

One Size Does Not Fit All

Gap analysis of NSW domestic violence support services in relation to gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex communities' needs

Executive Summary and Recommendations



ACON's Lesbian and Gay Anti-Violence Project
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The objectives of the research were to map existing domestic violence support services, analyse the gaps, and develop recommendations to improve same sex domestic violence support service provision to the gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex (GLBTI) communities in NSW.

Sixty-five service providers completed a fifteen minute online survey which consisted of sixteen multiple choice and/or open ended questions. The survey investigated the accessibility of services for GLBTI clients and the appropriateness of services provided to people experiencing domestic violence in same sex relationships. Nine community members were also interviewed about their experiences of service provision resulting from domestic violence in a same sex relationship.

This report firstly identifies the need for uniform knowledge and understanding of same sex domestic violence (SSDV) in the provision of domestic violence services and support.

Secondly, it advocates for mainstream service providers to adopt culturally appropriate approaches to GLBTI people experiencing domestic violence (DV).

Finally, it provides evidence to support the development of well resourced and culturally appropriate SSDV initiatives within a human rights framework.

1. Key Findings - Responses from Service Providers

This Gap Analysis found significant variation in services regarding their competence and confidence in working with GLBTI community members and understanding their specific needs. Some services were well informed and sensitive to these needs, while others lacked a basic awareness.

1.1 Data collection

There was also broad variation in approaches and engagement with GLBTI clients. Some services directly asked the gender, sex and sexuality of clients either via conversation or client intake forms, others did not see such information as necessary, thought it should be kept private or considered it inappropriate or irrelevant to know.

- Of the 65 services surveyed, thirty (46.15%) collected data on the number of gay and lesbian clients presenting at their service for same sex domestic violence.
- Twenty five services (38.46%) collected data on the number of transgender clients presenting at their service.
- Twelve services (18.46%) collected data on the number of intersex clients presenting at their service.
- Eleven (16.92%) services collected all three data fields of sex, sexuality and gender of clients.

1.2 Working with GLBTI people

- Twelve services (18.46%) rated themselves as “fully competent” to work with gay or lesbian people, five services (7.69%) rated themselves as “fully competent” to work with transgender clients and three services (5%) rated themselves “fully competent” to work with intersex clients.
- One of the main themes emerging from the survey was that the adoption of a non-discriminatory approach for service culture frequently resulted in a justification for not seeking to identify the gender, sex or sexuality of those seeking support - ‘we don’t discriminate (therefore) sexuality or gender is irrelevant.’ Furthermore, many services appeared to lack an understanding of the difference between gender, sex and sexuality, specifically in relation to intersex and transgender clients.

1.3 Services were asked to identify what they would need to better work with GLBTI communities

- Fifty-seven services (87.69%) specified that resources would be needed to provide specific support, with many indicating that time and money were most needed.
- Twenty-five services (38.46%) identified the need to train mainstream services to be culturally sensitive to GLBTI communities and the needs of GLBTI people experiencing DV.
- Eleven (16.92%) services identified the need for an increase in accessible counselling services for GLBTI people. Accessibility for rural, regional and isolated GLBTI people was also a major issue identified.
- Nine (13.84%) services identified a requirement for GLBTI community education to raise community awareness levels about the existence and dynamics of DV as well as for those affected by DV as a priority.
- Five (7.69%) services said that the creation of welcoming and inclusive environments (such as displaying GLBTI posters in services) is important.
- Other identified areas of need included education for the general community about SSDV, inclusion of SSDV in mainstream DV awareness events, services for gay, bisexual and transgender men who have experienced DV, employment of a specialist SSDV worker within mainstream DV services, access to information on how to engage and include GLBTI communities and improved access to current literature on SSDV.

1.4 Strategies and barriers for inclusion

- The most common strategy (35 services or 53.84%) for services with existing strategies to work with GLBTI people was the provision of time and support for staff to attend training. 33 services (50.76%) displayed SSDV resources or GLBTI material and 32 services (49.23%) ensured that staff understood some of the unique aspects of SSDV.
- Other strategies included distributing SSDV educational material and engaging staff from GLBTI communities.
- When asked about barriers to working more closely with GLBTI communities or to developing inclusive strategies, 40 services (61.53%) identified resourcing as a barrier.
- Of this forty, the top three resourcing needs identified were staff time, staff numbers and funding. Fifteen services (23.07%) specified staff time as the most pressing need, thirteen services (20%) identified a need for more staff, and twelve services (18.46%) the need for funding.

