Stonewall Health Briefings

Stonewall’s pioneering research demonstrates that the specific needs of lesbian, gay and bisexual people are too often overlooked in the provision of healthcare. At the same time, many experience hostility, poor treatment or outright discrimination from healthcare professionals.

Stonewall now works with NHS organisations to improve the health of lesbian, gay and bisexual people and make sure the NHS is aware of its legal duties to provide an equal service to everyone.

This is one in a series of briefings on the health of lesbian, gay and bisexual people in Britain today.

Other briefings in the series:
- Bisexuality
- Disability
- Ethnicity
- Mental Health
- Experiences of Healthcare

Domestic abuse

Same-sex domestic abuse receives little acknowledgement and visibility from the police and health services. Many lesbian, gay and bisexual people who have experienced domestic abuse from family members or partners rarely report these incidents to the police, of those that do, more than half were not happy with the response they received.

Tackling domestic abuse requires action from the police, from the health service and from support services. This briefing provides evidence on the prevalence and types of domestic abuse experienced by lesbian, gay and bisexual people to inform these key agencies.
Lesbian and Bisexual Women

Stonewall’s research into the health needs of lesbian and bisexual women, Prescription for Change, has found worrying levels of domestic abuse in relationships with both men and women. Many have been belittled and made to feel worthless, and many have never reported incidents to the police.

Of lesbian and bisexual women:

- **One in four** lesbians and bisexual women have experienced domestic abuse in a relationship. **Two thirds** of those say the perpetrator was a woman, **a third** a man. One in four of the general female population has experienced domestic abuse.

- **Four in ten** (39 per cent) lesbians and bisexual women with a disability have experienced domestic abuse in a relationship.

- **More than four in ten** (44 per cent) lesbians and bisexual women who have experienced domestic abuse experienced this for more than one year.

Sixty two per cent of lesbians and bisexual women who have experienced domestic abuse from a female partner have experienced some form of physical violence. Lesbians and bisexual women have experienced the following in **relationships with women** since age 16:

- **More than one in five** (23 per cent) have been pushed, held down or slapped.

- **Almost one in five** (18 per cent) have been kicked, hit, or had objects thrown at them.

- **More than one in five** (23 per cent) have been repeatedly belittled and “made to feel worthless”.

- **One in five** (21 per cent) have been stopped from seeing friends and relatives.

- **Almost one in ten** (nine per cent) had their sexuality used against them.

- **Six per cent** have been forced to have unwanted sex.

- **Four per cent** have been threatened with death.
Fifty four per cent of lesbians and bisexual women who have experienced domestic abuse from a male partner have experienced some form of physical violence. Lesbians and bisexual women have experienced the following in relationships with men since age 16:

- **One in six** (16 per cent) have been forced to have unwanted sex
- **Almost one in six** (14 per cent) have been pushed, held down or slapped
- **Nine per cent** have been kicked, hit, or had objects thrown at them
- **Almost one in six** (14 per cent) have been repeatedly belittled and “made to feel worthless”
- **More than one in ten** (11 per cent) have been stopped from seeing friends and relatives
- **Nine per cent** have had their sexuality used against them
- **Five per cent** have been threatened with death

Domestic abuse reporting:

- **Four in five** (81 per cent) lesbians and bisexual women who have experienced domestic abuse have never reported incidents to the police. Of those that did report, **only half** (49 per cent) were happy with how the police had dealt with the situation.

‘There is very little information regarding domestic abuse within a lesbian relationship; everything seemed tailored to the heterosexual relationship, and I had to specifically look for information regarding my circumstances.’

**Sophie, 19, North East**

‘I think same-sex rape between women needs a lot more attention – as a survivor of woman-on-woman rape, I was terribly let down both by both the lack of services and awareness and had to cope largely on my own.’

**Charlie, 31, South East**
Gay and Bisexual Men

Stonewall’s Gay and Bisexual Men’s Health Survey demonstrates that domestic abuse directed towards men is worryingly high. A greater number of gay and bisexual men have experienced domestic abuse from a family member or partner since the age of 16 than both men and women in general.

Of gay and bisexual men:

- **Half** (49 per cent) of all gay and bisexual men have experienced at least one incident of domestic abuse from a family member or partner since the age of 16. One in six (17 per cent) men in general have experienced domestic abuse from a family member or partner since the age of 16.

