

## **Title of case study:** Domestic violence and abuse in same sex relationships

### **1. Summary of the impact** (indicative maximum 100 words)

Impacts of this case study are national, regional and local in government departments and providers of domestic violence and abuse (DVA) services and in lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) specialist services. They include evidencing DVA in same sex relationships as a considerable social problem; identifying and improving understanding about specific vulnerabilities, abusive behaviours and help-seeking behaviours; the development of training across mainstream, DVA and LGBT sectors; the development of existing risk assessment tools to better reflect the experiences of victim/survivors in same sex relationships; and in raising awareness of DVA in same sex relationships in LGBT communities.

### **2. Underpinning research** (indicative maximum 500 words)

The original, multi-method research (Jan 2005-September 2006), was funded by the ESRC in the project: 'comparing love and violence in same sex and heterosexual relationships'. This research is the first of its kind from a comparative social science perspective focussing as it does on women and men across gender and sexuality. The research was collaborative between Donovan (University of Sunderland, 1996-currently), and Hester (previously of University of Sunderland until 2003) at Bristol University. Methods included a national community survey of 'what happens when things go wrong' in same sex relationships; focus groups with heterosexual women, men, lesbians and gay men; and interviews with 67 heterosexual women, men, and self-defined non-heterosexual women and men. The survey was designed to allow comparison with the British Crime Survey (BCS) as a proxy for the heterosexual experience of domestic violence. Interviews focussed on respondents' 'worst' and 'best' relationship experiences so that accounts of love and violence could be explored.

Specific insights include:

- a. DVA (when one partner exerts power and control over the other partner using physical, financial, sexual, emotional, isolating, threatening behaviours) is a substantial problem in same sex relationships in the UK;
- b. DVA in same sex relationships is often not recognised as such because of the impact of the public story which identifies DVA as a heterosexual problem of men for women; as a problem of predominantly physical violence; and as a problem of gender in that the 'bigger, stronger' embodied male exerts power and control over the 'smaller, weaker' embodied female';
- c. The public story also impacts negatively on the help-seeking of victim/survivors in same sex relationships as they fear responses of disbelief, minimisation, denial and/or homo/bi-phobia; and because of the subsequent gap of trust between these victim/survivors and mainstream and specialist DVA services. For example, findings showed that the police were the least often reported to out of a list of ten potential sources of help/support whilst the British Crime Survey shows that the police are the second or third choice for heterosexual women (depending on whether friends and family are grouped together or separately);
- d. mutual abuse, rather than being common amongst same sex relationships (because of the assumption made that two women or two men must be 'equal'), is rare and in most cases one partner exerts power and control over the other.
- e. those in first same sex relationships were often at risk of experiencing domestic violence because they did not 'know' what to expect in a same sex relationship and/or believed it to be normal;
- f. LGBT DV training and awareness raising is required amongst mainstream and DV specialist agencies; and
- g. raising awareness is required among LGBT communities.

Subsequent research (March-June 2010) by Donovan explored the treatment of LGBT DV victim/survivors by the national DV strategy as enacted through the Multi-Agency Risk

Assessment Conferences (MARACs) and Independent Domestic Violence Advocates (IDVAs). This strategy focuses resources on those victim/survivors at the highest risk. Nationally LGBT referrals to the MARAC are disproportionately low. A study exploring barriers to referring LGBT victim/survivors to MARACs identified the following insights:

- a. training and awareness raising about LGBT DV is required for agencies potentially referring victim/survivors to the MARACs but especially the police particularly in relation to the use of the risk assessment tool and the specific vulnerabilities of LGBT victim/survivors of DVA;
- b. most referrals to MARACs are from the police yet very few LGBT victim/survivors report to the police so they are unlikely to be referred to the MARAC;
- c. domestic violence in same sex relationships is not recognised either within LGBT communities or within mainstream or specialist agencies;
- d. the public story about DV – whilst accurate for the majority of cases of domestic violence - should not be the only model portrayed in the literature of agencies or in domestic violence campaigns.

### 3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

The funding was from the Economic Research Council for £295,000 for which there is an end of grant report.

