

Barriers Faced by LGBT people in Accessing Non-LGBT Domestic Violence Support Services



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This information sheet lists some of the barriers faced by LGBT people in accessing on-LGBT domestic violence support services and outlines some of the key recommendations to help domestic abuse services to be more inclusive.

Due to real or perceived homophobia, biphobia, transphobia and heterosexism, LGBT survivors can face specific challenges when attempting to access support services. Barriers faced by LGBT people in accessing help or support can be categorised into two groups¹:

1. **Structural and cultural barriers:** The way services are designed and delivered that result in them being less accessible and inclusive for LGBT people.
2. **Individual and interpersonal barriers:** LGBT people's perception of the support system, of their self, of the abuse and their relationship with the perpetrator/s.

Structural barriers typically relate to organisational structure and outreach and can include:

1. Lack of visibility and representation of LGBT issues:
 - Across internal publications and materials, such as policies, guidelines, training materials.
 - In publicity materials, websites, and information leaflets, or within physical organisational space.
2. Lack of established partnerships with LGBT networks, organisations, specialist services, which may result in:
 - lack of referral pathways.
 - lack of knowledge around the availability and resources of LGBT organisations that might support the service in supporting LGBT client.
3. Refusing services based on gender identity or perceived gender identity.

Cultural barriers typically relate to the knowledge and skills of service providers and may include:

- Lack of understanding and awareness of distinct experiences of abuse of LGBT people.
- Relying on myths and stereotypes which can contribute to misunderstanding or minimising the risk experienced by LGBT people.
- Lack of awareness of the spectrum of sexual and gender identities.

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

- Not identifying their experiences as domestic violence / intimate partnership abuse as they don't believe domestic violence and abuse happens in LGBT+ relationships.
- the incident is perceived to be too minor to seek support.
- 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 they will not be taken seriously as the abuse will be understood as a 'fair' fight.
- Confidence in own sexual orientation or gender identity.
- Knowledge of and connectedness to local LGBT community.

1. C.f.: S. Harvey, M. Mitchell, J. Keeble, C. McNaughton Nicholls, and N. Rahim, Barriers Faced by Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender People in Accessing Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Harassment, and Sexual Violence Services. Cardiff: NatCen Social Research, 2014.



Real-life scenarios of barriers

Below, are some of the challenges LGBT survivors are facing when trying to access support services. Imagine yourself in their shoes:

You call the police following a physical attack of 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 transgender woman. During a screening process, you are repeatedly asked to describe what your genitals look like and asked invasive questions about your body like, "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.

The emergency room staff let your abuser stay with you during your exam because she is a woman and they don't recognize 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. You're 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 recommendations to help domestic abuse services to be more inclusive

Be clear that your service is inclusive of LGBT people: provide clear examples of LGBT domestic abuse in advertising materials (posters, leaflets, etc.), case studies / stories on websites and notice boards.

Access appropriate training – without the correct training, staff may not be able to support LGBT people in a way that they need.

Be clear what support / services is offered to LGBT people: agencies might consider explicitly advertising that they will work with trans people (or trans women, for women-only organisations). Provide and advertise **a variety of remote services**, such as telephone, email and online support.

Establish links with specialist LGBT services. Be able to signpost and make referrals. Consider active supporting and / or involvement in larger LGBT events. Consider publicising your services in the wider LGBT community, e.g. in LGBT media, websites and forums.

Don't assume. Ensure you use **gender-neutral** language at all times, such as using 'partner' rather than husband or wife or preferred pronoun when your client identifies as a trans person.

For more information, support, or training on working with LGBT survivors please contact Galop:

T: 020 7697 4081

E: info@galop.org.uk

W: <http://www.galop.org.uk>

Key questions:

What clues is your organisation currently giving out to express that LGBT people are welcome?

How would you and your staff handle a call from someone whose name didn't 'match' the tone of their voice?

In what way are LGBT identities currently reflected in your publicity material and on your website?

What language do you use in internal and external communications? Is it as inclusive as it could be?