

## LGBTQ+ SURVIVORS OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and sexual harassment can happen to anyone, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, or gender identity. Women of all sexual identities bear the disproportionate burden of gender-based violence, but we also must recognize the diverse experiences of survivors who represent any and all genders, gender identities, and sexual orientations. LGBTQ+, or Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual and non-binary<sup>i</sup> communities often represent a direct contradiction to expected and assigned gender roles in society, and as a result are at heightened risk of gender-based violence. Some sexual assault and harassment may be directed at individuals as a hate crime specifically because of their identities; other times, abusers may use the victim's identity, status of being "out," or traditional gender norms as a way to maintain power and control.

YWCA is the largest network of domestic violence service providers in the United States, helping over 500,000 survivors each year. As such, YWCA supports anti-violence policies that protect victims, hold perpetrators accountable, and work to eradicate sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and dating violence. Specifically, we support the continuance and full funding for the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) and any legislation that ensures employment stability and economic security for victims of gender-based violence. Furthermore, we firmly support legislation that is comprehensive and inclusive of the needs of all victims of gender-based violence, particularly those who face increased barriers to safety, such as Native women, immigrants, communities of color, LGBTQ+ victims, and those with multiple marginalized identities.

### FACTS

- LGBTQ+ communities experience higher rates of intimate partner violence and sexual assault than heterosexual communities.<sup>ii</sup>
- Nearly 1 in 5 lesbian, gay, or bisexual students has been physically forced to have sexual intercourse, more than three times the rate of their heterosexual peers.<sup>iii</sup>
- 44% of lesbian women, 61% of bisexual women, and 35% of heterosexual women experience rape, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner in their lifetime.<sup>iv</sup>
- In a study by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, 19% of transgender respondents have experienced domestic violence at the hands of a family member because of their transgender identity or gender non-conformity.<sup>v</sup>
- Approximately 1 in 5 bisexual women (22%) and nearly 1 in 10 heterosexual women (9%) have been raped by an intimate partner in their lifetime.<sup>vi</sup>
- A 2014 report found that LGBTQ+ and HIV-affected people of color made up the majority (51%) of intimate partners violence (IPV) survivors. Specifically, LGBTQ+ Black/African American

survivors were 1.89 times more likely to experience physical violence within IPV when compared to all non-Black survivors.<sup>vii</sup>

- In 2015 alone, there were 13 reported LGBTQ+ intimate partner violence related homicides. 77% of those murdered were LGBTQ+ people of color.<sup>viii</sup>
- Approximately 1 in 8 lesbian women (13%), nearly half of bisexual women (46%), and 1 in 6 heterosexual women (17%) have been raped in their lifetime.<sup>ix</sup>
- 26% of gay men, 37% of bisexual men, and 29% of heterosexual men experience rape, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner at some point in their lifetime.<sup>x</sup>
- In a national survey, more than 60% of LGBTQ+ sexual and domestic violence survivors said they were denied access to domestic violence shelters.<sup>xi</sup>
- In a 2011 national study, more than half of transgender individuals who accessed homeless shelters were harassed by shelter staff or residents, and almost 29% were turned away altogether.<sup>xii</sup>
- Multiple studies indicate that over 50% of transgender people have experienced sexual violence at some point in their lives.<sup>xiii</sup>
- In a study by sexual assault centers, prosecutors' offices, law enforcement agencies, and child victim services, 94% of survey respondents said they were not serving LGBTQ+ survivors of IPV and sexual violence.<sup>xiv</sup> Several studies have shown that LGBTQ+ survivors are reluctant to call police for help because of racial and gender profiling, the threat of sexual and physical violence by law enforcement, and the fear of being misgendered.<sup>xv</sup>

#### HOW ADVOCATES AND NONPROFITS CAN HELP<sup>xvi</sup>

LGBTQ+ survivors of violence need many of the things all survivors need. They need safety and compassion, they need to be believed, and they may need housing, counseling, or medical services. However, because of the unique experiences of homophobia and transphobia in the world, there are some unique considerations for LGBTQ+ survivors of violence. And we're still learning. We know that many crimes against historically marginalized communities are underreported, so we continue to research and advocate for studies that lift up the stories of the most marginalized survivors.

