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# Barriers faced by Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender People in Accessing Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Harassment, and Sexual Violence Services

Research Summary

Social research

Number: 48/2014

This research identifies specific barriers that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people in Wales may face accessing appropriate support for experiences of domestic abuse, stalking and harassment and sexual violence. The findings set out clear opportunities for the future development of services and more effective, inclusive practice.

## Findings:

- The research found that LGBT people who experience domestic abuse, stalking and harassment and sexual violence may face specific barriers to accessing services. These included “individual barriers” related to their knowledge and perceptions, “interpersonal barriers” related to control and abuse from other people on the basis of their sexual orientation and gender identity, and “structural and cultural barriers” that related to the way existing services have been designed with the needs of heterosexual, cisgender<sup>1</sup> women in mind.
- The research identified a range of opportunities for further development of services to ensure that they offer the specific transparency and confidentiality LGBT people need, that they are actively inclusive of LGBT people, and that staff members are sensitive and well-informed about their needs.
- Recommendations highlight an opportunity for the Welsh Government to promote better access to appropriate service provision for LGBT people.
- The study involved an evidence assessment, qualitative interviews with 18 professionals and written submissions from 34 LGBT people across Wales.

<sup>1</sup> People who are not transgender: they experience a match between their bodies, personal identity and the gender they were assigned at birth.

## **Research aims and methods**

All people who experience domestic abuse, stalking and harassment and sexual violence face significant barriers to accessing support. However, the past decade has seen increasing awareness of ways in which lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) people may experience barriers specific to their sexual orientation and gender identity. This study consisted of a literature review, qualitative interviews with 18 professionals from the LGBT and domestic and sexual violence sectors working in Wales, and online written submissions from 34 LGBT people. The research aimed to:

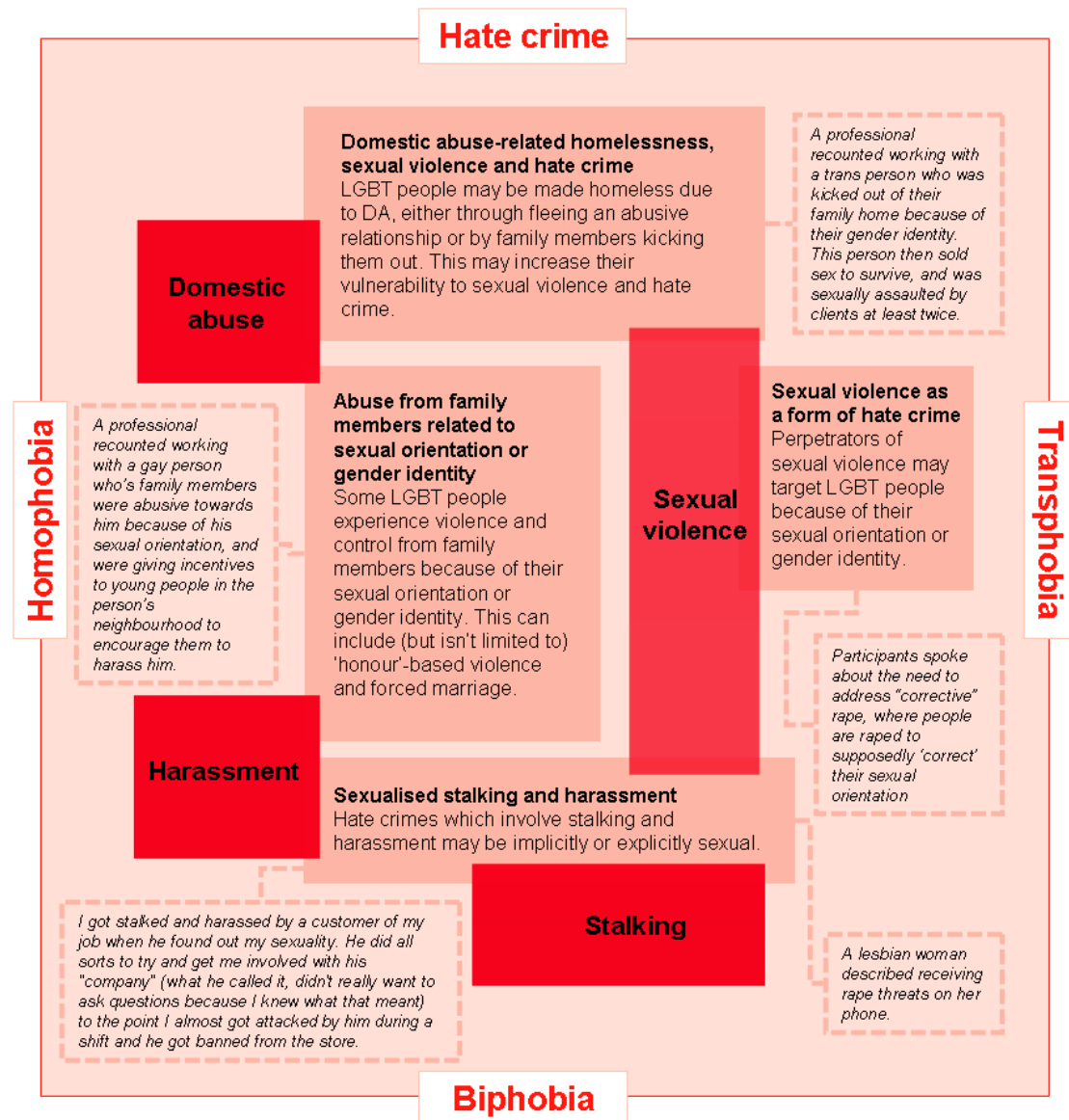
- Identify the barriers LGBT people may experience in accessing domestic abuse, stalking, harassment and sexual violence (DASH/SV) support services;
- Identify examples of effective practice in mitigating these barriers; and
- Propose recommendations for the future development of services.

