

Stonewall

ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

This resource is produced by Stonewall, a UK-based charity that stands for the freedom, equity and potential of all lesbian, gay, bi, trans, queer, questioning and ace (LGBTQ+) people.

At Stonewall, we imagine a world where LGBTQ+ people everywhere can live our lives to the full.

Founded in London in 1989, we now work in each nation of the UK and have established partnerships across the globe. Over the last three decades, we have created transformative change in the lives of LGBTQ+ people in the UK, helping win equal rights around marriage, having children and inclusive education.

Our campaigns drive positive change for our communities, and our sustained change and empowerment programmes ensure that LGBTQ+ people can thrive throughout our lives. We make sure that the world hears and learns from our communities, and our work is grounded in evidence and expertise.

To find out more about our work, visit us at www.stonewall.org.uk

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Stonewall is proud to provide information, support and guidance on LGBTQ+ inclusion; working towards a world where we're all free to be. This does not constitute legal advice, and is not intended to be a substitute for legal counsel on any subject matter.

Supporting trans women in domestic and sexual violence services

Interviews with professionals in
the sector

Forewords

Ruth Hunt, Stonewall

Since the Government announced their commitment to reforming the Gender Recognition Act (GRA) 2004, trans people have faced an onslaught of damaging attacks in the national media and online.

Much of this coverage has focused on particularly emotive issues – whether based on evidence or not. One of these issues is single-sex spaces for women, including women-only domestic and sexual violence services. Some commentators have focused on the view that supporting trans women in these services might compromise the integrity of these safe spaces, or that reforming the GRA would mean violent men could access these spaces more easily.

One thing that has felt stark watching this unfold is that the voices of the professionals delivering these services have largely been missing from these reports, despite the fact that their services have been made a focus of coverage about GRA reform and used by some to substantiate their opposition to change.

It's important that these conversations include people with direct experience of delivering these services. That's why we've commissioned nfpSynergy to interview representatives of 15 organisations who provide and oversee those services. We wanted policy makers and the wider public to understand the everyday reality of how they operate. We needed to hear their voices and find out if and how they support trans women who have experienced domestic and sexual violence.

What follows is a range of views and experiences, directly from service providers. We want their contributions to help move the conversation towards an evidence-based account of what's happening in the sector right now, and are extremely grateful to them for sharing their expertise, and wide range of views and experiences.

What we've found is that, contrary to the panicked headlines, organisations across the sector have already been supporting trans women for some time. This support is vital because, in the past 12 months alone, one in six trans women have experienced domestic violence. Many providers are taking proactive steps to ensure their services are trans-inclusive, and services are developing a growing body of best practice in this area. Some participants in this research recalled instances where challenges arose, and described how they managed these with sensitivity and common sense to ensure that every woman in their service felt welcome and safe.

Many organisations told us that reforming the GRA to simplify the process of getting a Gender Recognition Certificate would have no relevance to how they run their service. Participants overwhelmingly told us that services' thorough risk assessment processes would continue to safeguard against an incident of a violent man attempting to access services, while ensuring that all women receive the support they need.

This report isn't showcasing one view, or one narrative, about trans inclusion – we wanted to reflect where these service providers are now. Several participants expressed concern that there are trans survivors who are being let down when seeking support, with some likening their experiences to the struggles faced by many black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) women, lesbians, bi women and disabled women seeking support. Those participants pointed to the huge progress services have made in including all survivors, whatever their background or identity, and made clear their determination that the current debate about trans survivors won't stop them providing the most effective support they can to them.

Reading these testimonies, it's clear that these organisations are working in an incredibly challenging environment: not least that they are operating under significant financial constraints. Despite this, they want to do everything they can to ensure that all survivors can access the support they need. This includes trans survivors. Services want to work with trans communities and LGBT organisations to make sure they get this right, and this partnership work will be key in ensuring that domestic and sexual violence services are equipped to meet the specific needs of trans women, trans men and non-binary people. It is vital that the UK Government makes a concerted effort to facilitate this closer partnership working in the years ahead, as has been the case in Scotland for some time now, alongside providing sufficient funding for the sector as a whole.

We hope this research provides a useful contribution in supporting this work. It is a detailed insight into this specific issue as told by professionals who deliver and oversee these services on a daily basis. By moving away from speculation and towards an understanding of how services are supporting trans women today, we can restore focus to our shared goal: ensuring that every woman fleeing violence can access the support she needs, now and in the future.

Rt Hon Maria Miller MP

While Britain has come a long way on the journey towards lesbian, gay and bi equality, we are still failing our trans communities.

In 2016, I was proud to lead the Women and Equalities Select Committee's inquiry into transgender equality. We heard from trans communities, who told us about the daily discrimination and violence they face on the street, at home and in public services.

This situation is clearly unacceptable and needs to change. But while there is cross-party support for trans equality, misinformation is holding back progress. This is particularly evident when it comes to discussions around Gender Recognition Act reform and women-only services.

This report is a welcome contribution and restores evidence to a conversation that has so often ignored the reality of vulnerable people's lives. It shows us that women-only services in England and Wales want to do right by trans survivors and offer them the support that they need, following the lead of organisations in Scotland who have been delivering trans-inclusive services for many years.

We now need to get on with the job of supporting trans people across all areas of our society. And while this includes legal reform of the Gender Recognition Act 2004, this isn't where it ends. We need to look at our health services, our criminal justice system, our education system and root out inequality wherever we find it. Only then will our trans communities be treated with the dignity and respect they deserve.

Jess Phillips MP

Violence against women and girls is endemic. In England and Wales, two women are killed every week by a current or ex-partner. One in five women aged over 16 have experienced sexual violence.

Behind each one of these statistics is a woman or girl who's been harmed, belittled and dehumanised by male violence. I've seen the impact first hand: through my job running a refuge before I became an MP, and now through the hundreds of women living both in and out of my constituency who contact me for help.

We know that these women, and their children, need a safe place to go – but every day vulnerable women are being turned away because there aren't enough beds and there isn't enough support.

This should be the focus of media attention much more so than the inclusion of trans women – a group at particular risk – which has become the subject of relentless discussion. This is despite the fact that refuges and rape crisis centres have been supporting trans women for years.

I know from my time working at a refuge that every woman who comes through your door will need personalised support. One day you might be helping a woman with uncertain immigration status and no recourse to public funds. Another day you might be supporting a woman whose partner is threatening to make her trans history public if she leaves.

This report clearly shows that services are committed to helping trans women. Lots of refuges and rape crisis centres have worked with local LGBT charities to make sure they're meeting trans women's needs. Services want to help trans women and where they feel they're falling short, they want expert help.

It is OK that there may be some concerns from women in the sector about these issues. We must be able to have a conversation not a fight about this. Nobody wants to see small organisations with depleting resources feeling unsure. Women's organisations are expert in risk assessment, they do this each and every day. We must trust them to do as they always have in the past, and that is to assess the needs of the vulnerable women in their care.

We need to be fighting to make sure that services have the resources they need to support all women. We need to commit to funding a national network of services, so that all vulnerable women have somewhere to go. We need to tackle our culture of male violence. That's what matters here.

Baroness Burt of Solihull

The Gender Recognition Act (2004) is in urgent need of reform.

Trans communities have been clear that the current process of legal gender recognition is demeaning, bureaucratic and outdated. But while reform would simply make it easier for trans people to bring the gender on their birth certificate in line with their other forms of identification, we've seen a wave of attacks portraying Gender Recognition Act reform as a threat to women-only spaces.

