

## LGBTQIA 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. LGBTQIA, or Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual and gender non-conforming<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 530,000 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 who face increased barriers to safety, such as Native women, immigrants, communities of color, LGBTQIA victims, and those with multiple marginalized identities.

### FACTS

- LGBTQIA and gender non-confirming communities experience the same rates of intimate partner violence and sexual assault as heterosexual communities, about 1 in 4.<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>
- Forty-four percent of lesbian women, 61 percent of bisexual women, and 35 percent of heterosexual women experienced 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, nineteen percent (19 percent) 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 percent) and nearly 1 in 10 heterosexual women (9 percent) have been raped by an intimate partner in their lifetime.<sup>vi</sup>
- LGBTQIA and HIV-affected people of color made up the majority (51 percent) of IPV survivors. Specifically, LGBTQIA 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 LGBTQIA intimate partner violence related homicides. 77 percent of those murdered were LGBTQ people of color<sup>viii</sup>.
- Approximately one in eight lesbian women (13 percent), nearly half of bisexual women (46 percent), and 1 in 6 heterosexual women (17 percent) have been raped in their lifetime.<sup>ix</sup>
- Twenty-six percent of gay men, 37 percent of bisexual men, and 29 percent of heterosexual men experienced 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 percent of LGBTQIA and gender non-conforming sexual and domestic violence survivors said they were denied access to domestic violence shelters.<sup>xi</sup>
- In a 2014 national study, more than half of transgender individuals who accessed homeless shelters were harassed by shelter staff or residents, and almost 29 percent were turned away altogether.<sup>xii</sup>
- Multiple studies indicate that over 50 percent 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 percent of respondents said they were not serving LGBTQIA survivors of IPV and sexual violence.<sup>xiv</sup> And LGBTQIA survivors agree; several studies have shown that LGBTQIA and gender non-conforming 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>

LGBTQIA survivors of violence need many of the supports all survivors need. They need safety, compassion, they need to be believed, and they may need housing, counselling, or medical services. However, because of the unique experiences of homophobia and transphobia, there are some unique considerations for LGBTQIA survivors of violence. While we are still learning, we know that many crimes against historically marginalized communities are underreported, so we continue to research and advocate for studies that amplify to stories of the most marginalized survivors.

- Make an organizational commitment to working with and being inclusive of diverse communities, including LGBTQIA and gender non-conforming communities is important.
- Research LGBTQIA 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 LGBTQIA inclusion.

- Acknowledge that LGBTQIA survivors may have different experiences of their abuse, and may use different words. Mirror the language LGBTQIA survivors use to talk about themselves (gender pronouns, sexual identity), and their experiences (For example, some LGBTQIA survivors may be uncomfortable with terms like “domestic violence,” because it is often understood as a “heterosexual issue”). Don’t assume you know someone’s gender identity based on their appearance. Using gender-neutral language is preferred: “Hello friends” instead of “hello ladies.”
- Organizations should invest in opportunities for education, skills building and best practices for staff on supporting LGBTQIA survivors. Further, they should support the leadership of LGBTQIA people on staff, on boards and in advisory capacities.
- Organizations might consider creating signage, materials and an office environment that depicts members of the LGBTQIA community and important touchstones within those communities; LGBTQIA magazines, gender-neutral bathrooms, rainbow flags, pamphlets about LGBTQIA health, LGBTQIA materials from partner organizations about relevant LGBTQIA issues.
- 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 LGBTQIA people have about the police being homophobic, or minimizing same-gender intimate partner violence as “a cat fight.” Some LGBTQIA survivors may also fear putting a member of their community through a criminal justice system due to negative experiences of police in the past. They may also fear that the criminal justice process could mean being “outed”. Help LGBTQIA 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 LGBTQIA outreach, these may be traditional social services providers but may also be clubs, or non-traditional places where LGBTQIA 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> National Sexual Violence Resource Center, 2012

<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. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.ss6509a1>

<sup>iv</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2010

<sup>v</sup> Grant, Jaime M., Lisa A. Mottet, Justin Tanis, Jack Harrison, Jody L. Herman, and Mara Keisling. *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, 2011.

<sup>vi</sup> An Overview of 2010 Findings on Victimization by Sexual Orientation, (2010), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey, 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)

<sup>vii</sup> National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs. (2015). Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and HIV-Affected Intimate Partner Violence in 2014. New York, NY: Author.

<sup>viii</sup> National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs. (2015). Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and HIV-Affected Intimate Partner Violence in 2014. New York, NY

<sup>ix</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

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<sup>xii</sup> Grant, Jaime M., Lisa A. Mottet, Justin Tanis, Jack Harrison, Jody L. Herman, and Mara Keisling. 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, 2011.

<sup>xiii</sup> National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs. (2015). Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and HIV-Affected Intimate Partner Violence in 2014. New York, NY: Author.

<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 YWSW Who Engage in Survival Sex, Urban Institute, (2015)

<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