



Policing Intimate Partner Violence in the LGBTQ+ Community

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Intimate partner violence (IPV) is abuse or aggression (i.e., physical violence, sexual violence, stalking, psychological aggression) that occurs in a romantic relationship with either a current or former partner. Whereas domestic violence can occur between any people that live together (i.e., parents and children, siblings, roommates), IPV explicitly occurs between romantic partners that may or may not live together. IPV is relatively common, impacting millions of people in the United States every year. About **41% of women and 26% of men** have experienced sexual or physical violence or stalking by an intimate partner, and **61 million women and 53 million men** have reported experiencing psychological aggression by an intimate partner.

While statistics of domestic violence and intimate partner violence often focus on heterosexual cis women, anyone regardless of gender or sexual orientation can be a victim or perpetrator of IPV. For LGBTQ+ individuals, social determinants compound homophobic and transphobic stigma to **create a greater risk** of being a victim of IPV. Compared to 35% of straight women, **LGB women are more likely to experience IPV** in their lifetime, with 61% of bisexual women and 44% of lesbian women reporting such experiences (although this reporting rate is likely higher given underreporting within the LGBTQ+ community). IPV is also experienced by LGBTQ+ individuals at a younger age. A report by the **CDC** found that 19% of lesbian, gay, and bisexual high school-aged students reported being forced to have sex, compared to 6% of straight students. **Another CDC study** found that 24% of transgender high school-aged students reported being forced to have sex compared to 15% of their cisgender counterparts.

Despite LGBTQ+ individuals facing a higher risk of being a victim of IPV, police response to these cases is lacking. Current police response does not effectively consider how **stigma and social determinants increase risk**. Additionally, the **relationship** between the LGBTQ+ community and police can create a barrier to reporting IPV cases in the first place. Having a greater understanding of the LGBTQ+ community and improving relations between law enforcement and this community can help improve the effectiveness of police response to IPV cases within the LGBTQ+ community.

Increased Risk for IPV Victimization

Marginalized groups are at an increased risk for experiencing IPV because abusers can take **advantage of multiple vulnerabilities** facing those communities. For instance, LGBTQ+ individuals face **threats of homophobia and transphobia** that can limit their social support and economic security. These individuals may be **isolated from their family or face social rejection** due to their sexual orientation or gender identification. Abusers can exploit this lack of support to **further isolate victims and continue their abuse**. Abusers may also use expectations about IPV to **gaslight LGBTQ+ victims** into believing they are not victims at all. Manipulating

LGBTQ+ individuals to think they do not **fit conventional IPV** profiles discourages victims from seeking help.

The intersection of historically underrepresented identities can further increase the risk for IPV among LGBTQ+ individuals. Structural factors like age, race, and economic status can exacerbate the stigma or isolation faced by many in the community. For example, Black transgender women have a notably **higher risk for fatal IPV victimization**. Transphobia and racism, along with the lack of institutional support based on both identities, have a **compounding effect** on the risk of IPV victimization.

Current Police Training and Response to IPV Cases in the LGBTQ+ Community

Police response to IPV cases involving LGBTQ+ individuals is not always effective in addressing cases. **Gender biases and homophobic/transphobic attitudes** held by police can undermine the propensity of law enforcement to protect victims or hold perpetrators accountable. A **study from American University** found that arrest rates in non-fatal IPV cases were highest when the victim was white and when the assault was more severe, suggesting police may not respond as effectively for reports involving non-white victims, or they take less severe assaults less seriously. Police have also historically been **less likely to enforce orders of protection** involving LGBTQ+ individuals.

Many LGBTQ+ community members are also **reluctant to report incidents of IPV** in the first place. Criminal laws that have targeted the community in the past have sown mistrust, and lingering fears police will not take their claims seriously persist. Yet, even when police do respond to IPV incidents involving LGBTQ+ individuals, many have reported **experiencing homophobic, transphobic, sexist, or even violent treatment from police**. These **historical systemic biases** reinforce the reluctance to report as police brutality and discriminatory attitudes have eroded the relationship between the LGBTQ+ community and law enforcement.

Addressing Police Response to IPV in the LGBTQ+ Community

A concerted effort to (1) understand the unique or heightened risk factors faced by the LGBTQ+ community regarding IPV victimization, (2) address biases or misconceptions about the community held by police, and (3) strengthen relations with the LGBTQ+ community are all essential for improving police response to reports made by LGBTQ+ individuals. Three solutions are considered:

1. Improving Police Knowledge of the LGBTQ+ Community

Educational programs that **address** terminology, the history of the LGBTQ+ movements, differences between sexual orientation and gender identity—and how these intersect with other identities (i.e., race, religion, culture)—can inform police officers on the **biases and stigma facing the LGBTQ+ community**. Improving officers' knowledge in these areas can make them **more effective, compassionate, and comfortable** when engaging with the LGBTQ+ community.

2. Implementing Specific IPV Training for LGBTQ+ Cases

Training programs that focus on addressing biases, teaching practical skills (i.e. rapport building, addressing trauma), and understanding the **unique risk factors** that compound LGBTQ+ individuals' risk for IPV victimization, will help officers respond more effectively to these IPV cases. Additional training on **implicit bias**

awareness can further demonstrate how internalized beliefs about the LGBTQ+ community may impact police response to an IPV case. Having a **better understanding** of the marginalized communities police serve will allow for more effective police response.

3. Connecting with the LGBTQ+ Community

Community outreach by police to connect with LGBTQ+ individuals will help form more positive relationships. These efforts can be supplemented by the creation of a **community liaison position or unit** that works to foster a more person-centered connection between law enforcement and the LGBTQ+ community. Liaisons can support victims through the **reporting process** by taking statements, addressing public harassment, helping file complaints of police brutality, and providing other forms of support. This increased support and improved relations would **increase confidence in reporting** IPV cases among LGBTQ+ individuals while improving police response.