

Domestic Violence in Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Relationships

Partner battering and abuse in Queer relationships:

Domestic violence in the GLBT community is a serious issue. The rates of domestic violence in same-gender relationships are roughly the same as domestic violence against heterosexual women (25%). As in straight (e.g., heterosexually-paired) couples, the problem is likely underreported. Facing a system which is often oppressive and hostile towards queers, those involved in same-gender battering frequently report being afraid of revealing their sexual orientation or the nature of their relationship. Others who do not identify as GLBT may not feel that their relationship fits the definition but may still be in an abusive and dangerous relationship.

In many ways, domestic violence in lesbian, bisexual and gay relationships is the same as in straight relationships:

- No one deserves to be abused.
- Abuse can be physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, and involve verbal behavior used to coerce, threaten or humiliate.
- Abuse often occurs in a cyclical fashion.
- The purpose of the abuse is to maintain control and power over one's partner.
- The abused partner feels alone, isolated and afraid, and is usually convinced that the abuse is somehow her or his fault, or could have been avoided if she or he knew what to do.

Several important aspects of lesbian, bisexual, and gay relationships mean domestic violence is often experienced differently:

In same-sex abuse, a pattern of violence or behaviors exists where one seeks to control the thoughts, beliefs, or conduct of their intimate partner, or to punish their partner for resisting their control. This may be seen as physical or sexual violence, or emotional and verbal abuse. An additional form of emotional abuse for someone who is gay, lesbian, or bisexual may be to "out" them at work or to family or friends.

Local resources for domestic violence in the GLBT community are often scarce and many traditional domestic violence services lack the training, sensitivity, and expertise to adequately recognize and address abusive GLBT relationships. A Queer individual who is being battered must overcome homophobia and denial of the issue of battering. Lesbians, bisexuals and gay men who have been abused have much more difficulty in finding sources of support than heterosexual women who are battered by their male partners.

Here are more ways same-gender domestic violence is unique:

- It is frequently incorrectly assumed that lesbian, bi and gay abuse must be "mutual." It is not often seen as being mutual in heterosexual battering.
- Utilizing existing services (such as a shelter, attending support groups or calling a crisis line) either means lying or hiding the gender of the batterer to be perceived (and thus accepted) as a heterosexual. Or it can mean "coming out", which is a major life decision. If lesbians, bi's and gays come out to service providers who are not discreet with this information, it could lead to the victim losing their home, job, custody of children, etc. This may also precipitate local and/or statewide laws to affect some of these changes, depending on the area.
- Telling heterosexuals about battering in a lesbian, bi or gay relationship can reinforce the myth many believe that lesbian, bi and gay relationships are "abnormal." This can further cause the victim to feel isolated and unsupported.
- The lesbian, bi and gay community is often not supportive of victims of battering because many want to maintain the myth that there are no problems (such as child abuse, alcoholism, domestic violence, etc.) in lesbian, bi and gay relationships.
- Receiving support services to help one escape a battering relationship is more difficult when there are also oppressions faced. Battered lesbians and female bisexuals automatically encounter sexism and homophobia, and gay and bisexual men encounter homophobia. Lesbian or gay people of color who are battered also face racism. These forms of social oppressions make it more difficult for these groups to get the support needed (legal, financial, social, housing, medical, etc.) to escape and live freely from an abusive relationship.
- Lesbian, bi and gay survivors of battering may not know others who are lesbian, bi or gay, meaning that leaving the abuser could result in total isolation.
- Lesbians, bisexuals and gays are usually not as tied financially to their partner, which can be a benefit if they decide to end the relationship. However, if their lives are financially intertwined, such as each paying a rent or mortgage and having "built a home together", they have no legal process to assist in making sure assets are evenly divided, a process which exists for their married, heterosexual counterparts.
- The lesbian, bi and gay community within the area may be small, and in all likelihood everyone the survivor knows will soon know of their abuse. Sides will be drawn and support may be difficult to find. Anonymity is not an option, a characteristic many heterosexual survivors can draw upon in "starting a new life" for themselves within the same city.

Adapted from http://www.lambda.org/DV_background.htm