

# TRANSFORMING SURVIVAL

**TRANSGENDER PEOPLE'S  
ACCESS TO DOMESTIC  
VIOLENCE REFUGES**



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# **WHERE'S THE SUPPORT?**

- **If you are a transgender woman do you stay in the women's or the men's refuge?**
- **If you're a transgender man where do you go?**
- **If you don't identify as either male or female what are your refuge options?**
- **Are any of these services safe, supportive, or accessible to transgender people?**

# **DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND ABUSE**

**“Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality.”**

**- (Home Office, England, 2012 )**

**Includes: psychological, verbal, physical, sexual, financial, and spiritual.**

# **DOMESTIC VIOLENCE REFUGE**

- **‘Domestic Violence Refuge’ is an accommodation service for victims/survivors who have experienced domestic violence.**
- **I’m focusing on intimate partner domestic abuse only**
- **‘Victim/survivor’ is any person who has been abused by a current or previous intimate partner.**
- **I will NOT be discussing the role of transgender perpetrators of domestic violence. However, I acknowledge that domestic violence is complex and often the distinction between perpetrator and victim/survivor may be unclear.**

***“He started with constant verbal abuse, I was ugly, people knew I was a man, no one would want me cos' I am a freak, I am not a woman. He repeatedly forced me to have sex with him, even though I did not want to as he continued to threaten my life by either harming me himself or by exposing my [transgender] status to people who would not respond well to the knowledge and seek to hurt me.”***

**- Sara, a transgender woman survivor (Ceissman 2011, pp.5)**

# **TRANSFEMINISM AND GENDER BASED VIOLENCE**

- **Transgender people, like cisgender women, are consistent targets of violence and discrimination**
- **Gender norms are in and of themselves violent – reinforcing gender roles based on inequality, power and coercion. Sexism and transphobia are intricately linked ways of regulating ‘acceptable’ gender expressions**
- **Domestic violence can only be fought against when we challenge violent gender norms, not when we reinforce them through the exclusion of people with a non-conforming gender identity or gender expression**
- **For inclusive feminism that incorporates gender diversity and intersectional oppressions at its core**

# **HOW COMMON IS DOMESTIC ABUSE FOR TRANSGENDER PEOPLE?**

**80% of transgender people in Scotland stated that they had been abused in an intimate relationship (Roch, Morton and Ritchie, 2010, pp. 4- 5).**

**In Brighton & Hove, 64% of transgender people reported having experienced domestic violence (Browne 2007, p. 20).**

# DOMESTIC ABUSE

All types of DV can be experienced by transgender people.

DV is potentially magnified in its impact by the effects of transphobia and cisgenderism on self-esteem, lack of sensitive support services, and lack of viable alternatives for support (i.e. many transgender people are not out to family, friends, religious communities or are rejected by them once out)

- Unemployment
- High rates of mental health problems, substance misuse and homelessness
- More likely to experience harassment and hate crimes
- Lack of rights and legal protection
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tiXUGBCyZqA>

# TRANSGENDER DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

- 'Outing' a person's transgender status/ background
- Not allowing a person to be 'out'
- Using the wrong pronouns
- Forcing someone to perform a gender they do not wish to present as
- Isolating the victim/survivor from LGBT communities and friends
- Taking advantage of a lack of discrimination protection and housing alternatives
- Ridiculing or exotifying their body
- Transphobic name calling, or making a person feel guilty, faulty, or ashamed of their gender
- Preventing them from gender transitioning (hiding hormones, denying surgery)
- Blaming a person for being transgender or for causing the discrimination they have experienced
- Sexual or physical touch of a person's body that does not respect their gender identity or body comfort

# **IMPACT**

**“My health has been messed up by traumas or experiencing . . . everything from abuse to sexism, misogyny, homophobia, transphobia, that certainly affected my self- esteem and my self-confidence and my ability to assert my belief in myself, my belief that I deserve to be treated well and with respect,” (Anonymous, FTM Shelter Project Research Team, 2008, p. 17).**

# **IMPACT**

- **Emotional difficulties**
- **Physical injuries**
- **Problems sleeping**
- **Difficulty maintaining a job**
- **Substance misuse**
- **Isolation from family and friends**
- **Difficulty trusting people and forming new relationships**
- **Self-harm**
- **Eating difficulties**
- **Suicidal thoughts**

# HOMELESSNESS

## SYSTEMS OF INEQUALITY: POVERTY & HOMELESSNESS

Transgender and gender non-conforming people are much more likely to be poor or homeless than the average person. This diagram shows how various factors combine into an interlocking system that keep many trans and gender non-conforming people in situations that are vulnerable and unequal.



