

**real mates**  
look after each other

There's nothing better than a partner who really looks after you. It's about the little things that make you feel safe and loved. It's about being able to rely on each other when you need it most. It's about having someone who really gets you. It's about having someone who really cares. It's about having someone who really loves you. It's about having someone who really makes you feel like you're home.

www.realmates.org

Je m'aime comme les autres  
**MAIS**  
mieux, même si on a voulu.

Il y a des choses que les autres ne peuvent pas comprendre. Mais ça ne change rien à ce que nous sommes. Nous sommes nous-mêmes. Et c'est ça qui compte.

www.mais.be

**There's No Pride In Domestic Violence**

**What is domestic violence?**  
Domestic violence is a pattern of behavior that is intended to harm, control, or isolate you. It can include physical, sexual, emotional, or psychological abuse. It can happen to anyone, regardless of their gender or sexual orientation.

**There's no pride in domestic violence.**  
Domestic violence is a crime. It's not a private matter. It's not something that should be kept secret. It's something that should be reported to the police. It's something that should be taken seriously.

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# Violence against Women

*Human Rights organizations have been raising awareness on the specificity of violence perpetrated against women, including domestic violence. Domestic violence within same sex couples, however, is a taboo. It can take many forms: physical violence, sexual assault, emotional abuse or social or financial control. The fear of stigmatisation from the heterosexual world, the perception of the lesbian couple as the only refuge from a discriminatory society, and also the self image of the lesbian as a strong Amazon, have a major influence on underestimating or ignoring this problem even among lesbian communities or in the LGBT community at large. As for lesbophobic attitude, various organizations have started studying it as a double discrimination based on gender and on sexual orientation. Because of its double nature, research needs to be conducted separately from gay men and homophobia.*

*“Then I got pushed up against the door frame and was getting punched and kicked in the crotch. It really freaked me out, here I was being held and battered, and there was nothing I could do. Then I got thrown to the ground, and she was on top of me banging my head on the floor.”*

(from a lesbian disclosing her experience of abuse from her partner of 4 years - Walsh, 1996)

## **TAKING SAME SEX DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SERIOUSLY**

### **A LARGELY UNRECOGNIZED SOCIAL PROBLEM**

*“It is about time that we recognize same sex intimate violence as a serious social problem and attend to it within the unique social context of gay and lesbian relationships” says Mira Alexis P. Ofreneo, a teacher, psychologist and researcher who has been advocating for LGBT issues in the classroom, the clinic, and the academic. The current President of the lesbian organization Can’t Live in the Closet, Inc. (CLIC), Philippines has been counselling lesbian and bisexual women survivors of violence for 5 years: “1 out of every 4 same sex couples experience intimate violence. We can no longer remain silent”.*

Over the past 30 years, “women organized and politicized around the issue of domestic violence, defining it as a crime against women”. Once a private matter, domestic violence has become a public human rights issue and a recognized legal, social, and psychological problem. Though the dominant feminist analysis legitimized domestic violence as “violence against women”, it consequently left behind the parallel issue of partner violence in gay

and lesbian relationships as well as heterosexual female-to-male violence. The idea that domestic violence is fundamental to men’s power over women in society precluded the possibility that women could be violent or that men can be violated. And yet the few studies examining the prevalence of same sex intimate violence indicate that intimate violence in gay and lesbian relationships is as severe as heterosexual domestic violence. Studies of lesbian couples show that estimates of rate of partner abuse vary, from a low of 17% to a high of 73% ; with generally higher reported rates of emotional abuse, 65% to 90%, compared to physical abuse, 8% to 60%, and sexual violence, 5% to 57%. Studies on gay men showed that reported physical violence ranged from a low of 11% to a high of 47% and reported sexual violence from a low of 12% to a high of 55%. A summary of the heterosexual domestic violence literature concludes that 25% to 33% of heterosexual women are battered by their male partners; the research on gay and lesbian intimate violence indicates equal or greater prevalence rates as heterosexual domestic violence. Thus, same sex intimate violence occurs frequently enough to not be considered an “anomaly” or an “exception” to the general pattern of heterosexual male-to-female violence. Partner abuse is believed to be the third largest health problem facing gay men, second to substance abuse and AIDS.

