Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) Protecting LGBTQ Survivors

Domestic violence, dating violence, sexual violence, and stalking are serious social problems and all victims deserve access to life-saving services. The Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), first authorized in 1994, is at the core of our nation’s response to these insidious and pervasive crimes, and creates and supports comprehensive, effective, and cost saving responses. As part of VAWA’s reauthorization process, NTF seeks to safeguard VAWA’s current protections for LGBTQ survivors of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual violence and stalking while further expanding access to LGBTQ specific services to ensure that LGBTQ survivors face fewer barriers in accessing services and finding safety.

LGBTQ communities experience domestic violence, dating violence, sexual violence, and stalking at similar to higher rates as non-LGBTQ communities.

- Forty-four percent of lesbian women and 61% of bisexual women experienced rape, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner in their lifetime compared to 35% of heterosexual women. 26% percent of gay men, and 37% of bisexual men experienced rape, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner at some point in their lifetime compared to 29% of heterosexual men.¹
- A national study on students in grades 9 through 12 found that 8.3% of heterosexual students and 17.5% of gay, lesbian, and bisexual students reported physical dating violence, and 9.1% of heterosexual and 22.7% of gay, lesbian, and bisexual students reported sexual dating violence one or more times during the 12 months prior to the survey.²
- In the U.S. Transgender Survey (2015), which had more than 27,000 respondents, nearly half (47%) of respondents experienced sexual violence at some point in their lifetime and one in ten (10%) experienced sexual violence in the past year. Respondents who have experienced homelessness (65%) and people with disabilities (61%) were more likely to have experienced sexual violence in their lifetime.³
- The rate of stalking among bisexual women is more than double the rate among heterosexual women. One in 3 bisexual women (37%) and 1 in 6 heterosexual women (16%) have experienced stalking victimization at some point during their lifetimes in which they felt very fearful or believed that they or someone close to them would be harmed or killed.⁴

The explicit non-discrimination provisions for LGBTQ communities included in the reauthorization of VAWA in 2013 have been monumental for LGBTQ survivors of violence and LGBTQ communities across the country. These protections reflected the commitment of the domestic violence and sexual violence movement to better address the needs of LGBTQ survivors, and more organizations are working to make their services inclusive of LGBTQ communities.

However, the continued barriers experienced by LGBTQ survivors as they attempt to access care and support underscores the continued need for a fully inclusive VAWA.

- Of the total number of LGBTQ domestic violence survivors that reported to the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs (NCAVP) in 2015, 43% interacted with law enforcement in some form: 12% said police were hostile, 13% said that police were
indifferent in their interactions, and 31% said they experienced misarrest, meaning the survivor was arrested rather than the abusive partner, up from 17% in 2014.v

- The 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey found that only of 1% of transgender survivors visited or used services at a domestic violence shelter, domestic violence program, or rape crisis center in the past year. Fifty-nine percent of those who accessed these services believed that the staff or employees knew or thought they were transgender. Of those who believed their identity was known, 22% reported experiencing one or more of the following incidents: denied equal treatment or service, verbally harassed, or physically attacked because of being transgender.vi

There is a significant need for LGBTQ specific programs for survivors.

- In a survey of 590 LGBTQ survivors, 69% indicated that given a choice, they would rather seek services for domestic violence from an LGBTQ specific program than a mainstream program. However, close to 20% had sought services via mainstream programs. The survey found much higher levels of satisfaction with services from LGBTQ specific programs.viii

LGBTQ specific programs spend a significant amount of their time and resources providing technical assistance to support non-LGBTQ domestic violence and sexual violence organizations towards a goal of inclusivity.

- In a recent survey, 1 in 4 LGBTQ organizations reported spending the majority of their resources providing training and technical assistance to non-LGBTQ agencies.viii

As a result of a fully LGBTQ inclusive VAWA being re-authorized, more survivors will have access to necessary life-saving services reflecting our country’s deep commitment to address the needs of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual violence, and stalking survivors.

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viii National LGBTQ Institute on IPV (2017). By & for: The unique services, experiences, and approaches of LGBTQ domestic violence and anti-violence agencies. A report of the National LGBTQ Institute on IPV. Seattle, WA.