

Tackling biphobia

a guide for safety
services



www.galop.org.uk

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This factsheet provides information for criminal justice and other safety services, including police, councils, charities and the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) on addressing biphobic hate crime. Bisexual people can face prejudice and hate crime, which service providers have a duty to tackle. The information below aims to assist services understanding and serving the needs of bisexual people who experience hate crime.

Recognise Biphobia

Biphobia is a prejudicial attitude toward bisexual people based on negative stereotypes. It can include believing that bisexual people are:

- Deceitful, dangerous or perverse
- Greedy, promiscuous or exotic
- Confused, indecisive or 'going through a phase'
- Spreaders of disease or damage lesbian and gay rights

Recognise the gap

Services are increasingly familiar with hate crime against lesbian and gay people, but bisexual people have their own distinct needs, which can be overlooked or underplayed. Build your knowledge, policies and systems to tackle this important issue.

Biphobia exists

When asked how many biphobic hate crimes they have come across, most police officers would say zero. However, many officers will have dealt with one without realising. This is partly because bisexual people themselves sometimes struggle to label experiences as hate crime, do not disclose their identity, or are assumed to be another sexuality. Additionally biphobia is often not well understood or recorded by services. Instead of assuming biphobia does not exist, acknowledge that it happens but that under-reporting makes it difficult to see.

What is Biphobic hate crime?

Any offence should be treated as a biphobic hate crime if the person who experienced it or anyone else feels it was an expression of biphobia. Biphobic hate crime can include verbal abuse and violence from neighbours or strangers. Because people's bisexual identity is not always visible to strangers, biphobic abuse can often be concentrated in settings where the targeted person and perpetrator know each other. That can include verbal abuse or unwanted sexual touching from acquaintances and biphobic domestic abuse from family or partners. These crimes are less easy to recognise but it is equally important to record and address them in a manner that addresses their motivation of hostility. To qualify to be recorded as a hate incident, a report needn't include biphobic language. It is enough for a reporting person to perceive that it was motivated by anti-bisexual prejudice.

Record Biphobic incidents

Below the level of criminal offences, people can face prejudicial comments about their identity. Police forces, councils and charities can record these as non-criminal hate incidents. It is especially important to utilise this to record biphobic hate incidents because prejudicial and offensive but non-criminal abuse makes up the bulk of some bisexual peoples negative experiences.

Tackle biphobia within LGBT communities

Bisexual people can face prejudice from lesbian and gay people, such as being refused entry to LGBT spaces or inappropriate treatment by LGBT services. Lesbians and gay men working as service providers can also sometimes oppose bisexual inclusion. This means bisexual people sometimes feel pressured to pass as gay or lesbian to avoid biphobia when accessing an LGBT related service. Those who do come out can face inappropriate assumptions, questions, stereotyping. It is therefore important for LGBT services to do specific work toward understanding and welcoming this large section of their community.

Bisexual people face homophobia

Homophobia is not an intolerance of gay and lesbian people, but of people attracted to people of the same gender. Therefore many bisexual people can regularly face it in addition to biphobia. That means someone reporting homophobic abuse is equally likely to be bisexual as gay or lesbian. Someone could also identify as heterosexual but receive homophobic or biphobic hostility. Sometimes there can be uncertainty over whether an apparently homophobic word or action was being used in an anti-bisexual way. Determining how it should be recorded should be done together with the service user.

Make a positive impact

For every biphobic incident or crime someone tells you about there will be many more unreported. Help people feel that telling you was worthwhile. An important but under-utilised way of doing that is by referral to bisexual and LGBT support, advice, advocacy and social groups. Though some people are able to get criminal justice outcomes, many do not. Enable people to consider a range of options including help from police, discrimination law, restorative justice, emotional support, or

assistance complaining about biphobic attitudes from a provider of goods or services.

Bisexual people are diverse

Many people face hostility that they feel had multiple types of motivation, for instance both biphobic and racist. They are entitled to ask police and other safety services to record it under several hate incident categories. Ask open questions about motivation and support service users in determining their own account of events. Also, bear in mind that a crime or incident may have more than one hate motivation.

Be led by perception

It is the right of anyone reporting hostility to ask safety services to record something as biphobic. That is because police guidance states that any crime or non-criminal incident should be recorded as motivated by sexual orientation hatred (including biphobia and homophobia) if the person reporting it feels it was motivated that way. Though courts need evidence to record a hate crime, police and other services do not need proof to record an incident or crime as biphobic and/or other hostility.

