



**Barriers Faced by
Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual
and Transgender +
(LGBT+) People in
Accessing Non-LGBT+
Domestic Abuse
Support Services**





0800 999 5428
www.galop.org.uk

This information aims to provide professionals supporting lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender + (LGBT+) survivors with an understanding of barriers in accessing non-LGBT+ domestic abuse support services, as experienced by LGBT+ survivors of domestic abuse.

If this information sheet doesn't answer your specific question, please contact the National LGBT+ Domestic Abuse Helpline on 0800 999 5428 or email at info@galop.org.uk.

Contains information about:

■ Domestic Abuse

Research highlights that domestic abuse in LGBT+ communities is a serious issue. However, despite high levels, it remains acutely underreported and LGBT+ survivors are disproportionately underrepresented in domestic abuse services, including criminal justice agencies.

Personal barriers typically relate to LGBT+ people's perception of themselves, the abuse and the support system, and may include:

- Failing to recognise their experience as domestic abuse.
- Belief that intimate partner violence 'doesn't happen in same-sex relationships.'
- Previous bad experiences with reporting/support services.
- Concerns about homophobia and transphobia in service provision.
- Belief that non-LGBT+ services are not for LGBT+ people.
- Belief that disclosure will not be taken seriously.
- Concerns around disclosing sexual orientation or gender identity.
- Knowledge of and connectedness to local LGBT+ community.

Underreporting of domestic abuse and low visibility of LGBT+ people within services is often a result of a range of specific barriers existing on a personal and systemic level, which prevent LGBT+ survivors from getting the help and support they need.

Structural and cultural barriers relate to the way services are designed and delivered, and may include:

- Low visibility and representation of LGBT+ issues within the service, across internal and external publications (e.g. leaflets, booklets, websites, annual reports etc.) or within physical organisational space.
- Lack of established partnerships with specialist LGBT+ domestic abuse services.
- Lack of established partnerships with local LGBT+ organisations.
- Lack of quality referral pathways.
- Poor understanding and awareness of professionals around unique forms of coercive control targeted at sexual orientation or gender identity.
- Professionals assuming that all their clients are heterosexual and cisgender.

Below, are some of the challenges that LGBT+ survivors are facing when trying to access support services:

Imagine yourself in their shoes

You are a transgender woman. During a screening process, you are repeatedly asked to describe what your genitals look like and asked invasive questions about your body, such as “Have you transitioned?”, in order to see if you are eligible for the program. Because you are desperate to get away from your abuser, you decide to answer the questions, but are refused services based on your answers.

You call the police following a physical attack by your partner. You are both women and to protect themselves, your partner makes counter-allegations. The police don’t know who the abuser is, but they decide to arrest you because you are more masculine-looking.

You are a lesbian woman and the emergency room staff let your partner stay with you during your exam because she is a woman and they don’t recognise her as an abuser. When the doctor asks you how you were injured, she eyes you threateningly and you are afraid to say what really happened.

You are a transgender man. Your doctor refuses to use the pronouns and name that you chose for yourself. When your partner assaults you, you have to choose between seeing a transphobic healthcare provider or not receiving care.

You are a gay man fleeing your abuser. When inquiring about emergency shelter you are told that the only programs that have space in your local area do not take men. Your only option is a homeless shelter, where you fear being harassed and targeted for being gay.

You are bisexual man from Pakistan living in the UK on a spousal visa. Your partner is threatening to out you to your family and saying you will be deported if you ever tell anyone of the abuse, leave or divorce them. You contacted a local domestic violence service, who refused to offer support saying they don’t provide support to male victims. You live under a constant threat of deportation, which would almost certainly result in extreme violence or imprisonment.

Key Principles of LGBT+ Affirmative Support

Access appropriate training:

- Build knowledge and capacity to meet the needs of diverse LGBT+ survivors.
- Identify tailored training packages delivered by specialist LGBT+ domestic abuse services or experts.

Avoid assumptions and use open, inclusive language:

- For example, use 'partner' rather than husband, wife, boyfriend or girlfriend.
- Ask for and use the preferred pronoun when your client identifies as a trans person.

Establish partnerships with specialist LGBT+ domestic abuse services & local LGBT+ organisations:

- Be able to signpost and make informed referrals.
- Services should consider mutual support and other opportunities such as reciprocal training and awareness raising.

Create welcoming spaces and clearly advertise support to LGBT+ survivors:

- Provide clear examples of LGBT+ experiences of domestic abuse in advertising materials (e.g. posters, leaflets, web sites etc.), case studies and notice boards.

Listen to LGBT+ people and practice person-centred support:

- Apply a nuanced approach and develop support which is person-centred, recognising the different and intersectional needs of LGBT+ survivors.

Monitor for sexual orientation, gender and trans status:

- Review monitoring standards and forms and include questions about sexuality and gender identities.

Key questions to consider:

1. What clues is your organisation currently giving out to express that LGBT+ survivors are welcome?
2. How would you and your staff handle a call from someone whose name didn't 'match' the tone of their voice?
3. In what way are LGBT+ identities currently reflected in your publicity material and on your website?
4. What language do you use in internal and external communications? Is it as inclusive as it could be?