Other barriers included limited staff experience or training, services not prioritising SSDV, limitations on service opening hours, lack of a coordination in service approaches to GLBTI issues and people, organisational bureaucracy and individuals having no power within the workplace to take initiatives regarding GLBTI needs.

2. Key Findings – Responses from interviewees

The Gap Analysis found variation in the perspectives, experiences and needs of the nine gay and lesbian interviewees (4 women and 5 men). Due to difficulties in recruiting transgender, intersex or other gender or sex diverse participants, their personal experiences and perspectives are not represented in this research.

- Barriers to accessing support included having little or no personal awareness of what might constitute SSDV, lack of awareness of services that would support GLBTI people experiencing domestic violence and isolation from friends or families as a result of the abuse. Most participants didn't recognise their relationships as domestically violent until after the relationship had ended and they became more aware of SSDV. Finding the right support that was appropriate for people experiencing same sex domestic violence was identified as a challenge by all interviewees.
- Legal support was not high on the list of priorities for interviewees with few attempting to acquire or actually obtaining Apprehended Violence Orders (AVOs).
- Negative experiences included being referred for sexual reorientation instead of DV support, the lack of appropriate accommodation and other support services for men, and having to deal with the prejudices of mainstream service providers regarding men seeking support in relation to same sex domestic violence. Most interviewees eventually found appropriate support, but this was generally after searching and having negative experiences with mainstream services first.
- Assistance and advice from friends was identified as the key support by all interviewees. Interviewees specifically noted that GLBTI friends were supportive and understanding. Three interviewees noted that support was also found in the workplace.
- Police experiences and interactions were varied with some interviewees expressing gratitude for the support they received and others not feeling understood or supported. However, even the most supported participants expressed some initial hesitation in contacting the police due to perceived fears of institutional or interpersonal homophobia and potential inappropriate service.
- Children & family support needs were also identified as important. Interviewees noted a need for services which are culturally appropriate and supportive of children from families of people of diverse sex, sexuality and gender.
- All of the interviewees who accessed services known and respected by GLBTI communities experienced positive interactions. Telephone counselling was also highly valued as it allowed anonymity.
- Three interviewees indicated that through their experience of SSDV they had used this experience and new knowledge in a positive manner, including often participating in the wider community as a result.

3. Key Challenges for mainstream service providers

This research establishes and builds on the relationships between mainstream DV service providers and GLBTI communities. Some key ongoing challenges for mainstream DV service providers in working with GLBTI communities and individuals and identified by this research include:

- Identifying and assessing the nature and number of GLBTI people requiring support.
- Identifying and assessing current services including organisational capacity.
- Identifying and understanding the barriers in service provision.
- Developing meaningful and culturally appropriate collaborative partnerships with GLBTI services / organisations.
- Committing to, establishing and maintaining staff awareness and knowledge of SSDV and related issues.
- Committing to best practice approaches to working with sex, sexuality and gender diverse populations.
- Identifying and assessing appropriate opportunities, in collaboration with GLBTI user groups, regarding new and creative initiatives.
- Developing strategies to overcome service delivery barriers.
- Ensuring appropriate and robust approaches to evaluation.

4. Recommendations

Based on an analysis of need, demand, priority and barriers, the report makes recommendations for the development of good practice in service delivery for GLBTI people experiencing DV in NSW.

Whilst most recommendations focus on building the capacity of mainstream services to work with GLBTI people experiencing DV, the recommendations also seek to meet organisational and GLBTI community needs, address the specific needs of those affected by DV as well as to increase awareness and understanding of DV.

This report also recognises the limitations that mainstream DV services may have in working with or addressing the needs of gay, bisexual and transgender men. In addition it acknowledges the importance of recognising the needs of these men as an 'invisible' group who may present with unique or unmet needs.

The challenges and barriers identified in this report offer opportunities for government agencies and community organisations to take leadership roles in developing services, creating and maintaining access, and establishing good practice principles and policy.