This report shows that this speculation is not based on fact.

While some commentators have continued to portray women's rights and trans equality as being at odds, many providers here speak about their efforts to advance trans inclusion as part of their work to make their services inclusive of all women, and many have formed partnerships with local LGBT organisations.

Now we need to build on this best practice to ensure that trans inclusion is consistent across England and Wales. As Liberal Democrats, we know the importance of leadership from politicians: back in 2010, our Councillor Sarah Brown won a significant victory, securing a commitment that trans people would not be excluded from single-sex services operated by Cambridge City Council. In Scotland too, this report's contributors demonstrate the clear benefit of support and strategy led by government, both local and national.

With a collaborative approach, we can end this damaging speculation and false division, and focus on building a society in which all marginalised people are treated with dignity and respect.

Acknowledgements

We are extremely grateful to professionals in the participating organisations who gave their time to talk to nfpSynergy. These organisations included:

In England and Wales:



Cheshire Without Abuse



Imkaan



Independent Domestic Abusive Services (IDAS)



Latin American Women's Aid (LAWA)



Oasis Domestic Abusive Service



RISE



Welsh Women's Aid



West Wales Domestic Abuse Service



Women's Aid

In Scotland:



Edinburgh Rape Crisis



Rape Crisis Scotland



Scottish Women's Aid

Domestic and sexual violence in Britain

Domestic and sexual violence is a gendered phenomenon, with women at disproportionate risk:

One in four women (27 per cent) experience domestic violence in their lifetime ([Office for National Statistics, 2016](#))

One in five women aged 16-59 has experienced some form of sexual violence since the age of 16 ([Ministry of Justice, Office for National Statistics and Home Office, 2013](#))

Two women are killed each week by a current or former partner in England and Wales ([Office for National Statistics, 2016](#))

In the last 12 months alone, 7.5 per cent of women have experienced domestic violence ([Office for National Statistics, 2017](#)). Trans women are at heightened risk: Stonewall and YouGov's 2018 research, [LGBT in Britain: Home and Communities \(2018\)](#), found that in the same period, 16 per cent had experienced domestic abuse from a partner. Limited research exists into trans women's experiences of sexual violence in Britain today.

SafeLives' 2018 [Guidance for Multi-Agency Forums: LGBT+ People](#) states that trans survivors are one of the most hidden groups of domestic abuse survivors. GALOP, the LGBT+ anti-violence charity, state that while trans and cis people may face similar patterns of abuse, many trans survivors also face specific forms of abuse related to their trans identity. For example, perpetrators might:

- Withhold medication or prevent treatment related to the victim's transition

- Refuse to use correct pronouns and prevent the victim from telling other people about their trans history or identity

- Convince their partner that nobody would believe them because they are trans

In addition, under the current Gender Recognition Act, trans people who married before their transition must obtain their partner's consent, or a divorce, to allow them to obtain a full Gender Recognition Certificate. This can create an opening for abusive individuals to wield further control and power over their partners.

[Out of Sight, Out of Mind?, 2011](#) research by the Scottish Transgender Alliance and the LGBT Domestic Abuse Project, identified specific barriers to support among trans survivors, and found that one in four survivors (24 per cent) told no one about the domestic abuse that they had experienced.

In 2014, the Welsh Government commissioned NatCen to produce research on the [barriers faced by LGBT people in accessing domestic and sexual violence services](#), which highlighted the specific vulnerabilities of trans people to domestic abuse and their experiences in services, and set out recommendations for the Welsh Government.

Resources for individuals experiencing domestic and/or sexual violence and for organisations seeking to deliver trans-inclusive services can be found at the back of this report.

[LGBT in Britain: Trans Report \(2018\)](#) and [LGBT in Britain: Home and Communities \(2018\)](#), Stonewall research with YouGov, uncover the experiences of over 800 trans and non-binary people living in Britain today. These reports highlight trans people's experiences of domestic violence, hate crime and discrimination, and profile testimonies from trans respondents highlighting the need for Gender Recognition Act (2004) reform.

The study

Between January and April 2018, nfpSynergy conducted in-depth interviews on behalf of Stonewall with representatives of 15 national umbrella bodies and local domestic and sexual violence support services across Britain.

Following UK Government proposals to reform the Gender Recognition Act (2004), the inclusion of trans women in single-sex services, and in particular women's domestic and sexual violence support services, has been the subject of increased focus in the media and online.

Stonewall felt that the voices of the women providing and coordinating these services have largely been missing from this coverage, and so we commissioned this series of interviews to better understand their experiences, views and approach.

This report summarises key themes arising from the interviews with representatives of domestic and sexual violence support services in England and Wales, including: their experiences, if any, of supporting trans women, their views on the UK Government's proposed reform of the Gender Recognition Act and what they believe is needed to support trans survivors in the years ahead.

We also wanted to understand how trans inclusion in violence against women and girls services has operated in Scotland, where there is a long-standing history of trans inclusion in these services. The experiences of three Scottish services who took part are profiled separately in Chapter 5 of the report.

We spoke to representatives of frontline services across Britain and national umbrella bodies who support local member services. The organisations interviewed provide services including women's refuges and centres that offer helplines, one-to-one and group counselling, advocacy and community outreach. Some provide mixed-sex services, and all provide women-only services. As is the case for all qualitative research, the views expressed are not intended to represent all organisations in the sector.

For this research, we interviewed professionals who provide and coordinate these services as they have expertise in delivering this support. This report profiles these services' experiences of supporting trans women, as this has been the focus of extensive speculation. The scope of this research does not extend to the experiences of trans women accessing these services, and consequently we did not interview trans survivors of domestic and sexual violence. Trans men and non-binary people fleeing violence also have specific needs and experiences. Research on this, and the experiences of trans women survivors, can be found in the resources section of this report.

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Executive summary

In-depth interviews conducted by nfpSynergy on behalf of Stonewall with 12 national umbrella bodies and local domestic and sexual violence services across England and Wales found that:

Domestic and sexual violence services in England and Wales have been supporting trans women in their single-sex women-only services for some time.

Participants take a personalised, client-centred approach to supporting trans women, as they do for all survivors. Many described steps they are taking to proactively deliver trans-inclusive services, including creating specific policies and delivering staff training.

Participants said that many staff and member services have responded positively to discussions about supporting trans women. Most recalled positive experiences of trans women accessing their services and where other service users have been supportive.

Recalling instances where challenges have arisen, services described how they engaged with staff and service users to build understanding for trans survivors and ensure that a safe and inclusive space was maintained for all.

Many participants told us that reform of the Gender Recognition Act would have no relevance to how they deliver their services. While respondents were aware of a view that gender recognition reform could allow violent men to pose as women to access their services, with one participant expressing a concern about this, there was otherwise a clear consensus that services' thorough risk assessment procedures would safeguard against this. These participants said that gender recognition reform would not compromise their ability to protect their service against, or turn away, any abusive or disruptive individual.

No participants said they have used the Equality Act exemption to deny support to a trans survivor. Some participants said that the exemption should be kept as a safeguard, while others were concerned about other services using the exemption to turn away trans survivors when they should be providing support.

Several participants expressed concern that there are trans survivors who are being let down when seeking support, with some likening their experiences to the struggles faced by many black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) women, lesbians, bi women and disabled women seeking support. Those participants pointed to the huge progress services have made in including all survivors, whatever their background or identity, and made clear their determination that the current debate about trans survivors won't stop them providing the most effective support they can to them.

