



LGBT+ people and sexual violence





Galop is the UK's LGBT+ anti-violence organisation working with LGBT+ victims/survivors of hate crime, domestic abuse and sexual violence, including specialist trans and young people's advocacy.

Since 1982 we have worked to make life safe, just and fair for LGBT+ people. We challenge discrimination and ensure the voices and perspectives of LGBT+ victims/survivors influence law, policy, and services related to violence and abuse.

“ Sexual violence is wrong, whoever does it, and it doesn't make LGBT+ communities more robust by silencing survivors. ”

LGBT+ people and sexual violence

LGBT+ people who experience sexual violence, as children or adults, know what an impact it has on who they are and how they see themselves. It's important that LGBT+ people don't feel silenced about what's happened to them or what support they need. It is important that LGBT+ people see their identities, experiences and issues reflected in information and public debate about sexual violence.

This information sheet is written by the Sexual Violence Support Service at Galop, the LGBT+ anti-violence organisation, and covers some of the issues and barriers to support felt by LGBT+ survivors. We hope it is useful for practitioners in understanding the range of identities and lived experience of LGBT+ survivors.

Mostly we hope this factsheet reassures LGBT+ survivors that we know how much courage it takes to speak up and we understand your perspectives and experiences. We encourage you to seek support from us or another service that you feel comfortable with or to contact the London Survivors Gateway to get information about your options.

LGBT+ people

The phrase 'LGBT' refers to lesbians, gay men, bisexual and trans people. It is used to describe people with a range of identities, life experiences, perspectives and needs associated with sexuality/sexual orientation and/or gender identity. 'The '+' is used to indicate that people with a range of identities are also included, for example people who identify as queer, genderqueer, gender fluid, pansexual, asexual, intersex, non-binary (some of whom will identify as trans), and those who are questioning their sexuality or gender identity (see page 14 for terminology).

Survivors of sexual violence

We use the word 'survivor' to demonstrate our belief that empowerment, healing and hope are possible following sexual violence and that, despite being profoundly impacted by the experience, sexual violence is not the main or only thing that defines you as a human being. There are times when the word 'victim' may be appropriate and you may prefer to use this word; it is the word used in the criminal justice system. You may prefer to use another word, or no specific word at all.

Who are LGBT+ survivors?

LGBT+ survivors are a diverse range of people.

LGBT+ survivors include lesbian and bisexual women, cisgender and trans, and heterosexual trans women...

who experience sexual violence as women and who may want a gendered perspective in which to think about their experience, one which acknowledges the impact of male sexual violence on LBT women's sexuality and gender identity. LBT women also need to be able to express their sexuality and gender identity, even if this appears, to others, irrelevant to their experience of sexual violence. Acknowledging sexuality and gender identity enables LBT women to be better supported in terms of the full impact of sexual violence on their lives.

LGBT+ survivors also include lesbian, bisexual and trans women who experience sexual violence from another woman and may feel that their experience is invisible or not taken as seriously within services and public debates about sexual violence.

For those with close LBT friendship groups, speaking up might mean losing friends, being outed or ostracised, or risking further violence.

LBT women deserve safe spaces where they can be themselves and know that the specific challenges of their situation will be understood and supported effectively.

LGBT+ survivors include gay, bisexual and trans men...

who may feel that public awareness about sexual violence isn't inclusive of men and where the act of speaking up challenges ingrained assumptions about who experiences sexual violence.

GBT men may worry about having to explain the circumstances in which sexual violence happened and whether that will lead to a judgemental or prejudiced response, or whether services primarily based around women's and heterosexual people's experience will be able to offer suitable support. Gay and bisexual men have a collective history of discriminatory policing and legal inequality in relation to consensual adult sexual relationships and although

times have changed, this community memory, combined with a lack of voice for male survivors, can lead to GBT men feeling silenced about their experiences as children or adults.

For those involved in chemsex, they might fear a judgemental response if they talk about what has happened or be worried that they might be charged with a drugs offence, even if they were the victim of a much more serious sexual offence. Or that speaking up will ostracise them from a community, out them as gay/bisexual, or make the situation worse.

GBT+ men have the right to respectful, informed support that is not prejudiced or discriminatory about GBT men, whatever the context.

LGBT+ survivors include trans women and men...

who often experience particular barriers to speaking up about what happened to them. Trans people risk judgemental and ill-informed responses from services, including being 'mis-pronoun-ed', excluded or asked intrusive questions about their identity, body or history, which can add to the trauma they've already experienced.

If trans people report historic child sexual abuse to the police, they might be worried that police and courts will use old 'dead' names and pronouns or that questioning in court will be transphobic or risk outing someone to current partners, workplaces, friends and in the press. Trans people need reassurance that their identity will be respected, their personal information kept confidential, and that they will be safe from transphobia from other service users or staff.

