

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) Between Same-Sex Couples

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Overview of IPV in Same-Sex Relationships



Research of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is often limited to the case of heterosexual, male and female couples. Therefore, a closer look is necessary to examine IPV between same-gender couples as it will allow us the opportunity to be critical of cultural and gender stereotypes as well as analyze further predictors of violence (Baker, Buick, Kim, Moniz, & Nava, 2013). Unfortunately, the victims of intimate partner violence in same-gender relationships are not receiving the support they need due to the lack of legal recognition to properly handle

intimate partner violence cases for all members of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered, and Questioning (LGBTQ) community. Further resources must be created and made available to address these needs.

IPV Patterns and Characteristics

Intimate Terrorism - An attempt to exert control over their partner using a broad range of power tactics including physical violence and emotional abuse

Emotional/Psychological Abuse - Emotional and/or psychological abuse, the most common form of IPV characteristics, refers to the belittlement or humiliation by the perpetrator to their victim. This form of abuse is often verbal, ranging from name-calling to verbal assault.

Situational Couple Violence - A form of violence that occurs when specific conflict situations escalate to violence.

Stalking - A form of psychological abuse that may involve harassment, obsessive phone-calls, following of the victim to and from their home, school or work, tapping into phone lines or email accounts and more.

Sexual Abuse - Sexual abuse refers to any act of forced, coerced, or undesired sexual behavior.

Violence Homicide - Result of the most severe form of physical violence: homicide. This form of homicide can either be intentional or as the result of severe beating and repeated brutality (Hattery & Smith, 2012).



Intimate partner violence patterns in same-gender couples do not differ significantly from those in heterosexual couples. Some common examples of IPV both types of relationships include:

- Physical and psychological mistreatment, often leaving the victim feeling isolated, guilty, and fearful.
- Abusers often suffer from mental illness and were abused as children.
- Physical and sexual abuse often occur simultaneously

- No race, ethnicity or socioeconomic status is exempt

Some examples of IPV patterns that may be distinct in same-gender relationships include:

- Gay or lesbian abusers who threaten to “out” their victims to co-workers, family, and friends. This threat can be increased with feelings of isolation among gay and lesbian

victims since they may be still closeted by their closest relationships, have fewer civil rights protections and lack of access to the legal system.



- Gay or lesbian victims are less likely to report the abuse to the police.
- Gay or lesbian victims may be less likely to seek help due to the fear of society perpetuating the idea that same-sex couples are dysfunctional.
- Gay and lesbian couples are more likely to fight back in an IPV situation compared to heterosexual women.

Therefore, law enforcement may deem the conflict as mutual rather than identifying a distinct perpetrator.

- Abusers can threaten to take away the children. Some states do not allow parental adoption rights to same-sex parents. Therefore, if one parent chooses to leave the relationship, the other partner has no legal parental rights.

IPV Statistics

- Intimate Partner Violence in same-gender couples occurs at rates comparable to heterosexual couples (Center for American Progress).
- One out of four to one out of three same-gender couples have experienced intimate partner violence. This is comparable to one out of every four heterosexual females who experience IPV in their lifetime.

Available Resources

- ★ Rainbow Response is a grassroots coalition based in Washington, DC. It brings together LGBTQ community leaders, organizations, domestic violence personnel, and government officials to raise awareness about IPV amongst same-sex couples. Rainbow Response provides training, educational outreach, and advocates for members of the LGBTQ population. The coalition works with local colleges, law enforcement, government organizations, and the community. For more information, go to [Rainbow Response Coalition](#).
- ★ Call a Domestic Violence Shelter. Many shelters cater to LGBTQ clients, but if there aren't any in your area, you are still welcomed in any shelter. You do not ever have to divulge your sexual orientation.
- ★ Call [The National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs](#) at 212-714-1141 for 24/7 assistance in both English and Spanish.
- ★ Call National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799 SAFE (7233)
- ★ Call The Network/La Red at 617-742-4911. Offers assistance in English and Spanish.
- ★ Call SafeLink at 1-877-785-2020
- ★ Learn more about leaving an abusive relationship. Learn how to make a [safety plan](#).
- ★ [Obtain a Court Order of Protection](#) - this order can require your partner stay away from you and any children involved.

- ★ [Get legal help](#) - There are laws that protect people who are abused and laws protecting LGBT people from discrimination. Shelters can help you find lawyers who work for free if you are unable to pay for these services.
- ★ [Look for an anti-violence program](#) - These programs work specifically with LGBTQ survivors of domestic abuse and hate violence. You can ask shelter staff for help finding a program.



Counseling Strategies and Implications

Counselors can utilize the same methods and strategies for same-gender couples as used with heterosexual couples. However, it is important for counselors to take into consideration and be sensitive to the social, cultural, and developmental variables that may be present.

Counseling Considerations and Implications for Clinical Practice:

- Assessment of the overall environment of the relationship, such as the level of each partner's development, external issues (alienation from family, community, workplace etc.), any mental or physical disabilities, intimacy patterns.
- Gender identity of intimate partners.
- Concerns involving potential cultural, ethnic, religious, age, socio-economic, worldview, political, immigration status, or educational differences that may be present.
- Assess the level of outside support from family, friends, and co-workers.
- Develop partnerships, consultation, or collaborative efforts with local and national LGBTQ organizations.
- Examine your own views regarding heterosexuality, and determine their impact on work with LGBTQ clients.
- Systems-level intervention is often needed in schools, employment situations, or religious organizations. Diversity workshops can help organizations acquire accurate information. Counselors may need to be advocates for change.

- ❑ Ensure that your intake forms, interview procedures, and language are free of heterosexist bias and include a question on sexual behavior, attraction, or orientation. Be aware that LGBTQ clients may have specific concerns regarding confidentiality.
- ❑ Because many LGBTQ clients have internalized the societal belief that they cannot have long-lasting relationships, have materials available that portray healthy and satisfying relationships.
- ❑ Recognize and remember that a large number of LGBTQ clients have been subject to ongoing microaggressions and hate crimes. Conditions such as depression, anger, self-blame, and posttraumatic stress need to be addressed and treated (D.W. Sue, 2012; D. Sue, 2012)

A Real Story

BBC News, Washington analyzed the relevance of domestic violence between same-gender partners. In their 2014 article, Curt Rogers shared his story:

Twenty-years ago, Curt Rogers' then boyfriend imprisoned him in his apartment for three and a half hours. During this time, his boyfriend threatened to kill him with a knife and a gun. After hours of conversation, Rogers managed to escape and hide from his significant other. Although this was a terrifying experience, Curt did not know at the time that what had occurred was in fact a domestic violence crime.

For many years, the existence of IPV in same-gender couple relationships was not acknowledged by U.S. health and public service. In contrast, research on IPV has typically focused on cases involving heterosexual couples. Stereotyped gender roles continue to perpetuate the idea that only females are victimized and abused by their male counterparts. However, the reality of same-sex relationship violence, as evidenced in Curt's story, occurs at comparable rates to those cases involving heterosexual couples. The victims of same-sex relationship violence may be facing external stressors such as discrimination that may impact their reluctance to report the violence to the authorities. However, it is important to remain aware of this reluctance because it may also put the individual in a compromising position where they must reveal the true nature of their relationship by "coming out" to their families and friends. Education on the signs and symptoms of violence that may exist between all relationships is needed. Spreading awareness of this information can be done by providing available social supports and resources to victims of same-sex IPV.

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