



# Factsheet: Challenging our thinking as Practitioners around LGBT+ Domestic Abuse

## Common myths

It is important to recognise the power of the **public story** of domestic violence and abuse - it **wrongly tells us** that domestic violence and abuse is:

- ☒ Only perpetrated by heterosexual men against heterosexual women
- ☒ Always physical violence
- ☒ A problem of a particular presentation of gender - the big strong heterosexual man being physically violent towards the small weak heterosexual woman

This story exists because it is heterosexual women who are most often victimised in their relationships.

There are also societal assumptions about who can be a 'real victim': they are weak, passive, female, respectable, blameless and they have been overwhelmed by a bigger stronger deviant male.

## Why is this story a problem?

These stories and assumptions make it quite difficult for other stories to be told and heard. It makes it harder for us to see or hear that women can be perpetrators and that men can be victimised.

This public story can also contribute to other 'myths':

- ☒ Violence /abuse between two men or two women is assumed to be less serious/lower risk
- ☒ Violence between two women can be characterised as a 'cat fight' / no one is going to get seriously hurt
- ☒ Violence between two men is a more 'even fight' and they give as good as each other
- ☒ Violence / abuse is more likely to be mutual abuse in LGBT+ relationships

This can lead to practitioners having less confidence about identifying the perpetrator / victim in a same sex relationship.

Sarah, white lesbian in her thirties describes an incident where her partner pushed her down the stairs:

***"I was 4 or 5 inches taller than her, she was a tiny wee thing and I thought people were never going to believe me. They were going to go, 'Oh look, she couldn't beat you up!'"***

She didn't fit the public story and therefore she didn't report it.

Mutual abuse is a label which gets attached to the violence and abuse which can occur within the relationships of LGBT+ people and can feed self-doubt and self-blame. Research has found that mutual abuse is not very common at all in the relationships where violence or abuse is being reported.

## Did you know?

**One in four** lesbian and bi women have experienced domestic abuse in a relationship (Stonewall, 2017)

Almost half (**49%**) of all gay and bi men have experienced at least one incident of domestic abuse from a family member or partner since the age of 16 (Stonewall, 2017)

**80%** of trans people have experienced emotional, sexual, or physical abuse from a partner or ex-partner (Scottish Transgender Alliance, 2010)



# Factsheet: Challenging our thinking as Practitioners around LGBT+ Domestic Abuse

## Do LGBT+ people seek help?

Research has shown that LGBT+ people are highly unlikely to go to police and even less likely to use mainstream services due to:

- **Fear** of not being believed, understood, or taken seriously.
- **Fear** that they and/or the abusive partner are going to be discriminated against.
- **Fear** about being outed or lack of confidentiality.

## What can we do?

As it's really rare for LGBT+ domestic abuse to come to the attention of mainstream providers, it might be useful to consider that, if they do, they are at high risk?

Gently challenge people who are telling their story to reduce self-doubt by explaining the impact of the 'public story of domestic violence' and 'idea of the ideal victim' on victims and survivors.

Take the time to recognise and challenge ourselves as practitioners and colleagues - to reduce the impact that 'the story of domestic violence and abuse' and the idea of 'ideal victim' have on how we make sense of what

Resist the assumption that 'if it's a same sex relationship it must be mutual abuse' because it's too difficult to identify perpetrator/victim.

Be careful that presentation of gender (clothes, hair style, make up) is not taken to indicate power dynamics in a relationship.

Note that if somebody is giving a measured, fair, even handed account of their use of violence / abuse against a partner when they have also experienced violence/abuse in their relationship – they are probably not a

2 of 2

SAYit has been funded to run a year-long project which aims to improve access to domestic abuse services for LGBT+ people across South Yorkshire (Sheffield, Rotherham, Barnsley & Doncaster).

The project will undertake consultation work with local LGBT+ people / community groups, run awareness campaigns and provide training to local service providers. Get in touch if you, or your organisation would like some training on LGBT Domestic Abuse Awareness.

This factsheet is based on the work of Catherine Donovan, Marianne Hester, Rebecca Barnes and colleagues, see <https://www.dur.ac.uk/sociology/staff/profile/?id=17417>

[www.sayit.org.uk/callitout](http://www.sayit.org.uk/callitout)



Doncaster Council