Trans people deserve informed and inclusive support in a safe space, free from transphobia and prejudice.

It includes intersex people...

who, like other LGBT+ people, may feel they don't belong in LGBT communities or in services based on binary 'male' or 'female' genders. Intersex people may be concerned about getting a judgemental, disbelieving or blaming response from a service if they are open about their identity. Or that services won't understand the impact on identity and sense of self of medical interventions experienced as a child.

LGBT+ survivors include non-binary people...

who may feel that they are not welcome or understood in binary men's or women's services or that they have to hide their identity to be able to access a service. Like all trans people, non-binary people may be concerned about getting a judgemental, disbelieving or blaming response from a service if they are open about their identity. Non-binary identities can be invisible within services, especially if people are asked to define themselves as 'male' or 'female'.

Some LGBT+ people don't feel comfortable within binary services. All LGBT+ people deserve understanding spaces where they can be themselves, talk about what's happened, and find informed, respectful and positive approaches to support.

It also includes asexual people...

who may experience a lack of awareness about their identity and who can feel misunderstood and excluded from both heterosexual cisgender and LGBT communities.

LGBT+ survivors include people who identify as BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic identities)...

whose experience of racism and homophobia, biphobia and transphobia are equally important in their experience of sexual violence. BAME LGBT+ people may feel their particular experiences are not represented within mainstream LGBT+ communities and that their sexuality/gender identity is not visible within mainstream BAME services. Getting support that understands the lived experience of BAME LGBT+ people, acknowledging sexuality, gender identity, race, ethnicity, culture and language, is important.

LGBT+ survivors include people of all faiths...

who may not feel able to talk about this aspect of their life within LGBT+ spaces or being LGBT+ in faith-based spaces. Or about how their experience of sexual violence affects their faith and identity. Some LGBT+ people of faith may worry that there will be further violence if speaking up about sexual violence outs them in a hostile environment, whether in services or communities.

LGBT+ survivors include disabled people...

and those with long-term health conditions, including HIV, who also face assumptions, prejudice or invisibility about what they experience and who can be directly or indirectly excluded from support.

LGBT+ survivors include those who have experienced so-called 'corrective' therapies...

or procedures purporting to 'cure' them. Being gay or lesbian used to be classified as a mental illness and gender dysphoria has only recently stopped being listed in this way. Some mental health, medical and other practitioners have made the incorrect assumption that child sexual abuse 'causes' someone to be LGBT+.

Despite these classifications changing, these are lived experiences for LGBT+ people, both historically and still today. LGBT+ people who ask for help following sexual violence risk that the practitioner will make this assumption, overtly or by implication. The trauma of sexual violence is thereby compounded by an inappropriate and incorrect response that blames and pathologises LGBT+ people. The collective pain associated with therapies that aim to 'correct', 'cure' or explain someone's sexuality or gender identity linked to sexual violence is an additional barrier to LGBT+ survivors seeking and finding respectful and effective help.

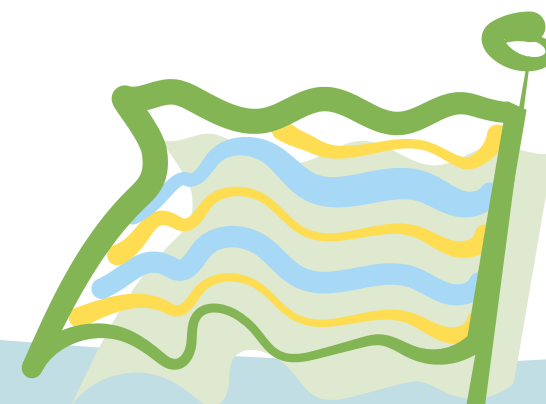
LGBT+ people have the right to be safe from 'corrective' practices and from incorrect assumptions that sexual violence makes people become LGBT+.

LGBT+ survivors include young people coming out...

it can be hard to know what LGBT+ sex and relationships should be like. There are so few representations of the diversity of LGBT+ lives that LGBT+ people themselves would recognise as authentic and there continues to be a climate where ordinary LGBT+ lives are not properly embedded in sex and relationships education. If LGBT+ young people don't see themselves in campaigns about consent or sexual violence, then young people may not know if what they're experiencing in their relationships is OK.

LGBT+ young people deserve education and support which understands the challenges of coming out and can help protect and respond effectively to sexual exploitation and violence.

LGBT+ people are people of all races, ethnicities, nationalities, cultures, languages and backgrounds. LGBT+ people are disabled people, people of faith, people who speak languages other than English, people who are immigrants and asylum seekers, people who sex work, people of different income levels, people of all ages, people with and without strong family ties, carers and people with children. LGBT+ people live everywhere.