4.1 Recommendation for mainstream domestic violence service providers

- Ensure staff are provided with appropriate training and ongoing support in the delivery of good practice DV services to GLBTI people.
- Seek the support and resources of specialists in the area of GLBTI DV in the design and delivery of training, services or policies.
- Ensure sustainability of inclusive practices, programs and policies in the reorientation of services.
- Initiate and foster ongoing working relationships with GLBTI community organisations, networks and groups in building and maintaining culturally appropriate services and increasing access.
- Develop and utilise client intake forms and DV screening processes in order to gather specific statistical data on sex, sexuality and gender.

- Use gender neutral and inclusive language in all intake processes. This includes not assuming heterosexuality, ensuring gendered language does not exclude, and being sensitive to the diversity of relationships.
- Develop, implement and monitor workplace policies which recognise the impacts of DV and SSDV on staff and consequences within the workplace. This would include the formulation of supportive and inclusive clauses within employment agreements to support staff experiencing domestic violence.

4.2 Recommendations for peak and local GLBTI service providers / organisations

- Provide information, education and support options to GLBTI communities about the nature and prevalence of DV. This should include developing culturally appropriate tools to identify DV and which recognise the value and importance of community and personal support networks.
- Develop community education/campaigns targeting GLBTI people to raise awareness and visibility regarding the (personal and social) impacts of DV.
- Develop a document identifying best practice in addressing SSDV (building on DV best practice models) including public health policy, principles and definitions, recognition of diversity and inclusivity, and population health approaches.
- Develop and deliver training and resources to mainstream and allied services addressing GLBTI cultural sensitivity and DV.
- Advocate for the specific needs of GLBTI people within key DV services, programs and campaigns.
- Recognise SSDV education as an important part of the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence and identify a White Ribbon Day Ambassador to highlight SSDV.

4.3 Recommendations relating to rural and regional communities

- As a matter of priority build organisational capacity (staff and resources) to meet the relationship needs of GLBTI people within their communities.
- Couples seeking support in relation to GLBTI DV to be offered access to more than one counsellor (wherever possible from outside local communities) to ensure both parties' needs are supported.
- Ensure that key telephone counselling/support/referral services are supported to improve their capacity, knowledge and skills to better meet the needs of GLBTI people from regional and rural communities experiencing DV.

4.4 Recommendations relating to transgender and intersex clients

- Ensure the specific and unique needs of transgender, intersex and other sex and gender diverse people are addressed through the provision of education and awareness training (with reference to this report's recommendations).

4.5 Recommendations relating to gay, bisexual and transgender men

- Identify the specific and unique needs of gay, bisexual and transgender men in regards to DV in order to develop and deliver appropriate services. These include screening for domestic violence, development of collaborative partnerships and/or provision of culturally appropriate accommodation.
- As a matter of priority, a range of culturally appropriate housing options be explored and developed for gay, bisexual and transgender men. This includes short, medium and longer term housing such as supported accommodation, refuge services and public housing options.
- A collaborative working partnership be developed between existing men's, GLBTI and mainstream DV services, and the NSW Department of Housing to address, fund and implement solutions to the paucity of culturally appropriate gay, bisexual and transgendered men's DV housing options.

4.6 Recommendations relating to GLBTI families

- Services to recognise the unique cultural, legal and structural nature of GLBTI families (including pets), the diversity of parenting and care giving roles, and the specific impact that DV has on these units.
- Services to be sensitive to the specific inclusion, support and accommodation needs of children of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex families experiencing DV.

4.7 Recommendations relating to research and data collection

- Pursue opportunities for further research in order to gain greater understanding of the nature and impacts of DV on GLBTI people, systemic and institutional barriers to service provision and access, and training and support needs.
- Services collect accurate data detailing the number of GLBTI clients presenting and the reasons for accessing services. This is vital for the development of appropriate and sensitive approaches to DV in GLBTI relationships.
- It is highly recommended that further specialised research on the needs of transgender and intersex people in DV relationships in NSW be resourced.

The logo for acon, featuring the word 'acon' in a bold, lowercase, sans-serif font. The letters are black and have a slightly rounded, modern feel.

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