Participants stated that more needs to be done to support trans survivors, and several called for greater Government investment and guidance for all service providers on trans inclusion. A number of participants said that trans voices need to be at the heart of these initiatives.

Participants said that funding cuts are the main threat facing their services and called for increased funding for all services, including women-only services, specialist services for LGBT survivors and services for BAME women.

We also spoke to three local and national organisations in Scotland, where there is a longstanding history of trans inclusion in violence against women and girls services. Scottish participants told us they welcomed the Scottish Government's proposed reform of the Gender Recognition Act, and advised that greater investment in training and resources in England and Wales would be critical in helping services become more trans-inclusive.

1. Responding to requests for support

Domestic and sexual violence support services have been supporting trans women in their women-only services for some time.

Every frontline service we spoke to told us that trans women are eligible for support in their services. This largely included their women-only communal services, although some determine this on a case-by-case basis.

- “ We very simply state that we support clients who identify as women. If we have a client who wants to come in that identifies as female, they can come into our refuge or any part of our service.
- “ We feel that providing inclusive and positive support for trans people fits quite well with our ethos because we work from the principle of services being gender-responsive. What we’ve set out about the access to services is that they should respond to somebody as their presenting gender and the gender they choose to present as, and that should not be a barrier to them accessing support. It’s not just about it being legal, it’s about also the fact that this is the right thing to do.
- “ We will look at each case as one case at a time.

The majority of participants said that they, or their member services, have supported trans women in their women-only services before. Many have been doing this for some time, although for most their experiences of trans women seeking support were limited in terms of overall numbers.

- “ In this training session we had staff from five or six different organisations, and all but one of those organisations were basically saying ‘We’ve been working to provide trans accessible services for the last two years, we don’t know that we’re necessarily always doing that well, but this feels important to us’.
- “ We’ve had three experiences of trans women accessing our refuge services, one of which was a number of years ago and she was a woman with no recourse to public funds and had a relative with her. We didn’t know that she was a trans woman when she came into our refuge services and she was fully accepted within the refuge, there wasn’t any hostility towards her... She was fully supported successfully in the refuge.
- “ When we wrote our first formal equality strategy about seven or eight years ago we then wrote our trans inclusion policy.

Several participants acknowledged that their services may have supported trans women in the past without realising.

- “ We’ve had trans women accessing refuge services throughout our services to our knowledge, obviously there might have been trans women accessing services without our knowledge, but to our knowledge we’ve had trans women who’ve accessed our services.

“ Our guidance to our members is to be inclusive and accept someone trying to access services who defines herself as a woman as eligible to our women-only services.”

2. Supporting trans survivors

Domestic and sexual violence support services take a personalised approach to supporting trans women, as they do for all survivors, and participants described steps they are taking to deliver trans-inclusive services.

Support services take a client-centred approach to supporting trans women, as they do for any woman seeking support, and work with trans survivors to decide how best to meet their specific needs.

- “ *Our position is that a woman who identifies as a woman should be respected as a woman and that is the bottom line, and it's then working out with that woman what services she wants to access and how that can be organised for her in a way that is going to give her the best chance of recovering from the abuse that she's experienced, and that she should be treated as any other survivor of domestic violence because that will be the presenting issue.* ”
- “ *We had someone who approached us through our helpline service and wanted access to support and they came in through assessment and the helpline, and they were assessed as being in need of refuge space. We arranged for them to be met, they were taken into the refuge and they were made comfortable. Like all our clients they have their own room and there is a communal kitchen, they make it home as much as they can when they're fleeing, and then overnight they get used to being in the space. They were then met with our floating support workers and went through their issues, what they needed. They wanted to move away from their abuser so we worked with them to work out where they wanted to go... The person who came into the refuge was quite forward about stuff so just told us, at the end of the day this is how I want to be addressed, this is what's happened to me, if you want to know about it I'll tell you, and the two workers who dealt with it said it was so good because we knew that they would correct us if we made a mistake.* ”

In addition to offering support within their organisation, some services said they would offer a supported referral to a specialist LGBT service where possible.

- “ *If somebody comes to a service, if they say they're a trans woman then we would say do you want to be referred to a specialist LGBT service or do you want to stay within our service. Whether it was sexuality or gender or ethnicity or race or disability, if we know of another organisation that's got specialist support we would offer them that as well as saying that they can come into the general organisation if they choose to.* ”

Several participants noted steps they take to ensure their services meet the specific needs of trans women, as they do for many different groups of women, including BAME women, lesbians, bi women and disabled women.

- “ *If you want organisations to be inclusive then you have to think about the fact that there's a slight difference in the way that you deliver services. So when we deliver services and it's someone who is a woman from a [BAME] community we ask questions that elicit answers, in the same way as when you're working with someone who starts to identify that they are trans. There are things that you would need to work out in a domestic violence case, so did suddenly the violence start because you started to be more in touch with the person you want to be rather than what you'd been assigned. Also, stuff around how their legal gender might have been used against them.* ”
- “ *In terms of our trans clients, we do not ask any inappropriate questions about where they are in their transition or any operations that they may or may not have had... We are very careful with pronouns.* ”

Participants highlighted the importance of having clear policies on trans inclusion as part of wider equality and diversity policies, supported by staff training, to underpin a trans-inclusive approach.

- “ *We have written quite an extensive trans policy and procedure guidance which we then have done training with our members on.* ”

■ ■ *We have a diversity policy, we've got a transgender policy and as part of our initial induction we do a day's training on equality and diversity of which our transgender policies are part of that. We then have an equality and diversity champions' group where one person from each service is nominated as a champion and they get additional support and training, and they meet quarterly to serve on different and decided-on interests and whether that's sexuality or whether that's race, whatever the issues are. So we're very alive to issues around equality and diversity as an organisation because of who we are really, we're a women's organisation and it's important to us that we are inclusive of all women.*

“We would make the same assessment that we would make of any woman and make a decision to accommodate or not based on that assessment and not on the fact that they were trans.”

3. Engaging staff and other service users

Services explained how they proactively work with staff and other service users to create an inclusive space for trans survivors, and how, when challenges have arisen, they engaged with staff and service users to maintain a safe and supportive environment for all.

Participants said that many staff and member services have responded positively to discussions about supporting trans women. Most recalled positive experiences of trans women accessing their services and where other service users had been supportive.

- *I was quite pleased about the issue of this young trans woman who came in and I overheard the conversation, and the staff member from the refuge was saying to the manager I really want to take her and she's obviously very vulnerable and I feel I can help her and work with her. The refuge worker was strongly advocating for the referral.*
- *Reality was, a transgender client is another woman in our organisation, and we haven't had any transphobia from other residents. We haven't had any of the fears that other people would have, that they may feel that, 'Oh, you're allowing a male in.'*
- *One of our values is compassion, we operate as an organisation that we don't deny that we are feminist in our origins and our history, and that many of us would declare ourselves feminist, but there's not been a single member of staff who's had issues with this.*

Participants recalled some challenges. While services said that many staff want to support trans survivors, sometimes staff are worried about doing or saying the wrong thing. Some staff have also expressed concerns about how other service users will respond. Participants said that policies and training on trans inclusion have helped to build confidence and address worries.