## **Existing evidence base**

The literature review identified a limited but quickly developing evidence base focused on LGBT people's experiences of DASH/SV, and the barriers they experience in accessing services. However, the majority of the available literature focuses on intimate partner violence over other forms of domestic abuse and sexual violence, and there has been little research that addresses the specific Welsh context. Our subsequent qualitative research sought to address some of these gaps in the evidence.

## **LGBT people and professionals' accounts of barriers to accessing appropriate support**

LGBT people living in Wales and professionals who work with them described how experiences of DASH/SV and hate crime could intersect in their lives. As the diagram on the next page illustrates, for example, hate crime may include sexual harassment and violence, or LGBT people may be targeted by hate crime as a result of their experiences of domestic abuse.



### Individual barriers

Professional and online participants highlighted four barriers related to LGBT people's individual knowledge, perceptions and beliefs:

- Lack of knowledge and recognition of abuse occurring in LGBT people's relationships;
- Lack of knowledge and connectedness to LGBT-friendly services;

- Lack of certainty about their sexual orientation or gender identity and/or ability to be open about this to others;
- Self-blame in relation to their experience of abuse.

### Interpersonal barriers

Participants noted how these individual barriers may be exacerbated by factors in LGBT people's interpersonal

relationships, particularly with perpetrators.

- Experiencing controlling tactics from the perpetrator which are focused on the individual’s sexual orientation or gender identity, such as threats to “out” someone;
- Concern that accessing services may inadvertently “out” them to others and lead to forms of abuse, such as hate crimes or homo/bi/transphobic abuse from other people where they live.

*Structural and cultural barriers*

However, individual and interpersonal barriers do not provide a full explanation why LGBT people are under-represented in DASH/SV services. Participants identified four areas in which the structure and culture of services can create barriers that prevent LGBT people from accessing them:

- Assumed heterosexuality within service provision;
- The prevalence of gender-binary service provision (e.g. women-only services);
- Inadequate level of staff

diversity, knowledge and skills;

- Service providers’ minimisation of LGBT people’s experiences of abuse.