Create a safe environment

Many bisexual people feel pressured to pass as straight or gay when talking to services. Some people believe that bisexual people who are not in open same sex relationships are lucky being able to pass as straight, but feeling pressured to keep your identity secret is stressful. It also prevents people from disclosing important information about incidents. Make efforts to enable service users to feel safe disclosing issues related to their identity.

Speak out

Demonstrate that you take biphobia seriously by



speaking out against it. Explicitly name biphobia in promotional material. Leave bisexual inclusive literature and posters in public spaces. Invite a speaker from a local group to a team meeting. Send bisexual inclusion resources to colleagues. Challenge biphobic attitudes where you see them. Mark Bi Visibility Day on 23rd September. Include bisexual people in case studies. Invite bisexual speakers when organising events.

Change recording systems

Criminal law recognises hate crime motivated by sexual orientation, which includes biphobia and homophobia. However, most organisations only have one recording category to record both, which they normally label as 'homophobic hate crime'. Ideally, recording systems should have a separate category for each, but failing that, ensure any biphobic motivation is specifically named on the narrative incident record.

Recognise bisexual diversity

People's sexual identity does not always fit into a neat box. Under the bisexual umbrella you find people who feel a strong tie to bisexual communities and others who do not. Some people are polyamorous (have relationships with multiple consenting people), while others are in monogamous relationships. You also find pansexual people (gender doesn't determine who they are attracted to) and people have a fluid attitude toward gender. Whatever terms someone uses about themselves, try to be flexible in understanding it.

Avoid assumptions

Ask open questions about service users identity and the gender of partners. Ask open questions about whether they felt there was any kind of prejudice motivating an incident. Do not presume

that everyone who reports homophobia is gay or that everyone in a mixed sex relationship is straight. Be open to the possibility of an incident being biphobic, even if a service user has not identified themselves as bisexual.

Mind your language

Avoid slipping into language that can exclude people. Do not use the word 'gay' to refer to all LGBT people and issues. Refer to same sex relationships instead of gay relationships. Talk about mixed sex relationships instead of straight relationships. It is fine to talk about homophobia in specific cases, but when talking about LGBT communities as a whole, mention biphobia alongside homophobia and transphobia.

Reach out

Find out about local, regional or national bisexual groups and events. Start dialogue with bisexual communities to find out about their experiences and needs, while acknowledging that they are under-resourced and have little capacity. Consult them on changes to your service. Ask for their expertise and support their work in exchange. Promote opportunities to get involved in your structures, such as independent advisory groups and management committees.

Create change internally

Aim to make bisexual people feel welcomed and accepted. Acknowledge that they have different needs to gay, lesbian and heterosexual people. Look into finding a way to officially record biphobic hate crimes and incidents. Get specific training on bisexual issues and needs. Ask questions about how your and other organisations are meeting their equality and human rights duties for bisexual people. Ask inclusive questions on forms. Ask a bisexual community group for their opinion about the accessibility of your service.

Be a good employer

Being a bisexual-positive employer is a legal duty, but also sends a message that you are serious about building inclusive services. Start by acknowledging that lack of inclusion of bisexual staff may be an issue. Work toward creating an environment where people can feel safe being out. Explicitly cover biphobic attitudes and behaviour within policies. Encourage LGBT staff and service user networks to provide a safe space for bisexual people.

Further reading

Complicated? Bisexual people's experiences of and ideas for improving services

www.equality-network.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Complicated-Bisexual-Report.pdf

Every council provides different services but the following lists things you can reasonably expect from your local council:

- Respect – you should be able to use council services without being treated in a homophobic, transphobic or inappropriate manner.
- Council staff should record your gender appropriately and use your preferred name.
- Anti-social behaviour – the council's anti-social behaviour team is responsible for

investigating and taking action against people who behave in an abusive or inconsiderate way.

- Noise – the council's environmental health department should take steps to deal with noisy neighbours.
- Applying for housing – if you're being targeted where you live, councils should consider whether they can help you find another home, which might include council housing. This can be a complex area and it is best to get advice from a specialist organisation like Stonewall Housing (www.stonewallhousing.org or 020 7359 5767).
- Council tenants – councils have a responsibility to investigate and deal with harassment against people who live in council housing. That may involve moving them where appropriate. Councils should also take action against council tenants when they are causing problems for neighbours.
- Graffiti – the council should clean off offensive graffiti in most circumstances.
- Safeguarding – if you're being targeted by someone and are a young, older or disabled person, the council's social care department might have a responsibility to coordinate efforts to make you safer.

Always dial 999 if it is an emergency and you think you are in immediate danger.