### **Heterosexism Hides Same Sex Intimate Violence**

Despite its prevalence and severity, same sex intimate violence remains a largely unrecognized social problem. Reports of domestic violence incidents involve mostly men battering

their wives or girlfriends; domestic violence laws do not explicitly protect or may even clearly exclude gays and lesbians, with domestic violence resources (e.g., organizations, shelters, agencies, services) primarily directed towards battered women in heterosexual relationships. Law enforcers, medical personnel, mental health professionals, and social service workers also fail to give adequate support to gay and lesbian couples dealing with intimate violence. "The mainstream domestic violence movement still adheres to gender-based, heterosexist theories of battering that preclude the possibility of male victims or female perpetrators of violence". Hence, gay and lesbian couples have generally been excluded from intervention efforts. Heterosexist gender norms dictate that men can never be vulnerable and that women can never be violent. As such, a man is expected to be able to defend himself against another man, precluding the possibility of gay partner abuse. On the other hand, a woman is expected to be nurturing and not exhibit violence toward a woman or a man, likewise precluding the existence of lesbian partner abuse. Heterosexist gender norms have also contributed to the myth of "mutual battering" or that both parties participate equally in violence in a same sex relationships. The gay and lesbian community for a long time remained silent on the issue of intimate violence for fear that this will be used by the homophobic majority against it. "Denial, minimization, and rationalization about abuse has been the community's way of protecting itself from a society that is looking for reasons to condemn lesbians and gays as sick and perverted".

*"The mainstream domestic violence movement still adheres to gender-based, heterosexist theories of battering that preclude the possibility of male victims or female perpetrators of violence".*

#### **The Unique Context of Intimate Violence In Lesbian and Gay Relationships**

Though there are similarities between same sex and heterosexual intimate violence, several important differences have been found. Most distinct and apparent is the role of heterosexism and homophobia; the unique form of abuse referred to as "outing" and the minority status of same sex couples leading to relative

social isolation. External homophobia limits lesbian and gay individuals' access to help and support (e.g., services, police, therapists) and maintains a general lack of awareness of gay and lesbian issues. Lesbian and gay individuals fear having their sexual identity revealed. As such, they may not seek help from traditional domestic violence resources. They may also be reluctant to report cases of abuse for fear of the negative consequences of publicly revealing their sexual orientation. A unique form of abuse in same sex relationships is the threat of "outing" or revealing a person's

*"Heterosexist gender norms have contributed to the myth of "mutual battering" or that both parties participate equally in violence in a same sex relationships".*

sexual orientation to others without that person's permission. The threat of outing a partner's sexual orientation to family, friends, employers, neighbours, or community in general can be used as a form of control. Outing can result in the loss of a job, support systems, and even child custody. The threat of outing also keeps a partner to remain in an abusive relationship. Individual gays' and lesbians' own internalized homophobia also affects the same sex abusive situation, whether homophobia is on the part of the abuser or the abused. Clinical observation shows that majority of gay males who behave abusively manifest a negative self-concept related to internalized feelings of hate and fear over one's homosexuality. For the abused gay or lesbian, homophobia may make them feel that abuse is part of an inherently 'sick' relationship. Another complicating factor to same sex couples is the relative isolation of the marginalized gay community, to which both victims and batterer belong. As such, the decision to leave a violent partner has repercussions on one's social life or community as well, with the possibility of increased isolation. The members of the community also face dilemmas dealing with both the "victim" and "batterer" and the gay or lesbian couple may have lost the support of families and friends because of their sexual orientation, adding to their isolation.

## **MYTHS AND FACTS ABOUT SAME SEX DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

### **Myth**

Women aren't violent and men can't be victims of domestic violence

### **Fact**

Domestic violence happens in same sex relationships.

