkers at Galop, note that approaching safety planning in a way that respects the client's own agency is particularly important when considering sensitive lifestyle practices such as chemsex. Iain explains:

[Chemsex] is a sexual practice that the individual is able to have an agency decision and participate in, we just want to help people be able to be informed of their rights and make informed choices, and keep them safe... I think my concern is in historic approaches, looking at LGBT people from risk perspective has led to further oppression and further incidences of homophobia and transphobia.

Iain, Case Worker, Galop

LGBT+ people know that when they access specialist services, there is a common understanding which removes the need for them to explain their identity or educate the service provider in LGBT+ issues. By contrast this creates a wariness of accessing non-specialist services. The challenge for non-LGBT+ domestic abuse services is to clearly and confidently demonstrate that they can meet the needs of LGBT+ people. In her Spotlights podcast Evelyn Sharp, an LGBT Idva, advises case workers to be confident and upfront when asking about gender identity or sexual orientation, as any embarrassment may give a message to the client that perhaps their sexual orientation or gender identify is embarrassing or shameful. This principle can be extended to conversations about wider LGBT+ issues. Similarly, when dealing with any LGBT+ specific issues that may not be familiar, Bev Higgins and Mark Sisterson from The Rape and Sexual Violence Project in Birmingham advise 'if you don't understand any issue with a client - don't be afraid to politely ask them.'

5. Societal attitudes and lack of inclusion are preventing LGBT+ victims and survivors from accessing the support they need to get safe and recover, and mean we aren't identifying and stopping perpetrators at the earliest opportunity.

The discrimination often faced by LGBT+ people in their everyday lives can create huge barriers to accessing domestic abuse support. It's important that services not only make themselves accessible to LGBT+ people, but that they work on conveying that message clearly so that confidence in the service is built.

Trends in access to support

Data from non-LGBT+ domestic abuse services indicates that, even within the group of clients who identify as LGBT+, a large proportion of victims/survivors accessing support are experiencing male to female abuse. SafeLives Insights data shows that almost half (46%) of the LGBT+ victims/survivors accessing domestic abuse support were bisexual women, and the vast majority of those (85%) were experiencing abuse from a male perpetrator. While there is some evidence to suggest bisexual women do experience domestic abuse at the highest rate of LGB people⁶³, they appear to be accessing non-LGBT+ services at a proportionally higher rate than the difference in prevalence rates would suggest. For instance, bisexual women were represented in the Insights dataset at just under four times the rate of gay men but, according to available research, experience domestic abuse at a rate approximately two times higher^{vi}. It should be noted that research on prevalence rates is limited; it is clear that more research in this area is needed in order to properly understand accessibility of services to people of different identities.

The apparent underrepresentation of gay men in Insights data differs to data from Galop's specialist LGBT+ domestic abuse service. Galop clients most commonly identified as male (65%)⁶⁴; it may be reasonable to assume that LGBT+ men are underrepresented within non-LGBT+ services, while more likely to access LGBT+ services, because many non-LGBT+ services are women-only or perhaps predominantly advertised with women in mind.

Contributors to the Spotlight highlighted that LGBT+ people are most likely to seek help informally from family or friends, or from a specialist LGBT+ service. Galop's helpline manager, Jude Long, describes the role of the helpline in enabling LGBT+ people to access non-LGBT domestic abuse services.

^{vi} See appendix, methodology: comparing rates of LGBT+ groups

Often people... are very reassured by the fact that it is a helpline that is run by the community for the community, they will always be talking with an LGBT plus member of the team. That is where often people will want to start.

Jude Long, Helpline Manager, Galop

Barriers to accessing support

A lack of clarity around inclusion is a key barrier to accessing support. In an interview with the Voices Unheard Project at LGBT Scotland, one young person explained:

I would think that because it doesn't explicitly say they support LGBT people then we're not welcome at that service.