1. **Donovan, C.**; Hester, M.; Holmes, J.; McCarry, M. (2006) Comparing Domestic Abuse in Same Sex and Heterosexual Relationships. Interim Report November.
2. **Donovan, C.** & Hester M. (2008) 'because she was my first girlfriend, I didn't know any different': Making the case for mainstreaming same-sex sex/relationship education. *Journal of Sex Education*, Vol 8(3): 277-287
3. **Donovan, C.** & Hester, M. (2010) "'I hate the word 'victim': an exploration of recognition of domestic violence in same sex relationships' *Social Policy and Society* 9(2): 279-289.
4. **Donovan, C.** (2010) Barriers to Making Referrals of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered (LGBT) victim/survivors to the MARAC and Recommendations for Improvement: A Study of IDVAs, MARAC Coordinators and PPU Detective Inspectors Within the Northumbria Police Force Area. July
5. **Donovan, C.** & Hester, M. (2011) 'Seeking help from the enemy: help-seeking strategies of those in same sex relationships who have experienced domestic abuse' in *Child and Family Law Quarterly*, 23(1): 26-40.
6. **Donovan, C.** & Hester, M. (2011) 'Exploring Emotion work in domestically abusive relationships' in J. Ristock (Ed) *Intimate Partner Violence in LGBTQ Lives*, Routledge

### 4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Before this research was carried out very little was formally known about domestic abuse in same sex relationships. The research has helped to raise awareness of this hidden problem within national government, among organisations in the North East and nationally that support victims of DVA; and within the LGBT community.

Both research projects have been picked up and cited by national policymakers. The ESRC end of grant report was cited in both volumes of the House of Commons Home Affairs Committee *Domestic Violence, Forced Marriage and "Honour"-Based Violence Sixth Report of Session 2007-08*, Volumes I and II [1] as evidence of the extent to which lesbians, bisexual women and gay men can be victim/survivors of DVA and of the particular difficulties lesbians and bisexual women face in seeking help. In *The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans Public Health Outcomes Framework Companion Document*, (2013) National LGB&T Partnership Public Health England, Department of Health [2], the work was cited as

evidence of the social problems faced by those living in same sex relationships and underpins the recommendations focussing on improving services and responses to victim/survivors of DVA in LGBT relationships. The research on MARACs has been cited in the Home Office *Research Report 55 Summary Supporting high-risk victims of domestic violence: a review of Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs)* (Steel, Blakeborough & Nicholas, 2011) [3] to support the findings and recommendation that those in minority groups, including LGBT victim/survivors are underrepresented in MARACs and as a source of recommendations for improving access to MARACs.

The ESRC research continues to contribute to changing practice among DV support agencies. Stonewall Housing used findings to secure funding for the national LGBT DVA forum, a conduit for sharing best practice, research and improving services for LGBT victim/survivors [4]. Within the North East, a steering group used the research to apply for the first regional LGBT DV development worker (funded by Northern Rock Foundation in 2009 for three years initially, and since, 2013, for a further year until Sept 2014 and thereafter for 2 years dependent on matched funding). In addition to a range of activities to raise awareness of LGBT DV in the region, the development worker has drawn on the research to create and roll out specific training on the topic for all service providers and a Train the Trainers course (these have occurred between 2008- currently). Trainees for the latter come from a range of agencies across the region committed to cascading the training within their geographical areas. Separately, the MARAC report led to further funding from Sunderland DVA partnership for specific regional training for mainstream and specialist DVA services focussed on referring LGBT victim/survivors to MARACs [5].

The ESRC research has also influenced practice on a national level among agencies that traditionally have only experienced working with heterosexual victims of DVA, thus increasing the support available to LGBT victims around the UK. For example, Co-ordinated Action Against Domestic Abuse (CAADA) used the research to inform the input on LGBT victim/survivors on their national training course for IDVAs [6]. In Cardiff the Dyn Project, part of the Women's Safety Unit, were influenced by the research to develop a risk assessment check list for gay men recognising their vulnerability to sexual violence and in their evaluation recommended further work and research on the risk assessment form in relation to gay and heterosexual men [7]. The current Community Safety Commissioner for Brighton and Hove Council, formerly of the Dyn Project and CAADA said of the research 'as it currently stands, it remains one of the most important yet accessible pieces of work of its kind for these communities in the UK' [6]. Additionally, Donovan has been invited to speak at 12 practitioner-led dissemination events, ranging from Scottish Women's Aid (2009), National Rape Crisis Annual Conference (February 2011), to Cheshire DV Forum Event (April 2010) promoting the issue to much wider groups of practitioners. The Learning Development Coordinator of Scottish Women's Aid said the ESRC research provided a way of seeing similarities and differences between heterosexual and LGBT domestic violence and for the agencies providing services to these different groups 'it provided an impetus and a focus to strengthening our work together' [8].

