Family violence and the LGBTIQ communities

Summary

- No matter who you are, you can be affected by family violence (also called domestic violence).
- Within Australia, intimate partner violence is the most common form of family violence.
- Evidence presented to the Royal Commission into Family Violence suggests intimate partner violence is as prevalent in LGBTIQ communities as it is in the general population.
- Studies have shown that approximately one-third of LGBTIQ people in Victoria (and nationally) have experienced intimate partner abuse, but that only 20 per cent of these cases are reported.
- If you are affected by family violence, help and support are available. You are not alone.

No matter who you are, you can be affected by family violence (also called domestic violence). Within Australia, intimate partner violence is the most common form of family violence. Evidence presented to the Royal Commission into Family Violence suggests intimate partner violence is as prevalent in LGBTIQ communities as it is in the general population. Studies have shown that approximately one-third of LGBTIQ people in Victoria (and nationally) have experienced intimate partner abuse, but that only 20 per cent of these cases are reported. If you are affected by family violence, help and support are available. You are not alone.

LGBTIQ people may face specific types of family violence

Members of the LGBTIQ communities often experience the same types of family violence as people who do not identify as LGBTIQ. They also experience LGBTIQ-specific forms of family violence that focus more on a person’s sexuality, gender identity or expression, or intersex status. Some examples of this type of family violence include:

- threatening to ‘out’ a person or disclose their HIV status
- isolating a person from the wider LGBTIQ communities
- ridiculing a person’s gender expression or intersex traits
- preventing a person from accessing gender affirming hormones or treatments for HIV or other chronic illnesses
- telling a person no one will help them because the support services are homophobic
- telling a person they ‘deserve’ the abuse because of their sexuality
- telling a person they’re not a ‘real’ homosexual because of their former partners, or their friendships and preferences
- portraying the violence as mutual or consensual combat (hiding the abuse behind stereotypes)
- portraying the violence as an expression of ‘masculinity’
- pressuring, forcing or tricking a person into having unsafe sex
- involving a person in bondage and discipline or sadomasochism (BDSM) without consent
- making a person have sex with other people
- threatening to infect a partner with a chronic illness, such as HIV.

LGBTIQ people may feel shut out from services and support

LGBTIQ people face particular barriers to obtaining services and support for family violence. Some examples are:

- self-blame: sometimes an LGBTIQ person will believe they were abused because of their sexual identity and blame themselves for others’ behaviour

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• fear of discrimination: some people within the LGBTIQ communities may fear seeking help because of the possibility of homophobia, transphobia and other discrimination. They may also be concerned about their privacy and confidentiality in small or rural communities

• lack of information and support: the police and courts system and some mainstream service providers may not be as aware of family violence experiences for LGBTIQ people as they are for other communities. This may make LGBTIQ people feel unseen and unheard

• under-reporting of family violence: some people may be too afraid to report their abuse to police or fear being outed if they report the abuse, and so the crimes are not being recognised within LGBTIQ communities.

The lack of knowledge about family violence in LGBTIQ communities can cause other problems for the victim of abuse too. For example, they:

• may incorrectly believe family violence doesn’t happen in LGBTIQ relationships
• may not recognise their experiences of abuse as family violence
• may not know how to respond if they see family violence among their friends and family.

All of the issues and barriers facing LGBTIQ people can be even worse for people who are LGBTIQ and Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander or from a culturally and linguistically diverse background.

Despite these challenges, it is important to report family violence and to get help and support. See the ‘Where to get help’ section below for information on specific services for LGBTIQ communities, and mainstream services.

The Queer without fear booklet is a useful resource for LGBTIQ people experiencing family violence, and their family and friends.

Remember…

• Family violence can happen regardless of your gender and sexual identity or your cultural background, ability, religion, wealth, status or location.
• Intimate partner violence may be just as prevalent within the LGBTIQ communities as it is in the general population.
• For LGBTIQ people, family violence may focus more on a person’s sexuality, gender identity or expression, or intersex status.
• Despite the barriers and issues facing people in the LGBTIQ communities, it is important to report family violence and to get help and support.

Where to get help

• Call 000 at any time if you are worried about your safety or your children’s safety.
• QLife (Australia’s first national counselling and referral service for LGBTIQ people) Tel. 1800 184 527
• 1800 RESPECT (National Sexual Assault, Family and Domestic Violence Counselling Line) Tel. 1800 737 732
• safe steps Family Violence Response Centre Tel. 1800 015 188
• Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria
• Kids Helpline Tel. 1800 55 1800
• Lifeline Tel. 13 11 14
• MensLine Australia Tel. 1300 78 99 78
• White Ribbon (list of national hotlines and state and territory helplines)
• Another Closet