LGBT young person, Voices Unheard Project at LGBT Scotland⁶⁵

In his Spotlights blog, Aaron Slater (Service Manager at Sacro) echoes this sentiment: 'if there's any ambiguity in your outward messaging, then there is a risk that LGBT+ people will revert to the default that they are not included.' LGBT+ people may make this assumption about many different types of services, but there is an added barrier for domestic abuse services: domestic abuse is often discussed as a 'weaker heterosexual cis woman abused by a physically stronger man.'⁶⁶ Those in same sex relationships may not see themselves in this narrative, reinforcing the assumption that services would not support them. For men in same-sex relationships this is a double barrier as it is not only their relationship that is not represented, but their gender too. In his Spotlights podcast Berkeley Wild from The Diversity Trust notes that men he spoke to during his research in this area would often say "Well, domestic violence charities are for women. They're not for men."

Creating LGBT+ inclusive services

There are many ways in which non-LGBT+ services can help LGBT+ victims and survivors to feel more confident to approach them directly. Aaron Slater's Spotlights blog includes a range of practice tips for ensuring services are accessible, including proactive engagement with LGBT+ communities, developing links with LGBT+ organisations, clear promotional materials and training so that staff provide a consistent inclusive response. But Aaron also emphasises that services wishing to be more inclusive must begin with a 'frank discussion' about what LGBT+ inclusion means for them.

Ambiguity around inclusion of gender diverse people can create further barriers and anxiety about accessing support for these victims and survivors. Suzie*, a trans woman and survivor of domestic abuse, talks about her trepidation towards accessing services in her Spotlights blog:

Do refuges accept individuals from the transgender community? And if they do, how will other people that live in the refuge react? Will you be accepted or will you be discriminated against? Are you strong enough for all of this? There's so much to think about.

Suzie, Trans survivor of domestic abuse*

Whilst some services have worked hard to become inclusive and to advertise this to LGBT+ people, there will always be a key role for LGBT+ specialist domestic abuse provision because of the unique challenges faced by this population. This role is under increasing pressure because of stretched resources and commissioning trends which tend to overlook the importance of specialist services for particular groups of people. This is particularly the case for refuge bed spaces: in 2017 Women's Aid reported that less than 1% of refuges (two refuges, both located in London) provided specialist support to LGBT+ survivors.⁶⁷ Additionally, ManKind estimates there are only 20 bed spaces dedicated to male victims in the UK.⁶⁸ We are aware that some LGBT+ specific accommodation for survivors of domestic abuse does exist; for instance, RISE now runs the LGBT+ Refuge Project consisting of 2 self-contained flats in the community, and St Mungo's run a 6 bed space in West London for gay men fleeing domestic abuse and Hate Crime. However with the limited availability of such services it is vital that non-LGBT+ domestic abuse services are adequately trained and equipped to respond to victims confidently and sensitively. It is also important for specialist LGBT+ support to be properly funded and embedded within local services, and this must be clearly and proactively advertised to LGBT+ people and professionals responding to disclosures.

Statutory agencies should think about their inclusivity for a joined-up approach. Considering the specific needs of LGBT+ people and proactively reaching out to them is something that all services can do; this will in turn create more opportunities to identify abuse. Police Forces are an important example: currently a key route into services is referral by the police (60% of all referrals to Idva services in 2016/17)⁶⁹, but as this report has highlighted, people from LGBT+ communities are unlikely to report to the police for reasons that go beyond the usual barriers for victims and survivors. Initiatives such as Hampshire's Lesbian and Gay Liaison Officers (LAGLOs) can help to overcome these barriers. LAGLOs are police officers and staff who are dedicated to supporting lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities. In her Spotlights podcast Julie Fry, Chief Inspector at Hampshire Constabulary, explains that the role was introduced to support victims of hate crime, but has expanded to develop a better relationship between the police and LGBT+ people more broadly. Julie believes that relations with LGBT+ people have improved considerably in Hampshire as a result. The UK government's LGBT Action Plan 2018 includes a commitment to refresh the Hate Crime Action Plan, to improve the response to hate crime for LGBT+ people. This will be a positive step towards improving the response in other forces.

As well as thinking about how organisations respond to domestic abuse, we also need to broaden the public narrative of what coercive control looks like to better include the experience of LGBT+ people, so that we can better reach LGBT+ people who are perpetrating or suffering domestic abuse, as the next sections explore.

