



# Working with LGBTIQ\* Clients

\*Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer

This fact sheet summarises the Ask LOIS webinar on this topic, presented by Kate Duffy, Solicitor, Women's Legal Services NSW on 31 October 2012. This webinar can be viewed for free at [www.asklois.org.au/webinars/past-webinars](http://www.asklois.org.au/webinars/past-webinars)

**Disclaimer: Some materials below may be offensive or confronting**

## This fact sheet covers:

- Types of violence experienced by LGBTIQ People
- Unique aspects of violence in LGBTIQ Relationships
- Understanding DV in LGBTIQ Communities
- Barriers and Strengths for LGBTIQ People
- Working with LGBTIQ People

## Terminology

### Acronyms

- LGBTIQ – lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer
- GLBT – gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans
- SSDV – same-sex domestic violence
- GLLO – Gay and Lesbian Liaison Officer (police officer sensitized to LGBTIQ matters)

### The difference between sex, gender and sexuality:

- Sexuality = sexual attraction: eg, straight, lesbian, gay, bisexual, same-sex attracted
- Gender = cognitive, constructed identities based on culture or performance (not biological differences): eg, identifies as female, male, transgender, transsexual, genderqueer, cisgender, pangender
- Sex = body parts or chromosomes: eg, intersex, male sex organs, female sex organs

### Gender definitions

- Cisgender: Individuals who's own gender matches the sex they were assigned at birth (eg, identifies as female born with female sex organs)
- Genderqueer/pangender: People who do not wish to be labelled as female or male in gender
- Intersex: Refers to a person born with a reproductive or sexual anatomy that doesn't seem to fit the typical definitions of female or male. Although most intersex people are heterosexual, many intersex are gay, lesbian, bisexual, or asexual. Intersex does not indicate gender and is about sex diversity
- Transgender/transsexual/trans\*: Transgender is usually used for anyone who lives, has lived or wants to live as a member of the opposite gender (sex) to their birth sex. Transsexuals may feel their birth sex was incorrect. Due to confusion between the terms, trans\* is often used as an umbrella term

## Language, Homophobia, Transphobia and Violence

**In *Writing Themselves In 3* (Lynn Hillier 2010),** research found that:

### Verbal Abuse

- **61%** of young gay/lesbian participants nationally reported being **verbally abused** due to their sexuality
- The verbal abuse included accusations that participants were going to hell, that they should be correctively raped, that evolution would kill them off, that they must have been sexually assaulted as children, that they were better off dead, that they had a mental disorder etc.

### Physical Violence

- **18%** of young gay/lesbian participants nationally were **physically assaulted** because of their sexuality
- The levels of these incidents of violence are extreme including having derogatory terms cut into skin, being kicked, punched in the face, brutal bashings, bones broken, having sexual organs forced into their face and being attacked by family members



## Domestic violence in heterosexual and LGBTIQ relationships

### The similarities:

- Types of abuse and violence
- Cycle of violence
- Levels of abuse and violence
- Impacts, short and long term effects on the survivor
- The law's protection of the survivor

### Unique aspects of domestic violence in LGBTIQ relationships:

- 'Outing' (or threat of outing) to friends, family, community or workplace as a method of control
- Using health/HIV status to control a partner
- Using internalised/ institutionalised homophobia as a weapon or to verbally abuse a partner
- Withholding or destroying medications – hormones, HIV medication, other medications
- Abuse can become associated with sexuality
- It can be difficult to identify the perpetrator
- Confidentiality/isolation within the gay and lesbian communities
- Services may not exist – eg, specific support needs of transgender clients and gay men
- Mainstream domestic violence services might not know how to deal with LGBTIQ people/issues

## Particular issues for transgender and intersex people

- Abusive partner threatening to "out" their gender or sex to family, friends, workplace.
- Abuse can be subtle, eg, telling someone to be more "male" or "female"
- Restriction of access to medical treatment or insisting that they have treatment
- Bullying a person because their body looks different
- Using inappropriate language – deliberately calling them "she" or "he" in front of others
- Difference threshold as to what is acceptable – trans and intersex people experience violence daily

## Understanding Domestic Violence in LGBTIQ Communities

### Domestic violence often is not well understood in LGBTIQ communities. LGBTIQ people may not:

- Have the language/conceptual framework to discuss domestic violence - mainstream discussions of domestic violence use gender specific terms which actively excludes LGBTIQ relationships
- Want to talk about it - over 1/3 of people in same-sex relationships experience domestic violence but only 30% seek help
- Believe that domestic violence happens in same sex relationships
- Recognise abuse as domestic violence when it happens to them
- Know how to respond to domestic violence in their friend's or family's relationships
- Know where to go to get help or may think services are homophobic or transphobic

## Barriers for LGBTIQ People

Print out the visual PDF of our [Ask LOIS barriers mind map!](#)

- Phobias or fear of phobias including homophobia, transphobia or intersexphobia (may have had/or heard of negative experiences from other people)
- Internalised phobias from being taught that heterosexuality is the norm
- Discrimination and stereotyping
- Higher rates of experiencing bullying, verbal abuse and physical abuse at school
- Lifetime of coming out - when meeting new people, starting a new job, relocating etc



- May have had negative reactions from family and friends when coming out or been disowned
- Higher rate of youth suicide, alcohol and drug use/addiction, mental health problems – depression, anxiety, low self esteem
- Geographic isolation or lack of confidentiality in small communities
- Lack of relationship recognition from family, friends, the community and government
- Chronic illness such as HIV – fear of discrimination, fear of HIV status being disclosed
- Lack of understanding that domestic and family violence happens in LGBTIQ relationships
- Lack of services for LGBTIQ communities
- Fear of reporting to the police

### Strengths for LGBTIQ People

Print out the visual PDF of our [Ask LOIS strengths mind map!](#)

- Strong sense of community
- Broader perspectives on relationships, may feel more comfortable to have relationships/families that don't fit the traditional nuclear family model
- May have a greater awareness of the struggles of other minority groups
- Diverse family structures e.g. "Chosen Family" consisting of friends from the community
- May more easily build rapport with other LGBTIQ people
- May lead more diverse lives than non-LGBTIQ people
- Able to start families – children planned for, wanted and loved by parents
- Community specific supports and visibility of niche groups within the LGBTIQ communities eg, Bears
- Resilient and proud – claiming PRIDE to represent themselves

### Working with LGBTIQ People

- **Show your support**
  - Display educational materials
  - Explain any confidentiality and diversity statements to your clients
  - Include LGBTIQ people in your client group in your workplace brochure/website
- **Speak up:**
  - Use gender neutral language
  - Use the language your client uses
  - Respond to homophobic or heterosexist comments in your workplace
  - Respond to anti-gay slurs including jokes
  - Speak openly about your support
- **Equip staff:**
  - Train your staff
  - Include diversity issues in workplace policies
- **Connect with your community:**
  - Make contact with local LGBTIQ networks
  - Research, attend and celebrate LGBTIQ events

### For more resources

See the **Ask LOIS LGBTIQ page** or visit:

- The Gender Centre: [www.gendercentre.org.au](http://www.gendercentre.org.au)
- ACON: [www.acon.org.au](http://www.acon.org.au)
- Another Closet: [www.anothercloset.com.au](http://www.anothercloset.com.au)
- The Safe Relationship Project: [www.iclc.org.au/srp](http://www.iclc.org.au/srp)
- Organisation Intersex Australia: [www.oii.org.au](http://www.oii.org.au)