What LGBT+ people have in common

Although 'LGBT+' covers a wide range of people, the one thing LGBT+ people have in common is the lived experience of homophobia, biphobia and transphobia.

Whether direct or indirect, current or in the past, all LGBT+ people know what it means to have to make daily micro-decisions about safety; about when, how and to what extent it is OK to be fully yourself; about what you can show and what you must hide. And it is this lived experience that interacts with the experience of sexual violence and the choices LGBT+ people make when considering whether to speak up or keep quiet.

Many LGBT+ people worry that if they tell the police or another service, the person they talk to will not understand and will ask questions that can feel intrusive, gratuitous or express disbelief, disgust or judgement. LGBT+ people may feel forced to explain LGBT+ identities, language and community norms or risk a homophobic, biphobic or transphobic reaction from the person they tell.

Services can assume that people are heterosexual and/or cisgender until proved otherwise. LGBT+ people have to make a choice about whether to 'out' themselves

and let the service know that they are not heterosexual and/or cisgender, especially when they are not sure how the service will respond. Some LGBT+ people face immediate judgement about who they are and what they have experienced, simply because of what they look or sound like. This lived experience can make LGBT+ people feel cautious or feel that they must keep some things private.

For those LGBT+ people who experience sexual violence from another LGBT+ person, it can be hard to acknowledge that the person who's hurting them is someone from their own community, someone who may also experience discrimination and violence as an LGBT+ person. LGBT+ people might worry about additional negative consequences if they speak up, such as being outed or ostracised from their community or exposed to a dismissive or discriminatory response. If the service response isn't LGBT+ aware, then it can potentially make the situation more unsafe for the survivor.

LGBT+ people experience sexual violence, in all sorts of circumstances. They experience the same impacts of trauma as non-LGBT+ people and the similar challenges that non-LGBT+ people experience in telling someone about what's happened. But in addition, LGBT+ people experience specific barriers and concerns about speaking up because of the impact of homophobia, biphobia and transphobia. Services are not always effective at recognising or supporting LGBT+ people. LGBT+ communities are not always able and willing to acknowledge sexual violence as a lived experience for many people or that LGBT+ people can hurt each other.

Sexual violence is wrong, whoever does it, and it doesn't make LGBT+ communities more robust by silencing survivors.

Despite the barriers, things can get better!

This factsheet has described a lot of concerns and barriers that LGBT+ people face when needing support following sexual violence. It might seem like a long list of difficult issues, on top of the impact of sexual violence itself. It is important to say that not all LGBT+ people will experience these barriers but, in our experience, they are very common fears and experiences for LGBT+ survivors.

At Galop, we are working with practitioners in many services to raise awareness about LGBT+ identities and what LGBT+ survivors need for support to be good for them.

We know that LGBT+ survivors want to speak up and get support. We know that services that take a proactive, welcoming approach to LGBT+ survivors find there are survivors who want support.

We believe that LGBT+ survivors deserve dignity, respect, understanding and validation as LGBT+ people.

We believe that LGBT+ communities will be stronger if survivors feel able to speak out about sexual violence.

We encourage all LGBT+ survivors to find someone or a service that can help and to speak up about what's happened to them. You deserve equal access to support and the right to be heard.

Healing, hope and empowerment are possible.



Getting help



If reading this has made you think about your own experience and you would like to speak to someone, please contact the London Survivors Gateway or Galop:

Galop

Online report form: www.galop.org.uk
 Phone: 020 7704 2040
 Email: referrals@galop.org.uk

London Survivors Gateway

Online report form:
www.survivorsgateway.london/
 Phone: 0808 8010860

About Galop's service:

- We are LGBT+. We understand LGBT+ people's identities and lives. You don't have to explain or justify yourself.
- We work confidentially. We keep your details and what's happened confidential. LGBT+ networks can feel small, so we have strict processes about confidentiality and safety and will protect your identity within the service.
- We give you a space to talk, think and learn about your options. We will not tell you what to do. We will not rush you. We aim to empower you to have more choice and control in your life and to make informed choices that are right for you. If you don't feel ready or able to decide anything, we give you a space to be that understands what it's like to be a survivor.
- We are trauma-informed. This means we understand how sexual violence impacts on people and will work with you in a safe way.
- You don't have to talk to the police, unless you want to. If you do, our trained ISVAs (Independent Sexual Violence Advisors) will help you to do this and support you throughout the whole process.
- As well as our ISVA and casework service, we run a young people's service and work with all LGBT+ people in London aged 13 and over.
- If you live outside London, we can give you information about local services or how to report and get help if you don't have a local service.