Education and awareness raising for young people

Young people are particularly vulnerable to exploitation from older partners because of the ‘experiential power’ that person holds. Young LGBT+ people face the additional challenges of not having the same access to relationship information and role models as their non-LGBT+ counterparts. Some young LGBT+ people are also unable to talk to their peers or family because of the reaction they would receive. The risk for young LGBT+ people seeking information in secret is that perpetrators will seek to target and exploit this situation.

Our previous Spotlight on young people⁷⁰ found that being able to access information on healthy relationships through education was helpful in teaching young people to recognise signs of abuse. It also improved their attitudes towards domestic abuse and provided them with options for getting support. If they have received it at all, young people have often been taught Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) that did not acknowledge a diversity of sexual orientation and gender identity. In his Spotlights blog, Jacob, a young Stonewall campaigner, reflects on his experience of RSE as a young gay man:

I only understood how (gay) sex worked when I found out myself online years later and that was scary. As an anxious gay teen the last thing you need to stumble across online is a hardcore adult video. We need to stop ‘protecting’ young people from topics like sex because they will and do find out, and a lot of the time they get the wrong idea. As I did.

Jacob, Stonewall campaigner

As well as the inadequacy of the relationships education he received, Jacob’s experience highlights that LGBT+ young people may not have the advantage of seeing relationships that they aspire to depicted in a healthy way in everyday media. Janice Stevenson, a Development Officer for LGBT Youth Scotland explains in her Spotlights blog ‘the media often depicts negative portrayals and stereotypes of same sex relationships’. Reinforcing this, the GLADD media institute’s annual ‘responsibility index’ found that a third of films released in 2017 were not deemed ‘LGBTQ inclusive’; they did not include an LGBTQ character who was a significant part of the plot and was not predominantly defined by their sexuality or gender identity. In previous years the percentage of ‘LGBTQ inclusive films’ has been considerably lower. It is therefore particularly important that myths and stereotypes about sexuality and gender identity can be dispelled in other settings, such as RSE lessons.

Ensuring LGBT+ relationships are discussed in RSE lessons can show young LGBT+ people that school can be a safe space in which to realise their identity. Schools should seek to equip themselves so they are able to offer a reassuring space to LGBT+ people, by utilising the expertise of specialists such as [Stonewall](#)⁷¹. Sophie*, who survived abuse from her partner as a teenager, describes how trying to understand her own sexuality while in an abusive relationship stopped her from speaking out about the abuse:

It was so easy, because I was so upset with myself and like (a) I was a teenage girl, like all teenage girls hate themselves a little bit, I think. And (b) having that extra dollop of figuring out your sexuality and your shame around it. It was so easy to just use those voices to silence that little nagging feeling.

Sophie, bisexual survivor of domestic abuse*

Inclusion of LGBT+ topics within RSE is still far from consistent. Stonewall reports a lack of consistency in LGBT+ representation within RSE. They conducted a UK survey of young people (11 - 19) in 2016 and 2017, and found that only 13% have learnt about how to have healthy relationships in relation to same-sex relationships, and only one in five were taught about safe sex in relation to same-sex relationships.⁷² The Westminster government is currently consulting on new statutory guidance on RSE for schools in England⁷³. As discussed in the policy section of this report, LGBT+ and domestic abuse organisations are campaigning to ensure this adequately addresses healthy relationships for all young people no matter what their sexual orientation or gender identity. In Scotland, LGBT Youth Scotland has developed the LGBT Schools Charter to help schools to be more LGBT+ inclusive.⁷⁴

Education and awareness raising for everyone

The National LGBT survey (2018)⁷⁵ gathered information on incidents of abuse (not just domestic abuse) experienced by LGBT+ people, and found that more than nine out of ten of the most serious incidents had not been reported to anyone. Common reasons for not reporting the incident were 'it happens all the time' or that nothing would change. Clearly LGBT+ people do not feel that their voices are being heard and/or that there is no commitment to addressing the abuse they face. It is easy to see how this can create an alienation from the rest of society which perpetrators of domestic abuse can exploit.

It is vital we look not just at domestic abuse, but at the wider experiences LGBT+ people have of hate crime and discrimination and examine how these issues intersect. We must seek the voices of LGBT+ people and co-develop services with them, so that we are creating an environment in which they want to report and support that they want to utilise.