- **Almost two-thirds** (63 per cent) of gay and bisexual men with a disability have experienced at least one incident of domestic abuse from a family member or partner since the age of 16.

- **More than one in three** (37 per cent) gay and bisexual men have experienced at least one incident of domestic abuse in a relationship with a man.

- **Almost one in four** (23 per cent) gay and bisexual men have experienced at least one incident of domestic abuse from a family member.

- **Seven per cent** of gay and bisexual men have experienced at least one incident of domestic abuse from a woman, 39 per cent of these experienced some form of physical violence.

- **Four in ten** (41 per cent) gay and bisexual men who have experienced domestic abuse experienced this for more than a year.

Fifty nine per cent of gay and bisexual men who have experienced domestic abuse from a male partner have experienced some form of physical violence. Gay and bisexual men have experienced the following in relationships with men since 16:

- **Over one in six** (17 per cent) have been pushed, held down or slapped.

- **One in six** (15 per cent) have been kicked, hit, or had objects thrown at them.
Almost one in five (18 per cent) have been repeatedly belittled and “made to feel worthless”

Fourteen per cent have been stopped from seeing friends and relatives

Almost one in ten (nine per cent) have been forced to have unwanted sex

One in fourteen (seven per cent) have had their sexuality used against them

Four per cent have been threatened with death

Forty two per cent of gay and bisexual men who have experienced domestic abuse from a family member have experienced some form of physical violence. Gay and bisexual men have experienced the following from family members since 16:

One in eight (12 per cent) have been repeatedly belittled and “made to feel worthless”

One in ten have had their sexuality used against them

Eight per cent have been pushed, held down or slapped

Seven per cent have been stopped from seeing friends and relatives

Six per cent have been kicked, hit, or had objects thrown at them

Two per cent have been threatened with death

‘I have been mentally abused as long as I can remember by means of name-calling, being ignored, belittled. This started with my dad, and then with male partners and I never understood why.’

Alan, 50, Scotland

Domestic abuse reporting:

Four in five (78 per cent) gay and bisexual men who have experienced domestic abuse have never reported incidents to the police. Of those that did report, more than half (53 per cent) were not happy with how the police had dealt with the situation.
One in four lesbian and bisexual women have experienced domestic abuse in a relationship

Half of gay and bisexual men have experienced domestic abuse from a family member or partner
What the health service can do

Lesbian, gay and bisexual people report many of the same indicators of domestic abuse that heterosexual people do such as being kicked, hit, or having objects thrown at them, being forced to have unwanted sex, threatened with death and being stopped from seeing friends or relatives. However, lesbian, gay and bisexual people also report having their sexuality used against them by partners and family members. Assumptions of who experiences domestic abuse makes it difficult for lesbian, gay and bisexual people to talk to someone and seek help.

There are a number of steps health services can take to tackle same-sex domestic abuse:

- Train all frontline staff on the prevalence and characteristics of same-sex partner abuse and family abuse
- Appoint a domestic abuse lead that has knowledge of same-sex domestic abuse
- Identify local organisations who can provide additional support for lesbian, gay and bisexual victims of domestic abuse
The Studies

The findings in this briefing are taken from the following Stonewall publications:

**Gay and Bisexual Men’s Health Survey**

In 2011 Stonewall and Sigma Research asked gay and bisexual men from across Britain to complete a survey about their health. 6,861 men responded making it the largest survey of its kind in the world.

**Prescription for Change: Lesbian and bisexual women’s health check 2008**

In 2007 Stonewall and De Montfort University asked lesbians and bisexual women from Britain to complete a survey about their health. 6,178 women responded making it the largest survey of its kind in Europe.
Further Resources

Sexual Orientation: A Guide for the NHS

Healthy Lives
For more NHS specific case-studies, best practice examples and research visit www.healthylives.stonewall.org.uk

Stonewall publications
All Stonewall publications cited in this briefing are free to download from www.stonewall.org.uk/publications
For hard copies of any of these publications visit www.stonewall.org.uk/resource
Domestic abuse
Stonewall Health Briefing
www.healthylives.stonewall.org.uk