Great effort has been made to disseminate the research to wide an audience as possible to raise awareness of DV within LGBT relationships. The Coordinator of the national LGBT DV

Forum identifies the research 'groundbreaking' [4] and it appears on their website – as it does on the website of Broken Rainbow the national helpline for LGBT victim/survivors of DVA (Donovan is on the Board) and Stop Domestic Abuse an LGBT DV project in Scotland. The programme manager of the Safety and Justice for Victims of Abuse at the Northern Rock Foundation said of the research 'I read lots of research - mostly it just gets filed - this is a study that I have kept referring to and kept recommending to others - good sign' [9].

Since 2007 Donovan has appeared on five radio programmes (including local radio in Bristol, Women's Hour in June 2008, and Pride Radio in Newcastle, July 2011) and research has featured in the Sunderland Echo, the Guardian newspaper and Diva a national monthly magazine for lesbians and bisexual women. The research also informed a new play 'A Twist of Lemon' exploring domestic violence in lesbian relationships. It toured for four weeks in 2008, reaching 2500 audience and workshop participants. Co-Founder and Artistic Director of Open Clasp said 'this research was invaluable in supporting our understanding of the issues and its complexities, and directly informed the script writing process, plus the workshops that were facilitated after the shows' [10].

#### **5. Sources to corroborate the impact** (indicative maximum of 10 references)

1. House of Commons Home Affairs Committee (2008) *Domestic Violence, Forced Marriage and "Honour"-Based Violence Sixth Report of Session 2007–08 Volume I*, page 22 footnotes 39 and 43; House of Commons Home Affairs Committee (2008) *Domestic Violence, Forced Marriage and "Honour"-Based Violence Sixth Report of Session 2007–08 Volume II, paragraph 5.3.3 page 217, footnote 166*
2. Williams, H.; Varney, J.; Taylor, J.; Fish, J.; Durr, P.; Elan-Cane, C. (2013) *The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans Public Health Outcomes Framework Companion Document*, Department of Health, page 18
3. Steel, N.; Blakeborough, L.; Nicholas, S. (2011) *Research Report 55 Summary Supporting high-risk victims of domestic violence: a review of Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs)*  
<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/science-research-statistics/research-statistics/crime-research/horr55/horr55-report?view=Binary>, page 22 footnote 53
4. Development Manager and Coordinator of LGBT Domestic Abuse Forum, based in Stonewall Housing, written response concerning impact of impact of ESRC research (Supplied on request from HEI)
5. Development worker at North East Domestic Abuse Project (NEDAP) focussing on domestic violence and abuse in LGBT relationships, hosted by Victim Support written response concerning impact of impact of ESRC research (Supplied on request from HEI)
6. Community Safety Commissioner for Brighton and Hove Council, formerly of the Dyn Project in Cardiff and CAADA a written response concerning impact of impact of ESRC research (Supplied on request from HEI)
7. Robinson, A.; Rowlands, J. (2006) *The Dyn Project: Supporting Men Experiencing Domestic Abuse Final Evaluation Report pages 13 and 60*  
[http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/socsi/resources/Dyn\\_Final\\_Evaluation\\_Report.pdf](http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/socsi/resources/Dyn_Final_Evaluation_Report.pdf)  
page 22 and 29
8. Learning Development Coordinator, Scottish Women's Aid concerning impact of impact of ESRC research (Supplied on request from HEI)
9. Programme Manager: Safety and Justice for Victims of Abuse, Northern Rock Foundation, written response concerning impact of impact of ESRC research (Supplied on request from HEI)
10. Artistic Director, Open Clasp Theatre Company, Newcastle written response concerning impact of ESRC research (Supplied on request from HEI)