

Unique aspects of same sex domestic violence

Domestic violence in same sex and heterosexual relationships share many similarities, including the types of abuse and the impact on the abused partner. However, there are a number of aspects that are unique to same sex domestic violence. These include:

‘Outing’ as a method of control

If the abused partner isn’t out to their family, friends, and workmates or within their cultural community the abusive partner may use ‘outing’ or the threat of ‘outing’ as a method of control.

The abuse becomes associated with sexuality

For many people, especially those new to gay or lesbian relationships, their sexual identity becomes associated with the abuse so that they blame the abuse on being gay or lesbian. So they may feel that “I’m experiencing this abuse because I’m gay/lesbian. If I wasn’t gay/lesbian I wouldn’t be experiencing this. I hate being gay/lesbian.”

Domestic violence isn’t well understood in the community

There hasn’t been much information or discussion in the gay and lesbian communities about domestic violence in our relationships. Most information on domestic violence relates to heterosexual relationships with the man abusing the woman. This lack of understanding means that some people may not:

- Believe it happens in same sex relationships;
- Recognize abuse as domestic violence if it does happen to them and/or
- Know how to respond if they see domestic violence in their friend’s or family members’ relationships.

Confidentiality and isolation within the gay and lesbian communities

The relatively small size of the gay and lesbian communities, especially in smaller cities and rural areas, can make it difficult for the abused partner to seek help. They may feel embarrassed about the abuse or their partner may have tried to turn others in the community against them. An abusive partner may isolate the other from contact with the gay and lesbian community by preventing them reading the community press or attending gay and lesbian venues or events and preventing them seeing friends from within the community. This is especially true for people in their first same sex relationship who may not have had much contact with the gay and lesbian community before the relationship began.

Services may not be well developed

Although lesbians can access most general domestic violence services, like refuges, court assistance schemes, and counseling services, these services may have little experience in working with same sex domestic violence and therefore, may not offer the most appropriate service. For gay men there are currently few specific services that offer assistance or support. However, the Same Sex Domestic Violence Interagency and other organizations are developing strategies for addressing this issue.