- *I think there are anxieties about getting it wrong. I think that's one of the biggest worries about actually doing the wrong thing, saying the wrong thing.*
- *I think, that not having any direct experience, people are fearful until they've engaged with the issue themselves and then they realise that if they've got good policies and procedures in place to protect survivors from any kind of bullying or harassment, then they can meet everybody's needs quite adequately.*
- *A couple of years ago we wrote a very strong policy and procedure which we then shared with our members and held a workshop with them and we brought an expert in to talk with our members about what best practice looks like and how this can happen. On the whole that was very positively received because that's what people wanted to know, they wanted to know how to do it, so most of the negativity came from a fear of not knowing how to do it.*

“Generally people have responded quite positively and some of the team, in terms of talking it through, have had to really think what this means, what's it about, because if it's not something you've talked about before you might not really think it through. We've got a policy, and there's been no one that's said no, we can't do it.”

Services recalled occasions where they responded to a complaint from another client in regards to a trans woman using the service. Participants explained that in these instances they engaged with other clients to build understanding for trans survivors, and some described how they brought in outside experts to support this.

- *We've had two different scenarios and some of the service users that were around have been absolutely fine and some haven't.*
- *There is an extra issue for [both trans and lesbian service users] that other women don't have, and even though they're living in refuge accommodation with other women, that doesn't mean other women are going to accept them because the whole patriarchy system makes us believe that women should be this and men should be this.*
- *A worker that was involved from the women's refuge said that [bringing in LGBT specialists to provide support] was quite a good learning opportunity for them, the workers there, but also it allowed them to explore with the women in the refuge some of the issues around the difficulties for trans women, to identify how hard it must be to be there as a trans woman and how hard it must be to have experienced domestic abuse and some of the intersecting complexities.*

Participants explained the importance of women-only services in providing a safe space for women to recover from male violence. While some participants expressed the view, or acknowledged a concern among some staff, that other service users could perceive a trans woman in their service as being a man and feel unsafe, others said that they would manage such instances if they arose by sensitively engaging with all service users to maintain a safe space for all.

- *All women who come to our services have been highly traumatised and they've been highly traumatised because of male violence.*
- *If they were stuck in a room [with] somebody that they experience as male, that would raise issues for them and, potentially, their continuing to access the help that they need.*
- *I would be advising them strongly to bring in some external expertise, for somebody to go in and talk to everybody and explain how difficult any journey of a trans person transitioning either way really is, because it's a lifetime's journey. There are very practical concerns that service users have, both around themselves and their children, that just need to be laid to rest, and some of the myths need to be brought out into the open and challenged, but possibly not in front of a trans resident herself because that can be quite a painful process, but it certainly needs to be done.*

To proactively build understanding for trans survivors and address any questions or concerns, some services engage with other service users both when preparing to support a trans woman and through their onboarding procedures for all clients.

- *I remember doing a referral with someone in our outreach building and just explaining what transgender meant. And this was something that was very new to her because of where she'd come from in a different country, in a small remote village, coming to the UK. Her initial reaction was, 'Oh, I didn't realise that was a thing.'. And [I explained], 'If we have transgender women in, they will feel exactly like you do. They're very scared, they're very frightened, they've been let down by certain people who they thought they trusted and loved.'. And she understood that.*
- *We are very clear from the start that we do have transgender [women] and women of different faiths and cultures and beliefs through our door constantly.*
- *[For a group of survivors with a religious background] we found a woman pastor who came to the refuge to talk about LGBT rights... We needed to bring [the pastor in] who can talk about the Bible and things like that in a different way, in a way that brings a calm to the refuge and to feel like it's about being tolerant and being a kind human being with other people, regardless of how they live or who they are, and that worked.*

“Refuges can be an intense environment as you can imagine and other service users have discomfort with each other for a lot of reasons, and often there can be issues, if it’s not a trans issue, more often there is an ethnic or a religious or sexual orientation issue or other issues that occur... So it is within our policy that where there are other service users that have discomfort around sharing services with trans users we will work with them to support and educate them in the same way as we would with any other equality issue in general.”

One participant recalled an occasion where another service user bullied and physically attacked a trans survivor. Participants were clear that they do not tolerate bullying or violent behaviour and are experienced at dealing with this, and were keen to ensure that trans women fleeing violence do not arrive in a space where they are further victimised.

- “ The other women told me that another woman was basically physically abusing the transgender woman in the refuge... When I talked to the transgender woman I said I know this is happening, why haven’t you said anything to me. And she said to me because I want to be safe and I don’t want to leave the place and nobody is going to take me in any other place, and I said but you’re not going to leave, you need to talk to me. And it was a big issue and she said this is the only place I’ve been able to get because I’ve been rejected everywhere in the refuge accommodation and this is the only place I got and that’s why, if I have to accept this from the other women in the refuge that’s fine because at the end of the day I know the staff and you are helping me and supporting me and that’s fine. And I said no, that’s not fine, that is absolutely not fine.*
- “ We have had issues in the past where perhaps someone has been racist or someone has been homophobic and you just deal with those issues through your licence agreement and through your ordinary systems, so in that sense that wouldn’t be uncommon to face some of those issues where you have people from a range of backgrounds and put them together in a new environment, it can release some tensions and differences of views so we are used to dealing with things like that.*
- “ When someone comes in to the refuge or the dispersed unit they’re told what they can and cannot do, so obviously discriminatory language, sexism, homophobia, transphobia is part of the conversation about what not to do.*

Several participants expressed concern that there are trans survivors who are being let down when seeking support, with some likening their experiences to the struggles faced by many black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) women, lesbians and bi women, and disabled women seeking support. Those participants pointed to the huge progress services have made in including all survivors, whatever their background or identity, and made clear their determination that the current debate about trans survivors won’t stop them providing the most effective support they can to them.

- “ A lot of the struggles that trans women have faced accessing women only services and women’s services generally are very similar to the struggles that BAME women faced, and that lesbians and disabled women face as well in using these services.*
- “ When we received a lesbian woman, it was an issue also. About her sexuality, ‘Oh she’s weird and probably she wants to kiss me, I’m going to punch her.’ and things like that, so you have to work with all of that.*
- “ You know, I started working in refuges at the time when people were going ‘You should not have lesbians living in refuges because they’re going to get found anyway’... I remember those bad old days and I reckon it could probably still happen, so when I hear some of the arguments I’m going ‘I’ve heard this before’, except applied in a different scenario, you know.*

Several participants noted that while there are some voices in the sector who take the stance that single-sex women's services should not support trans women, these are increasingly in the minority. Participants said that open conversations with staff help foster an inclusive approach.

“ Some staff might feel that the whole point of a women-only service is to foster some kind of solidarity around a common experience of sexism and sexual violence through being a woman, and they might have more of a political or a theoretical position that a trans woman won't have lived that experience and I think that needs to be challenged in a different way, that's a different kind of training that staff might need around understanding that there isn't a single experience of patriarchy, that patriarchy is also part of homophobia and transphobia, and that part of sexism itself is about very narrow and constraining socialisation about what gender is. So while there is something to hold onto about solidarity against a lifetime's experience of sexism, there is also something to hold onto against a lifetime's experience of homophobia and racism and transphobia as well, so really I think there is a lot of work to be done in our sector.

“ I don't want to deny that there are people out there that are transphobic as there are in society I suppose, but I would say that they are very much in the minority now and from my ten years in the field I would say that has been a significant change and a very positive change. So I would say that from when I first started in the sector people's understanding of trans issues has grown significantly and the trans phobic element within the sector has definitely reduced dramatically, so that's such a positive thing.

