

Recommendations

We recognize that in order to have an effective and adequate impact on the lives of LGBTQ survivors of violence a broad-based collaborative effort will be most valuable. To that end we make the following recommendations:

- Increase community education and awareness programs across the Commonwealth to enhance the abilities of friends, family members, and the full-range of professionals and service providers to respond to violence in LGBTQ communities.
- Develop better practice protocols and policies for organizations on responding to violence in LGBTQ communities and/or working with LGBTQ survivors of violence.
- Support community-based anti-violence initiatives with a broad range of diverse concerned stakeholders.
- Fund further research on LGBTQ communities of color, transgender communities, and other underrepresented and understudied communities, and communities with special concerns (e.g. immigrant and limited-English proficiency LGBTQ communities, LGBTQ persons with developmental disabilities and mental health issues, and others).
- Create a climate that supports respectful and equitable relationships across individual, relationship, community, and society levels.
- Work toward a more appropriate and culturally competent criminal justice system response to violence in LGBTQ communities.

The Equality Virginia Education Fund and the Virginia Anti-Violence Project remain dedicated to addressing and ending violence in the lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer people across Virginia and will utilize the knowledge gained through our research to help carry out these recommendations. The entire report and our LGBTQ Community Resource and Referral Guide are available at: www.equalityvirginia.org/avp or by calling our office at 804.643.4816.



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The State of Violence in Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Communities of Virginia

A Report of the Equality Virginia Education Fund Anti-Violence Project

"It was a friend. The first gay person I ever knew. I really was reaching out for the first time trying to find a mentor. He was older and I wanted to learn what it was like to be gay in my rural community . . . but then this happened."
(Gay queer male, 23, Richmond)

"I was attacked and taken behind a house. I was forced to have anal and oral sex unprotectively. I was pistol whipped several times and left behind the house in a pond, in the backyard. I walked across the street to someone's house that had the lights on. I asked to use their phone and they called the police and I was just trying to call a friend. The police took a report, and did research. The police took me home. I spoke to a detective several days later. Nothing (no leads) came about." (Gay, Transgender MTF, 26, Norfolk)

"My partners were never that violent--lover squables. It was the rape by a stranger that I sometimes regret not reporting."
(Gay male, 35, Norfolk/Virginia Beach)

"I wish I had time to tell you about all the incidents. This is sadly 'normal' for too many people I know who are LGBT. What makes it worse is that most of the time, people don't report these incidents because they think no one will care, and thus, no one will care to do anything about it."
(Lesbian female, 39, Harrisonburg)

"I didn't think it was a big deal; it felt normal or not what I thought 'domestic violence' was."
(Bisexual female, 20, Richmond)



Executive Summary

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) persons, families, and communities across Virginia have experienced and are experiencing various forms of violence including, but not limited to, sexual violence, intimate partner violence, stalking, hate violence, bullying and harassment. LGBTQ people have limited access to resources that are currently available to heterosexual women and their children through existing networks of sexual and domestic violence agencies. Organizations and social groups that primarily serve LGBTQ people in Virginia do not have the capacity to offer extensive services and support to individuals who are surviving violence at this time. These organizations and groups are often volunteer-based, without professional staff, and are underfunded or unfunded. For these and other reasons, LGBTQ communities in Virginia have historically focused more on addressing hate violence and bullying, yet 81% of respondents to our recent community survey either agree or strongly agree that addressing intimate partner violence should be a priority for the LGBTQ community.

During our ten month study, EVEF's Anti-Violence Project found that experiences of violence are present across the diverse spectrum of LGBTQ communities. Nearly 1000 LGBTQ- identified people from across the Commonwealth responded to our community survey. Although this data was gathered with targeted sampling methods which recognize the marginalized context in which LGBTQ people live, the information collected in this survey demonstrates that there are a sizeable number of LGBTQ Virginians who experience violence and are under-served by existing domestic violence and sexual assault services. Researchers commonly use a variety of non-random sampling methodologies when studying small and marginalized populations. This study uses one of those alternate methodologies, targeted sampling, in order to maximize the number of respondents and it is the largest attempt at collecting this type of information in Virginia to date.

