

## Same Sex Relationships

The problems faced by men and women in a “traditional” relationship are the same experience by the LGBT-Q relationships.

The primary reason given by victims for staying with their abusers is fear of violence and the lack of real options to be safe with their children. This fear of violence is realistic. Research shows that domestic violence tends to escalate when victims leave their relationship. Some perpetrators repeatedly threaten to kill or seriously injure their victims should they attempt to leave. The victim may have already attempted to leave in the past, only to be tracked down by the perpetrator and seriously injured. Most perpetrators do not let victims simply leave relationships.

**There are many reasons for staying in a violent relationship, and they vary for each victim. They may include:**

- fear of violence and the perpetrator
- lack of shelters and victim-advocacy programs to provide transitional support
- lack of affordable housing that would provide safety for the victim and children
- lack of real alternatives for employment and financial assistance, especially for victims with children
- lack of affordable legal assistance necessary to obtain a divorce, custody order, or a restraining order or protection order
- being immobilized by psychological and physical trauma (victims of trauma may not be able to mobilize all that it takes to separate and establish a new life for themselves and their children, particularly during the period immediately following the trauma or if they have suffered multiple traumas)
- believing in cultural/family/religious values that encourage the maintenance of the family unit at all costs
- continuing to hope and believe the perpetrator’s promises to change and to stop being violent because of the perpetrator’s positive qualities
- being told by the perpetrator, counselors, the courts, police, ministers, family members, and friends that the violence is the victim’s fault, and that she could stop the abuse simply by complying with the perpetrator’s demands; in these cases, the victim learns that the systems with the power to intervene will not act, and she is forced to comply with the perpetrator in hopes of stopping the abuse

## Why Gay Men Stay in Abusive Relationships

- Many men stay after the abuse has begun. Some stay for a long time, even though the abuse continues. Some leave and return, even though the abuse continues. For some people this behavior is incomprehensible: “Why do people stay who are being abused?” There can be compelling and understandable reasons why an individual stays. The reasons fall loosely into four emotional categories: Love, Hope, Fear and Shame.
- For gay men the two most cited reasons for staying are “love of partner” and “hope for change”. The third most commonly cited reason for staying is the lack of knowledge about partner abuse. It is cited more often even than fear. Gay men simply do not have enough knowledge to understand that what is happening to them is partner abuse – “I didn’t understand there was such a thing as ‘gay domestic violence’”. The lack of availability of appropriate resources also plays a significant role in gay survivors’ decisions to remain. (Merrill and Wolfe, 2000)

### Love

- The individual may Love the abuser, often because the abuser is loving and lovable when not being abusive
- Have invested in the relationship and feel he owes it to the abusive partner to “stick it out” and support him/her
- Be committed to the relationship “for better or worse”
- Believe that it is up to him to make the relationship work

### Hope

- The individual may believe that it is only an isolated incident, that it will not happen again or not often (over half of gay men in abusive relationships did not see the early incidents as the start of an abusive pattern)
- Believe it’s just a fight or “this is the way relationships are”
- Deny and minimize the severity of the abuse to themselves and to others (the abuser denies and minimizes, as well)
- Be convinced that the abuser will get help and can change (75% of gay men in abusive relationships believe this – Merrill and Wolf, 2000)
- Accept statements of regret and promises of change by the abuser and during the seduction phases, he may actually see signs of change
- Believe that things will get better when the abuser stops using drugs, or gets a job, or makes more money, or doesn’t have so much stress, or etc.

### Fear

- The individual may fear retribution by the abuser – against himself, his property, his children or other family members
- Believe there is no help or fear that possible resources will have a homophobic response or dismiss or minimize the situation
- Be concerned that he will have to come out in order to get help
- Assume that he can’t make it on his own, for example he has no money or no job
- Fear being alone or that he will never have another relationship
- Believe the abuser will out him to family, friends or work
- Believe he will lose personal possessions or mutual financial resources, such as property
- Fear that abuser will harm or kill himself/herself
- Be concerned about losing his children or access to his children
- Not have a place to go
- Not want to leave pets behind to be abused
- Not have the financial resources to live without abuser

## **Shame and Guilt**

- The individual may have feelings of guilt about the violence
- Feel he caused the abuse; he may feel responsible
- Feel shame for allowing it to happen
- Feel shame related to being gay, bisexual, transgender or some other personal characteristics
- Believe that the relationship's failure is his fault

## **How Often Do They Leave**

- 60% of gay men in abusive relationships report making three or more significant attempts to leave before being able to escape the relationship (Merrill and Wolfe, 2000). For women, the average is leaving 7 times, before leaving for good it is possible that this pattern is similar for GBT men.

## **Abuse after Leaving**

- A study by Merrill and Wolfe (2000) found that
- More than 75% of the time it is the abused partner who ends the relationship.
- Almost 90% of the survivors report continued abuse after leaving and 58% report this abuse as moderate or severe.
- For most gay men being financially trapped is not a strong reason to stay, but HIV-status may influence the decision to stay. HIV-positive survivors may fear becoming sick and dying alone. HIV-negative survivors may fear dating because of HIV. Survivors with HIV-positive partners sometimes don't want to abandon the partner even though he is an abuser.

## **Why do Lesbian's stay in Abusive Relationships**

Domestic violence in the LGBT-Q community is a serious issue. The rates of domestic violence in same-gender relationships are roughly the same as domestic violence against heterosexual women. As in opposite-gendered couples, the problem is likely underreported. Facing a system which is often oppressive and hostile towards those who identify as anything other than "straight", those involved in same-gender battering frequently report being afraid of revealing their sexual orientation or the nature of their relationship.

Additionally, even those who attempt to report violence in their alternative relationship run into obstacles. Police officers, prosecutors, judges and others to whom a LGBT-Q victim may turn to for help may have difficulty in providing the same level of service as to a heterosexual victim. Not only might personal attitudes towards the LGBT-Q community come into play, but these providers may have inadequate levels of experience and training to work with LGBT-Q victims and flimsy or non-existent laws to enforce on behalf of the victim.

Although much advancement has been made in the provision of services, the enforcement of the law, and the equality of protections available to those in LGBT-Q relationships over the last decade, it is important for you to be aware of your rights and options as they relate to your attempt to escape an abusive relationship.