**Opportunities for development**

Participants identified some examples of promising practice in Wales. Overall, professionals were keen to improve their response to LGBT people experiencing DASH/SV, whilst acknowledging the need for this to be adequately resourced.

Participants’ views on opportunities for development fell into three broad themes: flexible and confidential access to support, LGBT inclusive services, and informed and diverse staff. These are outlined in the table below, and reflected in the recommendations for the Welsh Government.

Flexible and confidential access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Non face-to-face support e.g. online, telephone</li> <li>- Drop-in service/ convenient appointment times</li> <li>- Address concerns about confidentiality</li> </ul>
LGBT inclusive services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Promotion of services - inclusive language, partnership-working between D/SV and LGBT sectors</li> <li>- Awareness-raising of LGBT people’s experiences of victimisation</li> <li>- Equal access to mainstream services</li> <li>- Specialist LGBT D/SV</li> </ul>

	provision available
Informed and diverse staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Staff understand LGBT people's specific experiences of D/SV</li> <li>- Staff understand the diverse nature of sexual orientations and gender identities</li> <li>- Staff do not assume that everyone is heterosexual, or hold stereotypical attitudes about LGBT people</li> <li>- Staff members are diverse in terms of sexual orientation and/or gender identity</li> </ul>

### Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, we recommend a number of measures the Welsh Government could implement to improve LGBT people's access to appropriate services for domestic abuse, stalking and harassment and sexual violence.

#### *Flexible and confidential access*

1. Existing telephone and online support should be clearly advertised as being available to LGBT people.
2. Investigate the feasibility of further developing and promoting online services in Wales.
3. Encourage service providers to publish clear information on what will happen when

someone discloses abuse to them.

#### *LGBT inclusive services*

4. Encourage service providers to promote their services to LGBT people.
5. Support domestic and sexual violence service providers to undertake outreach activities targeting LGBT people.
6. Support LGBT service providers and community organisations to promote awareness of domestic abuse, stalking and harassment and sexual violence within the LGBT community.
7. Encourage increased partnership-working between domestic and sexual violence services and LGBT organisations.
8. Map the extent to which the Equality Act 2010 is being properly implemented by providers of women-only refuges in relation to referrals for trans women.
9. Provide clear guidance for refuge providers<sup>1</sup> who deliver women-only and male-only services on ensuring equal

<sup>1</sup> While all gender-binary services should ensure access for trans people, the study identified this as a particular issue for refuges in Wales.

access to these services for trans people.

10. Investigate the value of providing specialist LGBT workers in domestic and sexual abuse services, and/or specialist domestic and sexual violence workers in LGBT services.
11. Develop a clear plan setting out how domestic abuse services will be made available to people in Wales who don't identify as either male or female. This plan should not compromise the existing availability of women-only services.

#### *Informed and diverse staff*

12. Support domestic and sexual violence service providers to ensure that their staff can demonstrate an understanding of LGBT people's lives and their specific experiences of domestic abuse, stalking and harassment and sexual violence.
13. Encourage local authorities, police, and other public sector agencies to ensure staff who have contact with people experiencing abuse are similarly skilled (as above) in LGBT

people's needs and experiences.

#### *Monitoring and evaluation*

14. Monitor levels of LGBT referrals to domestic and sexual violence services funded by the Welsh Government.
15. Monitor referrals to the All Wales Domestic & Sexual Violence Helpline where the victim is identified as a trans person, and the outcome of the call.

#### *Further research*

16. Investigate the reliability of the standard domestic abuse risk assessment tool in measuring risk to LGBT people.
17. Map the availability and need for female perpetrator programmes.
18. Investigate whether there are specific barriers faced by minority ethnic LGBT people in accessing appropriate services.

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