“We don't want to be bringing residents into a situation where they're going to face discrimination because we went through that journey in the seventies and eighties with BAME women going into refuges that were largely full of white women and experiencing a lot of racism and hostility, or just lack of understanding really. I would have hoped that as a movement we've learnt lessons from that that we could be a bit smarter this time.”

4. Understanding the law

Gender Recognition Act (2004) reform

The Gender Recognition Act (2004) is a law that enables some trans people to obtain a Gender Recognition Certificate, which allows a trans person to amend their birth certificate to reflect their gender identity. This ensures that they can:

- Protect their privacy by bringing the gender on their birth certificate in line with all their other identification documents (such as their driving license or passport)
- Get married or enter a civil partnership in their gender identity
- Have their pension and insurance policies administered correctly

At present, the Act requires trans people to have a medical diagnosis of gender dysphoria and engage in a lengthy and demeaning process, including submitting extensive evidence to a panel they never meet, to obtain a Gender Recognition Certificate. The Act makes no provision for non-binary people (those who do not identify as male or female).

As a result, most trans people do not engage with this legal process of gender recognition, and so their birth certificates do not reflect their gender identity: the Government Equalities Office's National LGBT Survey (2018) found that just 12 per cent of trans men and women who had started or finished transitioning said they had a Gender Recognition Certificate.

In response to the Women and Equalities Select Committee's recommendations in their 2016 Transgender Equality Inquiry, the Government announced that it will review the Act to de-medicalise and streamline the gender recognition process. This includes exploring the possibility of introducing a self-determination process of gender recognition, as is already in place in countries including the Republic of Ireland, Norway and Malta.

The Scottish Government consulted on their proposals to reform the Act in Scotland earlier this year, and in July 2018 the UK Government launched a similar consultation for England and Wales.

Since the UK Government announced its proposals to reform the Gender Recognition Act, some commentators in the media and online have expressed the view that these reforms could create an opening for violent men to pose as women to access women-only services. In light of this, we asked participants about the Government's proposed reforms from their perspective as organisations overseeing and delivering women-only services.

Many participants told us that Gender Recognition Act reform would have no relevance to how they deliver their services. While many were aware of a view that reform could allow violent men to pose as women to access their services, with one participant expressing a concern about this, there was otherwise a clear consensus that services' thorough risk assessment procedures would safeguard against this.

Many of the participants we spoke to were aware of Government proposals to reform the Gender Recognition Act (2004) and most specifically welcomed improvement to the process by which trans people can obtain a Gender Recognition Certificate to have their gender legally recognised.

■ *I feel really positively about the Gender Recognition Act [reform] because I've never been comfortable with the medicalisation of it in the way that it has been.*

Many told us Gender Recognition Act reform would have no relevance to how they deliver their services. No participant told us that they ask for a birth certificate or Gender Recognition Certificate from any client as proof of gender in order to access their services.

- “ I don't think any of our clients have had a Gender Recognition Certificate because that's not really relevant to our criteria. From the feedback I've had from the residents and clients I've worked with, they're very angry about that and that it's very difficult to obtain. It's a very traumatising process, that you have to go to a panel. Most of the clients that come to our refuge do not have their passport, they don't have their documents. Trying to hold all that paperwork - which is vast - and all the appointments you need to go to is very difficult if you are a victim of domestic abuse.
- “ I know that there are fears in the sector and very much I can predict for my organisation that it doesn't make a huge difference going forward.

While participants were aware of a view that's been expressed that gender recognition reform could allow violent men to pose as women to access women-only services, with one participant saying that this worries them, participants overwhelmingly told us that services' robust risk assessment procedures would safeguard against this, and that they are experienced at screening out perpetrators using many different means to attempt to gain access. These participants said that gender recognition reform would not compromise their ability to protect their service against, or turn away, any abusive or disruptive individual.

- “ I wouldn't imagine a man coming to us or a man saying that he's a transgender woman or in the process of it, and for us not to be able to assess that. I don't know, I'm just imagining a transgender woman coming here, like an impostor, right, but because you do an assessment with people before you work with them, I don't think that that's really a valid argument for women's organisation to say that's why we're not accepting transgender women. I don't think so because all organisations have assessments and you have comprehensive assessments with all people, it's not that they come and talk and that's it.
- “ We've certainly had women whose perpetrator would go to the nth degree. I'm also very clear that I'm not conflating trans women with perpetrators. Do you know what I mean? I don't think trans women are any more likely to perpetrate [violence] than the general population. What I do think is that perpetrators are very, very acute and good at being able to use their context to continue to abuse.
- “ I have a lot of experience with perpetrators using the law against victims. We see perpetrators trying to use the Freedom of Information and Data Protection Act to further perpetrate, and this is a very serious issue in the [domestic violence] world, so it shouldn't be taken lightly. I think the media portrayal of 'Oh, I can't have a man going into the women's toilets' is largely nonsense, but what they need to be taking seriously is there's perpetrators who are using the Freedom of Information laws and the access to their files and that kind of thing in order to continue to perpetrate, and also using family courts, the legal structures in the family courts. So this is a very real abuse of power, abuse of legislation that should be taken into consideration.
- “ We've heard people who dress up as delivery men so this is not any different and so I don't feel that that is a founded fear, and obviously we have to work to make sure that refuges are safe spaces for everyone anyway and it should just be part of that process of making sure that anybody accessing our services remains safe and there is a safe space for everybody.

“People say 'Yes, but what if some man decides to dress as a woman and goes to the refuge', and I'm like 'That's why we've got risk assessments.'”

There was some uncertainty as to whether gender recognition reform would affect services' rights and responsibilities under the Equality Act (2010), which provides an exemption for single-sex services to treat a trans person differently, or refuse them services, where they can demonstrate that this is necessary. In their GRA consultation document, published in July 2018 (after participant interviews took place), the UK Government has said that changes to the Equality Act (2010) will not be within the scope of any reform of the Gender Recognition Act (2004).

- “ *[The UK Government has] not published its consultation on a proposed amendment to the GRA. I'm interested in it and I want to see which of the Women's Equality Select Committee's recommendations they may be pulling through into that consultation. And, as I say, that's where I have the concern about the combination of those recommendations having potential unforeseen consequences for organisations and I'm particularly concerned around keeping the schedule for exemptions.*
- “ *I would have to look at them both side by side [the Gender Recognition Act and Equality Act] to see whether they were perfectly compatible or whether there is a potential clash of legislation here.*

The Equality Act (2010)

The Equality Act (2010) gives many trans people protection against discrimination by public and private services under the protected characteristic of 'gender reassignment'. It also makes provision for organisations to operate single-sex services.

Under the Act, trans people have the right to access single-sex services in line with their 'acquired gender', and they are not required to obtain a Gender Recognition Certificate, or have undergone any form of medical intervention, to be eligible for support in these services.

However, under the Act, it is lawful for single-sex services to provide a different service or refuse their service to someone who is undergoing, has undergone or is proposing to undergo 'gender reassignment', in circumstances where they can demonstrate that doing so constitutes a 'proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim'.

The Government has said that any changes to the Equality Act will not be within the scope of any reform of the Gender Recognition Act (2004).

No participants said they have used the Equality Act exemption to deny support to a trans survivor. Some participants said that the exemption should be kept as a safeguard, while others were concerned about other services using the exemption to turn away trans survivors when they should be providing support.