- It is important that our agencies make a commitment to working with and being inclusive of diverse communities, including LGBTQ+ communities.
- Do research to find LGBTQ+ friendly support services, counseling, and medical services in your community — that way, you know you are sending clients to a place that will treat them with compassion and respect. If they don't exist, consider a partnership to train fellow providers on LGBTQ+ inclusion.
- It is ok to acknowledge that LGBTQ+ survivors may have different experiences of their abuse and may use different words. Mirror the language LGBTQ+ survivors use to talk about themselves (gender pronouns, sexual identity), and their experiences (for example, some LGBTQ+ survivors may be uncomfortable with terms like "domestic violence" because it can

be seen as a “heterosexual issue”). Don’t assume you know someone’s gender identity based on their appearance. It is always helpful to use gender-neutral language: “Hello friends” instead of “hello ladies.”

- Organizations should invest in opportunities for education, skills building, and best practices for staff on supporting LGBTQ+ survivors. Further, they should support the leadership of LGBTQ+ people on staff, on boards, and in advisory capacities.
- Don’t make assumptions about who the abuser is. Review intake documents for gender neutral language. When talking about the abuse, use words like “partner” in both written language and in speech unless the survivor tells you otherwise.
- Acknowledge the fear that some LGBTQ+ people have about the police being homophobic or minimizing same-gender intimate partner violence as “a cat fight.” Some LGBTQ+ survivors may also fear putting a member of their community through a criminal justice system due to negative experiences with police in the past. They may also fear that the criminal justice process could mean being “outed”. Help LGBTQ+ survivors find safety options that do not further marginalize them – let them know you are listening and taking their unique experiences into consideration.
- Advertise services in your local paper or a community center with emphasis on LGBTQ+ outreach. These may be traditional social services providers but may also be clubs or other non-traditional places where LGBTQ+ people go to seek safe spaces

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<sup>i</sup> For a list of gender identity terms, see the [Sylvia Rivera Law Project](#).

<sup>ii</sup> Taylor N.T. Brown and Jody L. Herman. (November 2015). INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL ABUSE AMONG LGBT PEOPLE A REVIEW OF EXISTING RESEARCH. The Williams Institute.

<sup>iii</sup> Kann L, Olsen EO, McManus T, et al. Sexual Identity, Sex of Sexual Contacts, and Health-Related Behaviors Among Students in Grades 9–12 – United States and Selected Sites, 2015. *MMWR Surveill Summ* 2016;65(No. SS-9):1–202. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.ss6509a1>.

<sup>iv</sup> Walters, M.L., Chen J., & Breiding, M.J. (2013). The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS): 2010 Findings on Victimization by Sexual Orientation. Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved from [https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/cdc\\_nisvs\\_victimization\\_final-a.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/cdc_nisvs_victimization_final-a.pdf). [hereinafter NISVS 2013]

<sup>v</sup> Grant, Jaime M., Lisa A. Mottet, Justin Tanis, Jack Harrison, Jody L. Herman, and Mara Keisling. (2011). Injustice at Every Turn: A Report of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey. Washington: National Center for Transgender Equality and National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. Retrieved from [https://www.transequality.org/sites/default/files/docs/resources/NTDS\\_Report.pdf](https://www.transequality.org/sites/default/files/docs/resources/NTDS_Report.pdf). [hereinafter Injustice at Every Turn]

<sup>vi</sup> NISVS 2013.

<sup>vii</sup> Waters, Emily. (2015). Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and HIV-Affected Intimate Partner Violence in 2014. National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs. New York, NY. Retrieved from [https://avp.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/2015\\_ncavp\\_lgbtqipvreport.pdf](https://avp.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/2015_ncavp_lgbtqipvreport.pdf). [hereinafter LGBTQ and HIV-Affected IPV in 2014]

<sup>viii</sup> Id.

<sup>ix</sup> NISVS 2013.

<sup>x</sup> Id.

<sup>xi</sup> LGBTQ and HIV-Affected IPV in 2014.

<sup>xii</sup> Injustice at Every Turn.

<sup>xiii</sup> LGBTQ and HIV-Affected IPV in 2014.

<sup>xiv</sup> Why It Matters: Rethinking Victim Assistance for LGBTQ Victims of Hate Violence & Intimate Partner Violence (2010). National Center for Victims of Crime and the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs.

<sup>xv</sup> Locked In: Interactions with the Criminal Justice and Child Welfare Systems for LGBTQ Youth, YMSM, and YSW Who Engage in Survival Sex. (2015). Urban Institute.

<sup>xvi</sup> For more information, see Model Policy and Legal Guide For Providing Culturally Competent Services to Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Clients of Homeless Shelters and Housing Programs.