Conclusion

To support LGBT+ victims and survivors of domestic abuse, we must first make sure they are visible. This is about enabling LGBT+ people to speak out, but it starts with creating an environment in which that is a safe and rewarding thing to do. Service providers can support this wider societal process by scrutinising both their response to LGBT+ people and the proactive steps they are taking to engage with them.

Frontline practitioners need to be mindful of how their client's sexual orientation and/or gender identity may intersect with their experiences of domestic abuse and understand how this impacts on risk. The support offered also needs to be reflective of and tailored to the issues faced by LGBT+ people. As ever, this starts with practitioners asking the right questions in the right way, as they do with great skill in so many other situations.

There are many specific issues highlighted throughout the Spotlights series and this report which need to be considered in the response offered to LGBT+ victims/survivors of domestic abuse. Whilst specialist LGBT+ domestic abuse services are key to supporting this population, we must also recognise the responsibility all frontline services have in responding to domestic abuse irrespective of the sexual orientation and/or gender identity of those affected. We therefore need to skill up others to become more 'culturally competent' in their response.

Cultural competence is just as important in responding to perpetrators as it is in supporting LGBT+ victims/survivors of domestic abuse. An approach that assumes all domestic abuse survivors or perpetrators share a single homogeneous identity is unlikely to be effective for perpetrators of domestic abuse identifying as LGBT+.

The importance of a tailored, specialist approach highlighted throughout this report needs to be reflected in funding and commissioning. Whether specialist LGBT+ domestic abuse provision is specifically commissioned or whether non-LGBT+ domestic abuse services are 'skilled up' to provide a response; it is crucial that LGBT+ organisations have the capacity to support the sector.

There also needs to be a broadening of the public narrative around domestic abuse. Abuse in all its guises needs to be depicted in ways that enable everyone, irrespective of their identity, to recognise it, feel able to speak out about it, and get help.

I think, you know, there is a lot of shame and stigma around [being a bisexual woman]. And I think it's easy to let that make you think, well, I feel bad about this, so it's okay for other people to make me feel bad about it and use it against me. So I think...addressing that and finding as much positivity as you can, is a good thing.

Sophie, bisexual survivor of domestic abuse*

Appendix: about the data

The method of data collection places a number of limitations on the conclusions we can draw from Insights data, as set out below. Care has been taken to use this data alongside other sources of information when producing the findings set out in this report.

Sample Size

The dataset used within this report represents 30,559 people entering services, 754 of whom identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual, or as trans. Insights data identifies trans people through a question on gender identity followed by 'was this the gender that the client was assigned at birth?' Monitoring of gender identity is being reviewed as part of the 2017-18 redevelopment of Insights.

Cases

Insights data is collected from victims/survivors at the point at which they are accessing services. This means it is not representative of victims/survivors who are not accessing services.

Data collection

Data collection is completed at two points on the client journey within a support service: intake and exit. Data is anonymous and only collected from people who consent to their data being used for monitoring and research purposes.

The Insights data used in this report is collected by 50 services using the SafeLives Insights tool during the reporting period (April 2014 to March 2017). This means that the nature (eg support offered) and location of services will not be representative of all domestic abuse services nationally.

Methodology: comparing rates of LGBT+ groups

Insights data for those experiencing abuse from an intimate partner abuse contained 92 clients who identified as gay men, compared to 347 clients who identified as bisexual women. Research by Stonewall found that 13% of bisexual women had experienced domestic abuse from an intimate partner in the last year, compared to 7% of gay men⁷⁶; the National Intimate Partner Sexual Violence survey (US) found that lifetime prevalence of rape, physical violence and/or stalking by an intimate partner was 61.1% for bisexual women, compared to 26.0% for a gay man⁷⁷. This comparison assumes similar population numbers for bisexual women and gay men; available estimates from Public Health England⁷⁸ in fact suggest the population of gay or bisexual men is higher than the population of lesbian or bisexual women, and that identifying as bisexual is less common than identifying as lesbian or gay, which would increase the expected proportion of clients identifying as gay and male.

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