No participant said that they had invoked this exemption to deny support to a trans survivor.

- “ *We certainly wouldn't exclude somebody from any of our existing services based on the fact that they were transgender.*

All the services we spoke to provide a range of services and accommodation options to flexibly meet the diverse needs of their clients. As is frequently the case for many different survivors, support through one-to-one counselling or in dispersed accommodation units is sometimes offered to trans survivors alongside, or as an alternative to, communal services.

- “ *We don't just have a one size fits all approach so even if we excluded someone from one service, if there was a genuine need to do so, we could offer them another. We could offer them individual support or we could offer them dispersed accommodation so it's not, I think it's not something that we would do lightly but if there was a genuine reason that we thought they wouldn't get on themselves in the group or other people would find things difficult, not because they were trans, there could perhaps be other reasons for that, generally about behaviours and things like that, then we would have to do so I suppose but we wouldn't do so and not offer them something as an alternative.*

Participant views were split between those who saw a need for keeping the exemption as a safeguard, and those who said that they could not see a case for keeping it.

- “ If trans women are excluded from certain services under the exemptions provided for, then that’s determined on an individual case-by-case basis. An assessment would be made that would inform whether that decision was proportionate and legal: legitimate. And I would take advice on that. But that professional discretion is very rarely invoked. Which is what I’ve been trying to say. But it still remains, I think, an essential protection that allows me to ensure that women who would not otherwise access our services, do still receive the support that they need.
- “ [The exemption is] absolutely wrong, or it is in my opinion, because the thing is, I know it brings a lot of challenges to organisations, I know because we have been dealing with those challenges that we have and we have transgender women who have lived here... Some services they don’t want to work with [people with a particular immigration status] but that doesn’t mean you cannot work with them, it’s just that I know, it’s more complicated, it’s going to bring challenges but that doesn’t mean you cannot deal with them and it doesn’t mean that you’re not going to make mistakes but you need to do it basically.
- “ Sorry, like putting it into practice, so we’re going to exclude on a case by case basis, so what’s going to be the criteria for exclusion, who’s going to decide, what are we going to do if that person has had some kind of surgical journey... Like what is it, what’s the thing that’s going to be the deciding factor, is it going to be in the aesthetic, is it going to be in the behaviour, but what’s going to be the criteria around behaviour?... I don’t know if it’s me, but I’m just not getting how people imagine that this is going to work.

Some participants expressed a worry about other services using these exemptions to bar access to trans survivors when they should be providing support.

- “ I think that some organisations may use that to withhold transgender clients coming into their service because my clients have reported that back to me, that they’ve had a lot of doors closed in their face. And obviously, they say they don’t fit the criteria for a male service.
- “ It has been used as an easy way to justify excluding trans women and I’m not sure that it is always justifiable in the interests of other service users... I think we need a stronger push towards inclusion so I would support some parallel wording to go with that [the Equality Act] that is around addressing transphobia at the same time. At the moment that wording doesn’t include in that part of the Act any recognition that part of that decision making process on a case by case basis might be made on the basis of transphobia rather than legitimate reasons for exclusions.

“If somebody came into our service that wouldn’t be comfortable going into a women-only space or a refuge for whatever reason, we would look at how else we could provide that service, we would explore it in regards to their need, so it might be looking at how we could work with housing or other aspects in response to what they need as a presenting person... Their identity as trans should not be a barrier to support.”

5. Trans inclusion in Scotland's services

We wanted to speak to women's organisations in Scotland, where there has been a longstanding history of trans inclusion in domestic and sexual violence services.

Since 2011 the Scottish Government has required these services to have action plans on trans inclusion, and guidance on trans inclusion has been produced in partnership between women's organisations and LGBT organisations. The Scottish participants we spoke to have supported trans women in their services for many years and welcomed the Scottish Government's proposed Gender Recognition Act reforms.

In early 2018, the Scottish Government consulted on its proposed reforms of the Gender Recognition Act (2004) to introduce a self-determination process of legal gender recognition. In November 2017, Scottish women's organisations including Rape Crisis Scotland and Scottish Women's Aid signed a joint statement welcoming the proposed reforms, stating:

“ For over a decade, we have engaged in constructive dialogue with our colleagues in the Scottish Trans Alliance, Equality Network, LGBT Youth Scotland and Stonewall Scotland. We have shared knowledge, explored complex practicalities and developed sensible policy positions on trans inclusion. We do not regard trans equality and women's equality to contradict or be in competition with each other... Rape Crisis and Women's Aid in Scotland provide trans inclusive services on the basis of self-identification. We support the Equal Recognition campaign and welcome the reform of the Gender Recognition Act... We will continue to work collaboratively with Scottish Trans Alliance and other equality organisations with the aim of ensuring that new processes are appropriately designed and without unintended consequences.

In line with this, Scottish participants told us that they welcomed Gender Recognition Act reform, stating that their services already operate on a self-determination basis.

“ I think some of the media coverage seemed to kind of imply that it would have a really stark and negative effect on women's services, which is not reflective, well it's not reflective of how we felt, and wasn't recognising that for the majority of these services it's how we operate currently. We've worked on the basis of self-declaration for some time now and in our experience it's never been something that's been exploited or misused.

“ We would never ask for evidence of someone's sex or gender because we're open to women on a self identifying basis.

Scottish interviewees stated that they have been proactively working to provide trans-inclusive services for many years.

“ This is something the centres have been doing for years, they've had a trans inclusive action plan for six or seven years, we've had a trans inclusion policy, and they've got their Charter Mark [a quality-assurance standard on LGBT inclusion].

“ The frontline services work really hard to be accessible and inclusive.

“ We recognise trans women as women, therefore they're included in our women only times and spaces, and that's been our practice for years, like years and years.

“I think a lot of the negative stuff that is online, particularly at the moment, is that there will be some flood of men pretending to be women in order to gain access to women only spaces, and I don't think based on other people's experience and also based on our own experience, in our policy it says that we will never ask for a GRC, so we've been already for a long time basing our work with women on their own self-identification and that hasn't been problematic.”

Participants advised how they would respond if challenges arose when supporting a trans survivor, and how they use a flexible approach to meet the needs of every woman requiring support.

- “ If someone for example wanted a women-only space but perceived that this person wasn't a 'woman', and so felt unsafe about that, then it would be about how do we address that with them separately, look at maybe challenging and exploring with them what are their concerns and how do we create that safety for everybody.*
- “ Risk assessments are to actually support the women, to make the right choice for them, you know, so it's not just about the service and its accessibility, it's also about the women saying 'Actually refuge will work for me or it won't, or can you find me something else and give me some outreach support'. So when we talk about a case by case basis, I think we do that anyway with all women, you know.*

Scottish participants rejected the view that gender recognition reform could allow men to pose as women to access services, and reflected on their experience of providing trans-inclusive services on the basis of self-identification.

