

# ABUSE IN LGBTQ RELATIONSHIPS

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Domestic violence in an intimate relationship is any pattern of behaviour used to coerce, dominate, or isolate the other partner. It is the use of power imposed by one partner over the other to maintain control within the relationship. Domestic violence isn't only a problem in heterosexual relationships; everyone can be affected, regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation. Domestic violence in the LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer) community is a serious issue. The rates of abuse in same-sex relationships are roughly the same as in heterosexual relationships, and the issue is equally underreported.



## FORMS OF ABUSE UNIQUE TO LGBTQ RELATIONSHIPS

Heterosexual and same-sex domestic violence share much in common, including: the cycle of violence, the most common forms of abuse, and typical characteristics of an abusive partner. However, abuse in same-sex relationships is distinct in a few ways. Some differences include:

- *The abuser may use their partner's sexual identity or gender identity as a means of exerting power and control. Abusers can threaten to "out" their victims to work colleagues, family, and friends. This threat is amplified by an extreme sense of isolation felt by victims who are still closeted from friends and family.*
- *Victims can be more reluctant to report abuse to police, as doing so would force them to reveal their sexual orientation. Abusers may tell their partner that no one will help them or they will not be believed because there is no abuse in same-sex relationships.*
- *Victims within a same-sex partnership are more likely to fight back. This can lead police to believe the fighting was mutual, overlooking the larger context and the history of power and control in the relationship.*
- *Victims are reluctant to seek help out of fear of losing friends and support within the LGBTQ community.*

## HOW EXPERIENCES OF ABUSE ARE DIFFERENT FOR LGBTQ VICTIMS

Homophobia tends to deny the reality of LGBTQ lives, including the existence of both healthy and unhealthy same-sex relationships. As such, the seriousness of abuse experienced by LGBTQ victims is often misunderstood by police, therapists, and health care providers. Authorities often lack knowledge on how to handle domestic violence cases involving people of the same gender. Same-sex partners lack the resources needed to help them get out of abusive relationships. Women's shelters are increasingly responsive to the needs of lesbian, trans, and non-binary domestic violence victims, however, in Canada these services for gay men are practically nonexistent.



## IF YOU ARE EXPERIENCING ABUSE IN AN LGBTQ RELATIONSHIP

At PEI Family Violence Prevention Services, sexual orientation and gender identity are not barriers to receiving support. All individuals who presently (or at any time did) identify as a woman (including: trans women, trans men, and individuals who were female but now identify as non-binary) are eligible for services at Anderson House, and are encouraged to reach out for help.