LGBT+ terminology

Asexual

A person who does not experience sexual attraction. Unlike celibacy, which people choose, this is an intrinsic part of who someone is.

Gay/lesbian

A person whose primary romantic, emotional, physical and sexual attractions are to people of the same gender as themselves.

Heterosexual

A person whose primary romantic, emotional, physical and sexual attractions are to people of an opposite gender to themselves.

Bisexual

A person who experiences romantic, emotional, physical and sexual attractions to people of the same and other genders to themselves, whether trans or cisgender.

Pansexual

A person whose romantic, emotional, physical and sexual attractions are towards people regardless of their sex or gender identity.

Queer

Queer is an umbrella term for sexual and gender minorities who are not heterosexual or cisgender and in current useage can imply an activist perspective to LGBT+ identity. It is a term used pejoratively against LGBT+ people in the past and, as such, is not liked by all LGBT+ people.

Trans/transgender

A person whose gender history, identity or expression does not fit what others assumed they were at birth or what others think men and women 'should' be like. Some undergo a process of medical, surgical and/or hormonal transition. Some do not, for many different reasons.

Non-binary

A person who does not identify as male or female. They may identify as both a man and a woman, or neither.

Genderqueer

Genderqueer, also known as non-binary, is an umbrella word for gender identities that are not exclusively masculine or feminine—identities which are outside the gender binary and cisnormativity. Genderqueer people may express a combination of masculinity and femininity, or neither, in their gender expression.

Intersex

An umbrella term used for a variety of conditions in which a person is born with physical, hormonal or genetic features that don't fit the typical definitions of female or male. For some, the condition is clear at birth, while others don't discover that they're intersex until puberty or later.

Cis/cisgender

A person whose gender identity matches the gender that they were assigned at birth.

Biphobia

Hatred, hostility or a prejudicial attitude directed towards bisexual people – or those assumed to be bisexual – based on who people are and their perceived lifestyle, culture or characteristics. It can include believing that bisexual people are: deceitful or perverse; greedy, promiscuous or exotic; 'going through a phase'; or damaging to lesbian and gay rights.

Homophobia

Hatred, hostility or prejudicial attitude directed towards LGB people. It can include believing that LGB people are unnatural, immoral, sexual predators or paedophiles; that being LGB can be corrected or cured; or that being LGB is a lifestyle choice.

Transphobia

Hatred, hostility or prejudicial attitude directed towards trans and gender non-conforming people. It can include believing that trans people are not "real" women/men; that non-binary genders are invalid; that trans people are gay people in denial; or refusing to use the correct name or pronoun of a trans person.

Gender identity

Someone's sense of themselves as being a boy/man, girl/woman, both or neither.

Gender expression

The choices we make on a daily basis regarding what we wear and how we present ourselves and behave, that indicates our gender.

Sex

A categorisation of male/female based on physical, hormonal or genetic characteristics. Usually assumed to be binary.

Sexual orientation

Who you're attracted to and want to have sexual relationships with.

Pronouns

Words that can be used to refer to a person in place of their name, e.g. he/she, him/her, they/them.

Transitioning

A process of social, legal and/or medical change about gender identity to enable someone to live as the person they know themselves to be.

Discrimination

The unjust or prejudicial treatment of groups of people, especially on the grounds of protected characteristics, defined by the Equality Act (2010) as age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

Stereotype

A common preconception about a group of people – for example how they look and act – often incorrect or based on biased and prejudiced assumptions.

Gender marker

Designations such as male/female or Mr/Mrs which are found regularly on ID documents.

Misogyny

Hatred, hostility or prejudicial attitude directed towards women or girls. It can be acted out through sexual discrimination, denigration of women, violence against women, and the sexual objectification of women. It affects women and girls as individuals and as a gender. It affects all women and girls, whatever their sexual orientation or gender history.

Coming out

Telling other people about your sexual orientation or gender identity.

Being outed

When someone else decides to tell people about your sexual orientation, gender identity or history, without your permission.

LGBT+

An umbrella term to describe people of all minority sexual orientations and gender identities, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual, trans, non-binary, queer, genderqueer and asexual identities, and intersex people.



The London Survivors Gateway offers victims and survivors of rape and sexual abuse help to access specialist services in London.

We provide information on what support is available after rape, sexual assault, sexual abuse or any form of sexual violence and can help survivors to access these services. We work with anyone aged 13 or above regardless of gender, sexuality, disability, language, ethnicity or immigration status.

The Gateway is a partnership between the four London Rape Crisis Centres, Galop, SurvivorsUK and the Havens and is run by the Women and Girls Network.

www.survivorsgateway.london
0808 801 0860