We know from research and the personal stories of those who have experienced it that women are capable of committing violence against their partners and men can be victims of violence in relationships.

### **Myth**

Violence between same sex partners is a mutual fight

### **Fact**

An abusive relationship will almost always involve a number of forms of abuse. Physical violence will only be one of those. Being able to fight back, however, does not mean the person isn't being abused.

### **Myth**

Drugs make him/her violent

### **Fact**

Some drugs (especially amphetamines) may trigger violent behaviour in some people. However if the person uses the drug knowing they may become violent and/or the violence is targeted towards their partner then this is domestic violence and they are responsible for their actions.

From the pamphlet "There is no Pride in Domestic Violence", Acon. The Australian NGO has also published "Another Closet". This booklet underlines how domestic violence can happen in all types of relationships: gay, lesbian or heterosexual; monogamous, open or three-way; dating, new relationships or long-term; live-in or not, across all communities, social classes, ages, cultural backgrounds and geographical areas. It details the unique aspects of same sex domestic violence and gives hints on what to do if you are experiencing domestic violence or if a friend or family member is experiencing abuse or violence.

## **LESBOPHOBIA**

### **FRENCH STUDY SHOWS HIGH INCIDENCE OF LESBOPHOBIA EXPERIENCED IN A MEDICAL ENVIRONMENT**

Fighting against any form of homophobic discrimination and aggression, SOS Homophobie maintains a phone counselling service for victims or witnesses of homophobic acts or discriminations. Only one of five calls to denounce homophobia received by the French NGO comes from a woman.

End 2003, the association's Lesbophobia Commission managed to lead an inquiry into the subject among France's lesbians. The first results are already available and reveal that 57% of lesbians surveyed report having suffered lesbophobic discrimination. Most of them suffer from it outside of their home (43%), within the family (44%), and at work (26%). One of the most striking facts coming out of the study is the high incidence of lesbophobia experienced in a medical environment as 44.38% said it happened during visits to the gynecologist.

This study draws the same conclusion as others conducted in Belgium, Canada, Moldova, according to which health care provision is not adapted or even hostile to LGBT people. SOS Homophobie has published various material on the specific subject of lesbophobia.

To see the results of the survey, visit  
[www.france.qrd.org/assocs/sos/](http://www.france.qrd.org/assocs/sos/)



**DAPHNÉ**

[www.lesbians-against-violence.com](http://www.lesbians-against-violence.com) or [www.lesben-gegen-fewalt.de](http://www.lesben-gegen-fewalt.de)

This international project is a gathering of various European lesbian associations. It addresses various issues such as violence against lesbians, accessibility to health services and domestic violence.

**GARANÇE**

[www.garance.be](http://www.garance.be)

This Belgian association works at strengthening the capacity of women and girls to defend themselves in all aspects of their daily lives. By means of prevention, it fights against violence, organising educational activities that help women and girls learn how to control their emotions, how to recognise their limits and how to defend themselves both verbally and physically. Its website provides information on violence among same sex couples but also violence against lesbians in public.

Garance produced a report entitled "Ça arrive dans les meilleures familles..." (It happens in the best of families...). It details the various forms of violence among same sex relationships: physical, emotional, verbal, economic, etc..., and describes some of the reasons why this issue is such a taboo. The Brussels-based association also produced a campaign under the name "Between visibility and invisibility: lesbians confronted in public by violence". Here are some of the slogans of its posters against lesbophobia:

"I do not have anything against lesbians, BUT..."

"... they are not really normal"

"... not my daughter"

"... a child needs a father"

"... no man wanted her"

**TALLER LESBICO CREATIVO**

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The Puerto Rican Taller Lesbico Creativo (Creative Lesbian Workshop) develops interactive workshops on same sex domestic violence, using various theatre and artistic techniques. It also provides workshops on sexuality, lesbophobia, diversity and health. Though their activities are mainly aimed at lesbian and bisexual women, the organization also cooperates with various non-LGBT organizations targeting a more general public.