Over one third of respondents (36%) experienced sexual violence as a child or young person and over one quarter of respondents (26%) experienced sexual violence as an adult. Forty-one percent (41%) of respondents had been in an abusive relationship at some time in their life and almost one third of respondents (30%) had been stalked. Half of respondents (50%) experienced hate violence or harassment based on their actual or perceived sexual orientation and 10% of respondents said they experienced hate violence or harassment based on their gender identity/expression.



"During a beating, I had to call 911 and have the police come and save my life. When the cops arrived they laughed at me. I was bloody, bruised, crying, and my clothes had been cut and ripped...It was by far the worst and most humiliating experience of my life. I will never trust the police again."

(Gay male, 25, Richmond)

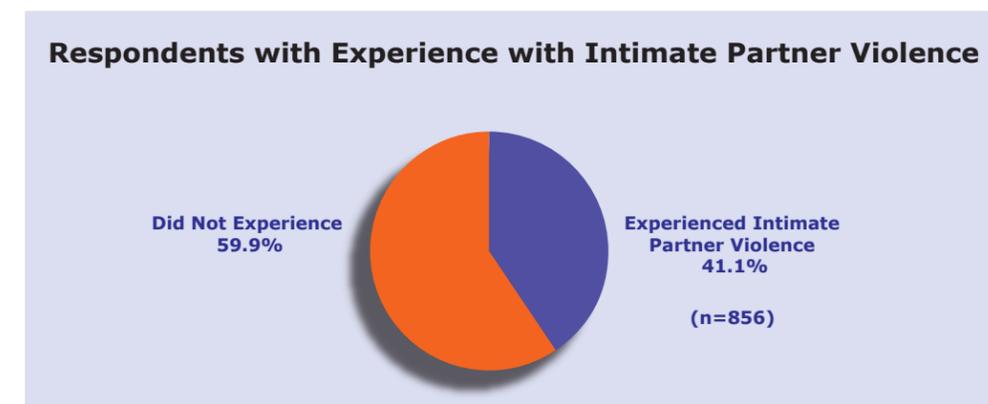
"I didn't realize it was that abusive. I knew it made my life hell but I didn't think of it as abuse until I was out of it and saw it clearly for what it was."

(Lesbian Queer female, 28, Roanoke)



In addition to our community survey, we interviewed representatives from 59 sexual assault crisis centers and domestic violence programs and 27 LGBTQ service organizations and community groups. We found that there is a tremendous lack of consistent resources available to LGBTQ individuals who experience violence in Virginia. Fewer than five of the 59 sexual and/or domestic violence agencies had knowingly served any LGBTQ people in the twelve months preceding the interview. There are no consistent policies for providing services to LGBTQ communities, especially transgender people. Leaders in only five of the 27 LGBTQ organizations had received any training on sexual violence and intimate partner violence and only a third of all the LGBTQ organizations had sexual violence and intimate partner violence materials available for community members to utilize. Nearly everyone interviewed requested educational materials and training opportunities on addressing violence in LGBTQ communities and expressed interest in participating in a statewide effort to improve and increase services to LGBTQ survivors of violence.

The purpose of our research was to assess the current (and anticipated) need of LGBTQ people that have experienced or are experiencing violence in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The narratives as well as the quantitative data received from participants mirror that of other studies around the country. Although the majority of our respondents were not satisfied with conventional methods of victim services, they found support in friends, therapists, and family members. This mirrors similar trends in support seeking behaviors found in heterosexual women who experience violence, particularly in communities of color and other oppressed groups.



"I had a friend who hanged himself - suicide isn't murder, but the day to day harassments he went through as a young gay man were his primary motivators."

(Lesbian Female, 43, James City County)