



THE LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY

Intimate partner violence (IPV) occurs within the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual, and other (LGBTQ+) communities with greater frequency and severity than in the heterosexual community.¹ Abusive partners in LGBTQ+ relationships use similar tactics to gain power and control, as well as other unique forms of coercion, such as threats of “outing” a person (in terms of sexual orientation and gender identity), which can result in serious professional, financial and familial consequences. An abusive partner may attempt to convince an individual that prejudice within the broader community will prevent them from accessing needed services and support. Particularly in small, closed and/or rural communities, an abusive partner may monopolize community support and available resources, further isolating an individual seeking assistance.

It is important to acknowledge the intersectional factors within gender and sexual minority communities, specifically how tactics of coercion relate to a societal history of sexism, homophobia, and transphobia. IPV within the LGBTQ+ community is vastly underreported or, if reported, may not be identified as IPV. LGBTQ+ individuals may be hesitant to seek help from law enforcement, legal systems, or health care entities due to fear of discrimination or bias.² For similar reasons of discrimination and concerns about putting a spotlight on problems within an oppressed minority group, there is a lack of research and resources related to LGBTQ+ individuals experiencing IPV. There are many damaging misconceptions that create obstacles for LGBTQ+ individuals accessing assistance and services. Some of these myths suggest that women are not violent, that men cannot be abused, that same-sex couples are “playing out” heterosexual gender roles, or that LGBTQ+ IPV is mutual.

PREVALENCE

- 44% of lesbian women and 61% of bisexual women have experienced rape, physical violence, and/ or stalking by an intimate partner in their lifetime – compared to 35% of heterosexual women.⁵
- The rates are similarly higher for men: 26% percent of gay men and 37% of bisexual men have experienced rape, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner at some point in their lifetime– compared to 29% of heterosexual men.⁵
- 54% of transgender people experience IPV at some point in their lives.³

EFFECTS

- As with cisgendered heterosexual individuals who experience IPV, there are higher rates of substance abuse and STIs with LGBTQ+ people who experience IPV.¹
- Furthermore, LGBTQ+ individuals who experience IPV have higher rates of health conditions, such as frequent headaches, chronic pain, difficulty sleeping, overall poor physical health and poor mental health, asthma, irritable bowel syndrome, and diabetes than individuals who have not experienced IPV.



INTERVENTIONS

Health care providers should screen for IPV, keeping in mind:

- It is imperative to convey a non-judgmental attitude. Be mindful of making assumptions about gender identity and orientation. Providers should receive education on LGBTQ+ affirming practices, including appropriate terminology, common barriers faced by LGBTQ+ individuals, unique physical and mental health concerns, and strategies for actively creating a welcoming and respectful environment.
- Providers should attempt to understand their own biases, as well as those of their organization, which may be heterocentric in nature and perpetuate inequity.
- Be mindful of language. Use the word “partner” rather than gendered terms, such as “boyfriend,” “girlfriend,” “husband,” or “wife,” until your patient confirms the relationship. Clarify with each patient what pronouns are used.
- Educate your patients about IPV and its health effects.
- Refer anyone who screens positive for IPV for appropriate help in the community. Ask about immediate safety and have the local Hotline and IPV service provider information available.

RESOURCES

- FreeState Justice provides legal services to low income LGBTQ+ individuals (name & gender markers changes, legal protections against discrimination and harassment, and family law) <https://freestatejustice.org/>
- Chase Brexton provides health services for LGBTQ+ individuals: www.chasebrexton.org
- GLBT National Help Center, 1-888-843-4564, www.glbtnationalhelpcenter.org
- FORGE provides resources for reducing the impact of trauma on trans/non-binary survivors, <https://forge-forward.org/about/>

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