- “ I think it's quite offensive to trans people, and I think we have really robust risk assessment processes for all services. I would believe that the frontline workers would always support service users in the best possible way, and I find that hard to think that they would be fooled by a perpetrator trying to enter services, I think that suggestion, I have seen that in the media, I think that's quite ridiculous, to be honest.*
- “ The service now has been trans-inclusive for [8+] years and in our experience that has never happened. We have risk assessments in place, that are in place for anybody who's accessing our service, that will still exist, and as a practitioner... sometimes I think that conversation can be misleading, because we're practitioners who work in sexual violence, we work with survivors and we have experience and knowledge about perpetrators of sexual violence. If we were confronted by somebody who was a perpetrator and was using our service in order to perpetrate sexual violence, I think practitioners' experience would come into play there. As I said, it isn't something we've experienced here, but I'd hope that what is in place in terms of how we work, and the risk assessment processes that exist, that that would be reassuring to anyone who had any concerns.*

The organisations interviewed credited the collaborative approach of the sector and Scottish trans and LGBT organisations, and the Scottish Government's leadership, with progressing trans inclusion in domestic and sexual violence services. These participants were clear that greater investment in training and resources in England and Wales would be critical in helping services in those countries become more trans-inclusive.

- “ I think that there needs to be some tailored training and resources put in to support those services, to be more inclusive... Yes, I think providing good guidance and training and support, and doing a bit of that myth busting I think is helpful, just getting back to the basics of what we're here to do, which is to support people who are experiencing discrimination and gender-based violence.*

While recognising the considerable progress made, participants observed that trans inclusion is a constant work in progress.

- “ *What we've identified is that, yes, we've been trans-inclusive technically [for a number of years], but the number of trans people who would access our service remains small, so that's a problem, because we know that trans people experience disproportionate levels of sexual violence and are specifically targeted in the form of hate crime. I suppose we would see being proactively inclusive as work that's always ongoing, where we work to continually address barriers that exist, and work to make sure we're aware of what those barriers are so we can reduce them.* ”
- “ *We are aware that we need to upskill and do some training around trans inclusion, because the workforce changes, people leave, new people come on board, boards change.* ”
- “ *Whilst I would agree that people are trans-inclusive, that doesn't mean that every worker comes with that completely fully formed at the start of their practice, but I think that people are well-intentioned but often would make mistakes accidentally, misgender or not fully understand or get things wrong and I think partnership work is really key about building those good relationships. We all want things for everyone to feel safer and in terms of survivors, whether they're trans or not we all want people to feel that they can access the support they need, that they feel safe, that they feel heard, listened to etc, so I think finding the common ground and being able to work from there and having enough of a good relationship that we can be honest about concerns and find a way forward.* ”

“I suppose generally, from our experience [trans inclusion] is something that we've done for a number of years, and it's been a really positive experience. I think addressing some of the concerns, we'd want to relay the fact that we have done it for a long time, with ongoing support and training from partnership organisations, and it has been positive.”

6. What needs to happen next

Participants stated that more needs to be done to support trans survivors and ensure that women's services are properly funded to support all women in the years ahead.

Participants told us that they are aware that trans survivors are still being let down when seeking support.

- *On the ground level, my clients experience so much prejudice. They still experience closed doors, they still experience so much questioning, suspicion. Are they a perpetrator dressed up as female? ... [What] gets forgotten amongst all these prejudices is actually, these are victims of domestic abuse, that they will have already experienced another level of abuse because of their gender status, and that they are much, much more vulnerable.*
- *I do not understand why an organisation would 'other' someone when what we've been fighting against for many years is 'othering'.*

A number of participants said that trans voices need to be at the heart of initiatives to support trans inclusion in domestic and sexual violence services.

- *For me it's a bit more than inclusion... it's autonomy, it's voice, it's determination, it's leadership, it's representation, not tokenism, it's what we call 'by and for', which is by us, for us, with us. One of our mantras is 'Nothing about us without us'. To actually build real services that are appropriately trans responsive, they need to have trans women at the heart of those services.*

Several services called for greater Government investment in training and guidance for all service providers on trans inclusion, and were keen to work in closer partnership with LGBT organisations to support this work.

- *Part of making [women-only services] more accessible is through the kind of messages we put out, through the imagery that we use, through more inclusive messages on websites and in promotional material, but also through having very strongly worded and open statements to all service users about our equality and diversity policies when they arrive in the services. Then, just like we think through for black women or for refugee women or for disabled women, are there particular measures or provision that we want to offer that is different from what they offer other service users because trans women may have different needs, and really we need to reach out to LGBT organisations in our own localities to understand better what those needs might be. It's also through partnership working at a national level and also locally. I suppose what policymakers need to understand is that actually there's going to need to be some money behind this; money for training and money for support and the sector needs more investment in training staff and training boards of trustees as well. If they want it to be taken seriously and done properly they need to invest in the development of some kind of national training programme.*

“There needs to be much more in place to keep these client groups safe, and policies and procedures to make sure that if you do have a transgender client come through the door, they are welcome from the start. Not, ‘Okay, we have to work with you, but we don’t really want to’. Because that’s the vibe I’ve got from other agencies before.”

- “ What I can see happening is I think there’s real space for very rich partnership and rich learning, rather than having a token trans survivor voice as an add-on and as a tick-box. The government needs to think seriously about funding for services, but it’s really important that those are intersectional. So it’s important that we have funding that really focuses on the development and strengthening of services for trans survivors, taking into account the diversity of survivors and the diversity of needs and the diversity of concerns that may arise.
- “ I feel refuges will need to challenge themselves on this, but I also understand that there is a big issue in terms of funding and in terms of resources to do that because I also think that it’s not okay to receive a transgender woman in a place where she’s going to be abused and where she’s going to be more vulnerable or where she’s going to feel bad, so you need to have some things in place to work on that. And I think that’s possible because we have done it before and it was successful at the end, but it’s a challenge that refuges and women’s organisations need to take. We are a very small organisation and we don’t have massive resources, but we have to challenge ourselves and be able to work with that.

Nearly all participants said that funding cuts are the main threat facing services and called for increased funding for all services. Alongside services for BAME women, specialist LGBT services were identified as being at particular risk, and participants called for increased funding for these services to ensure that all trans survivors, including trans men and non-binary people, can access support.

- “ One of the major concerns that drives a lot of these fears is the fact that the sector is massively under-resourced to provide services, even with the basic services, and one of the things that is very clear is that specialist services within that for the LGBT+ services and BAME services are the most under-resourced, and so I do think it would be nice to see some more specialist trans and LGBT+ services being funded again because it’s a unique issue and it’s a unique way of experiencing domestic abuse if you’re a trans person or there might be a unique intersecting issue that you might want specific projects for or specific services for.
- “ Commissioners tend to be a bit fickle about these things, they will commission something as a one off but then when it comes around to the next funding round, if they’ve had more government cuts, [LGBT services] are exactly the sort of services that tend to be axed which is not right.
- “ I think trans guys’ voices are very, very quiet in this debate, they aren’t heard and they aren’t particularly sought, and I think that that’s something that does concern me a little bit, because I feel as though they’re a lot less visible than trans women in terms of just having a voice about these issues, and it definitely isn’t because they don’t get affected by domestic abuse because they do, you know, the same as everybody else.

“Trans voices need to be at the forefront of any of these conversations. For me, my position is I have a responsibility and accountability to my trans sisters and I come from that place, but I’m also not going to make assumptions about what their needs are and the best way to respond, because I hated it when people made assumptions around what would work for me in the past.”

Participants expressed concern for a trend towards commissioning which does not recognise the gendered nature of sexual and domestic violence. Participants were clear that commissioning should not lose its gendered focus, with one participant explaining how trans inclusion is in keeping with this. All providers called for women-only services to be properly funded.

