

# Myths and stereotypes about violence and abuse in same-sex relationships



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This information sheet lists some of the prevailing myths and stereotypes that surround violence and abuse in same-sex relationships. Galop encourages all service providers to examine their own attitudes and feelings towards lesbian, gay bisexual and transgender people, to counter harmful myths and appropriately address their concerns.

There are many myths surrounding partner abuse and some specific myths which directly relate to abuse in same-sex relationships.

Myths and stereotypes about same-sex partner abuse, minimise the experiences of LGBT people with abuse and make it difficult for the victims to seek help. Misconceptions also make it difficult for others to understand the real issues affecting LGBT victims and may stop some agencies taking the issue of same-sex partnership violence seriously.

Some of the more common stereotypes and myths suggest that:

- Abuse doesn't happen in same-sex relationships.
- Abuse in same-sex relationships is not as serious as heterosexual abuse.
- Abuse in same-sex relationships is 'mutual'.
- Abuse is about size and strength: for example, a gay male victim will be smaller and more

effeminate and abusive lesbian will be more masculine.

- Women cannot perpetrate violence.
- Gay men can more easily protect themselves.
- Sexual abuse doesn't happen in same-sex relationships; a woman cannot rape another woman and men cannot be raped.
- Same-sex partners are more able to leave their abusers because, they are not married or don't have children.
- Same-sex partners are as bad as each other and both a victim and a perpetrator.

All these myths are based on misconceptions of what constitutes partner abuse. Partner abuse is a systematic pattern of behaviours and attitudes where one person attempts to exert power and control over the thoughts, beliefs, and/or actions of their partner, someone they are dating or have / had an intimate relationship with.



### **Abuse CAN happen in same-sex relationships.**

Partner abuse does not discriminate and occurs proportionally across all groups, subgroups and categories of people. Victims and abusers come from all cultures, all sexual orientations, all gender identities, all socioeconomic classes, all ages, religions and political beliefs.

### **Partner abuse is NOT more common in straight relationships than same-sex relationships.**

There is no reason to assume that gay men and lesbians are less violent than heterosexual men and women. UK reports suggest the prevalence of partner abuse is similar, if not higher, between same-sex and opposite sex couples, occurring in approximately 25% to 38% of relationships. Transgender individuals may be at even higher risk, as research demonstrates 80 % of transgender people have experienced emotionally, sexually, or physically abusive behaviour by a partner or former partner.

### **Abuse in same-sex partnerships is NOT a 'lovers quarrel'. Abuse is never mutual.**

Abuse in a same-sex partnership is not 'a cat fight' between two women or 'boys being boys'. Two women in a relationship do not automatically guarantee equality and two men in a relationship are not 'fighting it out' all the time. There is nothing equal or fair or mutual about partner abuse. Abuse is about controlling, coercive and threatening behaviour. Although the abused partner may fight back, there is a difference between violent resistance and abuse. Dismissing partner abuse as 'a lover's quarrel' trivializes the abuse and allows it to continue.

### **Same-sex partner abuse CAN happen in a variety of living situations.**

Many same-sex couples are not married and

may not live together. LGBT survivors may also use different language to describe their partner such as: husband, wife, domestic partner, lover, girlfriend, boyfriend, significant other, carer, romantic friend, etc. Abuse can happen in the context of any of these relationships.

### **Partner abuse is NOT about size or strength, or who looks more masculine.**

By definition a perpetrator of domestic abuse is someone who is or has recently been using violence, abuse, fear, force, threats and coercive control to a family member, and intimate partner or ex-partner. Abuse is about a willingness to use tactics to gain power and control over another person regardless of how a person is, how a person looks or their gender or sexual identity. Age, size, weight, masculine or feminine appearance or any other physical attribute or role is not an indicator of whether a person will be a victim or an abuser.

### **Women abusers are NOT less physically abusive.**

Anyone can choose to be abusive or not. Men can be and are victims of domestic violence. Women can be and are abusers. Because of gender stereotypes, many people believe that a woman abuser is more likely to use emotional tactics of abuse rather than physical tactics. The truth is that female abusers can and do use the same tactics as male abusers including tactics such as pushing, hitting, beating, raping and sometimes killing their partners. There is no reason to take female abusers less seriously.

### **Sexual violence DOES happen in same-sex relationships.**

Sexual abuse in same-sex relationships can be as severe as among heterosexual couples and can include: unwanted advances, unwanted sexual



contact, rape, forcing sex, intentional exposure to HIV or sexually transmitted infections, withholding sex in order to control the partner; etc. In approaching support services, LGBT victims may deal with the added shame of being the target of sexual violence from someone in their own community. They may also minimise the sexual abuse they experienced, because of stereotypes that women cannot be rapists and that men cannot be raped. Sexual violence is more prevalent for gay men in abusive relationships than for heterosexual male victims.

**It is NOT easier for LGBT survivors to leave abusive relationships than it is for heterosexual counterparts who are married.**

There is no reason to believe that LGBT people are not as involved in each-others' lives as are opposite-sex couples. Some LGBT people might even be more couple or family oriented, as they might have experienced isolation or alienation

from their own families and social networks. There is also no evidence that the absence of children makes leaving an abusive partner easier as barriers to leaving may also be: a lack of inclusive and LGBT informed system of support and lack of support from victim's family and social circles. Victims may also be threatened with 'outing' if they attempt to leave or might be made believe that potential system of support will be homophobic, heterosexist and unsupportive. In case where the abused partner in the UK on a spousal visa, abuser might take advantage of their lack of awareness about immigration law, and threaten to deport them back to their country of origin, which might be unsafe due to e.g.: anti-gay legislation.

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