



**Myths and Stereotypes  
About Partner Abuse  
Among Lesbian, Gay,  
Bisexual, and  
Transgender (LGBT+)  
People**



**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](mailto:info@galop.org.uk).

Contains information about:

■ Domestic Abuse

There are many myths surrounding partner abuse and some specific myths which directly relate to abuse in relationships where one or more partners identify as LGBT+. Myths and stereotypes about partner abuse among LGBT+ people minimise the experiences of LGBT+ victims and survivors and make it difficult for the victims to seek help.

Misconceptions may also stop some agencies taking the issue of partner abuse seriously and prevent them from developing responses and support that appropriately meet the needs of LGBT+ clients.

**All these myths are based on misconceptions of what constitutes intimate partner violence and abuse.**

**Intimate partner violence and abuse is any incident or pattern of incidents, 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.**

### Some of the more common myths may suggest that:

- Partner abuse doesn't happen among LGBT+ people.
- Partner abuse among LGBT+ people is not as serious in nature compared with experiences of their heterosexual cisgender peers.
- Partner abuse among LGBT+ people is almost always 'mutual'.
- Partner 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/do not perpetrate partner abuse.
- Gay men can more easily protect themselves.
- Sexual abuse doesn't happen in intimate relationships among LGBT+ people; a woman cannot rape another woman and men cannot be raped.
- LGBT+ people are more able to leave their abusers, e.g. because they are not married or don't have children.

### **Partner abuse CAN happen within intimate partner relationships where one or more persons identify as LGBT+.**

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

### **Partner abuse is NOT more common in heterosexual relationships.**

UK research suggests that more than one in four gay men and lesbian women and more than one in three bisexual people report at least one form of domestic abuse since the age of 16.

While lesbian women report similar rates of domestic abuse to that of heterosexual women, gay and bisexual men might be twice as likely to experience domestic abuse compared to heterosexual men. National statistics also suggest bisexual women are twice as likely to disclose intimate partner violence compared to heterosexual women.

Although more limited in number, studies suggest that transgender people may be experiencing similar if not higher levels, of domestic abuse compared to LGBT+ men and women and cisgender people.

### **Partner abuse as experienced by LGBT+ people is NOT a 'lover's quarrel'.**

Partner abuse 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.

### **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, 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 been using violence, abuse, fear, force, threat and coercive control to a family member, intimate partner or ex-partner. Abuse is about gaining power and control over another person, regardless of who the 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 perpetrator.

### **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 female abuser is more likely to use emotional tactics of abuse rather than physical tactics.

Evidence suggests women 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 intimate relationships.**

Sexual abuse in same-sex relationships can be as severe as among heterosexual couples and can include: unwanted advances, unwanted sexual contact, rape, forced sex, intentional exposure to HIV or sexually transmitted infections, withholding sex in order to control the partner etc.

In approaching support services, LGBT+ victims and survivors 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 are not capable of rape and that men cannot be raped.

---

**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 any less involved in each other's lives as 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 a lack of support from the 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 support systems will be homophobic, heterosexist and unsupportive.

In cases where the abused partner in the UK is on a spousal visa, the abuser might take advantage of their lack of awareness about immigration law. In such instances, they may threaten to deport them back to their country of origin, which for a variety of reasons (e.g. anti-gay legislation etc.) might be unsafe.