- “ I guess that something that feels very clearly that I would not want to lose is the gendered focus around sexual violence because I think that would be doing a disservice to the reality that we face: that it does predominantly, disproportionately, affect more women and girls than men and boys.
- “ Obviously single-sex services have been massively under threat from funding and commissioning that doesn't understand the gendered aspects of domestic and sexual violence, and it's moving towards a gender-neutral perspective and so people are very keen to make the case for single-sex services and the need to recognise domestic and sexual violence as gendered. So there is a fear about some of the trans inclusion elements diluting or impacting on that and moving towards a gender-neutral theoretical and practice response to these issues which will not be effective in addressing these issues, it will mean that we won't be addressing the causes and consequences of domestic and sexual violence. We need to protect women-only services, but for me that's somebody who is a trans woman as any other woman. We wouldn't want this to be a move towards a drive to gender-neutralise the definitions and understanding of domestic and sexual violence, but actually a move to including and intersecting trans equality with gender equality issues and the work we do to eradicate violence against them, as we have done and done work around BAME and other LGB issues, so it's part of that intersectionality and drive within the sector.

Participants overwhelmingly spoke about the need to build common ground to ensure that all survivors can receive the support they deserve in the future.

- “ I suppose we are very keen as an organisation to make sure that we get this right and we realise that it's difficult because there are such strong opposing views, so we do recognise that but I've been keen to talk about it and to find a way through it rather than to ignore it which was the other option. So it's about not taking the easy option and actually dealing with the issues as they come up and taking responsibility for doing that.
- “ It's like every new issue, isn't it, everybody has to wrangle and think and have a view, and then we look back and think 'That was a storm in a teacup', because we find a place where we can come together and find our way of working with things. So I think we're at that place.
- “ The category of woman has always been contested, and we have to be really careful around very short memories, around the fact that actually, at different points in time, that's excluded woman of colour, that's excluded working class woman, like we excluded lesbians, you know. So we need to think about this very, very carefully, and actually think about the kind of society that we want, do we want one that actually insists on reinforcing hate, or do we want one that actually starts to build community and transformation, I'm much more interested in the latter.

“I think fundamentally we're talking about protecting people's human rights to be free from violence and abuse, and trans people have the same rights to be free from violence and abuse as anybody else.”

“I was at a very different place like 15-18 years ago, where I didn’t understand and I wasn’t clear about what trans identities meant in terms of the work that we do. They weren’t what people might call hateful thoughts, they were much more ‘Yes, but why, why? Come on, really I’ve got so much I’m doing and now, come on’. I don’t think I had like a single great moment where I had a major epiphany, it was really just me going ‘But hold on, where do you stand in terms of your politics, like what are your commitments, what does this mean in terms of you talking about how gender works in this work, and actually, if you’re committed to ending violence against woman and girls, does that not mean that you start to rethink this category of woman?’.

Then I also started to think about black feminist history and our practice, and I’ve said this to a lot of my white feminist colleagues who are coming with really strong anti-trans language, where I’ve said ‘Hold on, there was a time when, as a black woman, I would not have been identified as a woman in your eyes, you know, the history of the feminist movement has not been great in terms of black women’s experiences’, and a lot of it is based around the category of woman and the category of woman being designed very much in a white, Eurocentric, middle class way and everybody else is falling outside of that. So for the moment, I suppose when that kicked off in my head, however many years ago, I was just like ‘This is a load of crap, like we’re doing, we’re literally saying that we are defining which woman should be allowed in and which woman shouldn’t be, how am I going to be a gatekeeper, what is that?’. I think when that happened, that didn’t mean that I sorted myself, like ‘I’m now fixed because I’m the trans ally’, lifelong work, right, but what it then did was it put me on like a completely different trajectory.”

Methodology

nfpSynergy conducted individual telephone interviews on behalf of Stonewall with representatives of 15 organisations. This included 12 national umbrella bodies and local domestic and sexual violence support services in England and Wales, and three in Scotland. Services were sought to represent a geographic spread across England and Wales, and from across urban, town and rural locations. We also interviewed community-specific services, including organisations delivering specialist targeted services to BAME and LGBT populations.

As with all qualitative research, the views expressed are the individual thoughts and experiences of the participants, and so may not represent the views of everyone within individual organisations or the organisations as a whole, nor can they be taken to represent all organisations in the sector.

Resources

Support for survivors

LGBT-specific

Galop National LGBT Domestic Abuse Helpline – 0800 999 5428 and help@galop.org.uk

Provides emotional and practical support for LGBT+ people in the UK experiencing domestic abuse. Information for LGBT+ survivors of domestic and sexual violence and hate crime is available [here](#).

London LGBT Domestic Abuse Partnership – 0207 704 2040 and referrals@galop.org.uk

Operated by Galop, Stonewall Housing, LGBT Switchboard and London Friend, this partnership provides support in London for LGBT+ people experiencing domestic abuse.

Supporting LGBTI Survivors of Sexual Violence - Rape Crisis Scotland

Guide for LGBTI survivors of sexual violence in Scotland

General

England and Wales

National Domestic Violence Helpline – 0808 2000 247 and helpline@womensaid.org.uk

Confidential 24-hour Freephone helpline, run in partnership between Women's Aid and Refuge, for women experiencing domestic violence, their family, friends, colleagues and others calling on their behalf.

National Rape Crisis helpline – 0808 802 9999

Confidential Freephone helpline operating between 12:00 – 14:30 and 19:00 – 21:30 every day, providing support and/or information about your nearest Rape Crisis services. You can also find your nearest Rape Crisis service [here](#).

Live Fear Free Helpline (Wales) – 0808 80 10 800 (phone), 078600 77 333 (text) and info@livefearfreehelpline.wales

Confidential 24-hour Freephone service run by Welsh Women's Aid for victims of domestic and/or sexual violence, providing support in Welsh, English and any other languages using LanguageLine.

Scotland

Scotland's Domestic Abuse and Forced Marriage Helpline – 0800 027 1234 and helpline@sdfmh.org.uk

Confidential 24-hour Freephone helpline for anyone with experience of domestic violence or forced marriage, as well as their family members, friends, colleagues and professionals who support them.

Rape Crisis Scotland helpline – 08088 01 03 02 or if you are deaf or hard of hearing on minicom number 0141 353 3091, and support@rapecrisisScotland.org.uk

Confidential Freephone helpline, operating between 18:00 – 00:00, for anyone affected by sexual violence, providing support and/or information about your nearest Rape Crisis services. All 17 Rape Crisis services across the country provide trans-inclusive support around all forms of sexual violence.

Resources for services

Galop, the LGBT+ anti-violence charity, have an online [LGBT+ Domestic Violence Library](#), alongside factsheets for domestic and sexual violence service providers about supporting LGBT+ people.

[Guidance for Multi-Agency Forums: LGBT+ People](#) (2018) - SafeLives

Research

[Barriers faced by lesbian, -gay, bisexual and transgender people in accessing domestic abuse, stalking and harassment, and sexual violence services](#) (2014) Welsh Government and NatCen

[LGBT in Britain: Home and Communities](#) (2018) Stonewall and YouGov

Features research into trans people's experiences of intimate partner violence in Britain today.

[National LGBT Survey](#) (2018) Government Equalities Office

Features testimonies from LGBT survivors of domestic abuse about their experiences of seeking support, and from trans respondents about their views on GRA reform.

Supporting trans women in domestic and sexual violence services

Interviews with professionals in
the sector

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