Image from Sylvia Rivera Law Project

# **CASE STUDY**

- **40 year old African- Caribbean heterosexual transwoman**
- **Physical disabilities**
- **Depression and anxiety**
- **No contact with family- transphobia**
- **Unemployed, supported by State Welfare**
- **Issues accessing accommodation**
- **Not interested in women's refuges**
- **Remains in abusive relationship with boyfriend**

# **WOMEN'S SHELTERS TRANSGENDER INCLUSION- POLICY**

## **ENGLAND**

### **Equality Act (2010)**

- **Gender Reassignment a 'protected characteristic'**
- **Any service that provides to the public, or that sells goods and services**
- **“If you are an organization that provides separate or single-sex services for women and men, or you provide your services differently to women and men, you should treat transsexual people according to the gender role in which they present.” \***

(Voluntary and community sector: quick start guide to gender reassignment for service providers, Government Equalities Office, 2011)

**\* EXCEPTIONS- beware of clauses!**

# TRANSGENDER INCLUSION

- **Respect a transgender person's identity- if they say they are a woman, they are a woman.**
- **Use the name and pronoun the victim/survivor identifies with, regardless of legal documents. If you are unsure of the person's preferences, then ask.**
- **Do not make assumptions about the gender of the victim/survivor or of their partner/ex-partner's gender.**
- **Let the person decide for themselves which gender service they would like to use.**
- **Look at your refuge's policy towards transgender people- does it even have one? Have a policy that explicitly includes transgender people and make this inclusion policy publicly accessible.**
- **Review your intake process and documents, be sure that they use gender inclusive language. Instead of having questions that ask to check the box of "male" or "female" this could change to be open ended, ex. "Gender \_\_\_\_\_"**
- **Like other medical information, do not disclose a person's gender status to staff or residents unless you have the person's permission to do so.**
- **Do not ask the person about the details of their transgender status (ex. NOT appropriate to ask if they have had surgery or what their genitals look like).**
- **Have a private, individual and gender neutral toilet and washing facility. If possible, a private sleeping arrangement may be safer and more appropriate for a transgender person (but ONLY if they request this, a trans\* person should not be segregated as policy).**
- **Address the victim/survivors needs according to what the person considers to be important, do NOT treat being transgender as the problem.**

# **TRANSGENDER INCLUSION**

- **Educate staff and residents about transgender people with training and resources.**
- **Act swiftly and effectively against transphobia and other forms of discrimination within the refuge.**
- **Advertise and display your inclusion towards transgender people on websites, leaflets, and around the refuge.**
- **Advertise your inclusion policy to transgender organizations, events, and community media.**
- **Reach out to transgender and LGBT community groups, involve them in improving your service.**
- **Support transgender community initiatives, promote visibility of positive transgender relationships and the many successes of transgender people.**
- **Promote transgender and LGBT specific domestic violence initiatives, including the creation of an LGBT DV refuge. This is what LGBT service users say that they want most.**

# **CASE STUDY**

- **23 year old white bisexual transgender man**
- **Depression**
- **Early stages of transitioning**
- **Rejected by family**
- **Leaves abusive relationship**
- **Placed in a women's refuge**
- **Delays his transition**
- **Eventually he informs shelter that he is trans\*, they are supportive**

# **STAR- STREET TRANSVESTITE ACTION REVOLUTIONARIES**

**Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson, NYC, 1970**

- **STAR House, a shelter for transgender people, gender non-conforming people, drag queens who were homeless**
- **Advocated for trans\* rights in both legal frameworks and in Lesbian and Gay activist groups, that they were later rejected from**
- **Grassroots initiative, trans\*-collective approach**

# PROMOTE HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

- **Positive representation of transgender people in healthy relationships**
- **Positive representation of transgender people who have left abusive relationships**
- **Discussion about what abuse is and what it can look like for transgender people**
- **Discussion about consent and equipping people from a young age with improved communication tools**
- **Group outreach to schools, social groups, conferences**
- **Supportive services for transgender people struggling with their mental health or with low self-esteem**
- **Promote trans\* positive sexual health**  
<http://vimeo.com/89404670>

# **CAMPAIGN FOR MORE**

- **Promote transgender and LGBT specific domestic violence support initiatives.**
- **Most transgender and genderqueer correspondents state that they want a transgender specific and/or LGBT specific accommodation service.**
- **Raise awareness !**
- **Improved legal protection when accessing refuges, accommodation provision, and health services.**
- **More research and services for transgender and genderqueer people with multiple marginal identities, i.e. TPOC, trans people with disabilities, trans people in sex work.**



Questions, resources, comments, feedback?

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