

## **Does Intimate Partner Violence Impact on the Lives of the LGBT Community in Ireland?**

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One in four Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender individuals are affected by domestic abuse (Outcomers 2018) yet there has been limited empirical research to address the experiences of LGBT community in Ireland. The following research project explores the nature of violence in the domestic sphere that specifically affects the lives of the Irish LGBT community. From a systematic and qualitative gathering of information, the researcher aims to measure the impact of intimate partner violence in same-sex relationships. While domestic violence is a well-ventilated and researched topic in the academic field, it often fails to include those that belong to the LGBT community. This can ultimately result in LGBT individuals encountering chronic abuse in their relationships, being misinformed, ignored and isolated from society, which ultimately prevents them seeking out the support of mainstream domestic violence services. This is a hidden and multifaceted issue in Ireland and therefore requires further academic thought and consideration: hence, this silent issue became the basis of the overall rationale and objective of this research paper.

### **Research Questions**

Burck (2005) maintains that research questions are the most important facet within the qualitative study. The interrogative research questions that guided the researcher through out the study included; how does intimate partner violence shape the lives of the LGBT community? What are the barriers to support for individuals in the LGBT community that encounter intimate partner violence in Ireland?

### **Section 1: Literature Review**

There has been limited empirical research to address the experiences and encounters of LGBT people in Ireland. By critically reflecting and evaluating the literature, this paper aims to reduce researcher bias and discover if intimate partner violence (IPV) affects the lives of those in same-sex relationships and why some individuals who experience violence refrain from seeking help. This paper argues that more research and academic rigour is required to understand and appreciate the lives of this marginalized group. Through an extensive review of the literature on intimate partner violence (IPV), it has been possible to identify the following five themes that could explain why those in the LGBTQ community experiencing IPV may refrain from seeking professional help. The themes include the following;

#### **Theme 1 critically reviewing the terminology of domestic violence**

This paper aims to shed light on the importance of clear precise terminology regarding domestic or intimate partner violence. Imprecise or misleading terminology can lead to unwanted barriers to professionals, researchers and service users. For example, the term “domestic” can often contrive a picture that violence only occurs in the home environment between a wife and husband; however, this paper argues that violence transcends location, relationship or marital status, sexual orientation and gender. Violence can affect anyone at anytime. Having made this point, this research paper will mainly apply the term intimate partner violence to describe violence that occurs within human relationships.

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The traditional view of domestic violence was primarily concerned with the abuse involving two individuals in an opposite -sex (heterosexual) marriage. Most often, the abuser was the husband and the wife was the victim (Wallace 2015). This is reflected in statistical research; for example, one in five women in Ireland who have been in a relationship revealed that they had been abused by a current or former partner (Women's Aid 2018). The term "domestic" often refers to the family relations in a household and as such, the re-occurrence of violence or abusive behaviour in domestic relationships led to its name. However, societal views and attitudes evolved, as the public gained a clearer understanding of the different types of violence that occur within a relationship. As a result, the term "intimate partner violence" was developed to encompass a more inclusive and broader understanding of violence (Wallace 2015).

Santaya and Walters (2011) offer a useful definition of intimate partner violence. Violence is described as being nested within a larger relationship dynamic often characterised as warm and loving but often with time and increasing frequency, the relationship may become distrustful, oppressive or violent. The term 'domestic violence' is used in many countries to refer to partner violence but it is important to note that the issue does not discriminate between race and can also include child or elder abuse, or abuse by any member of a household (World Health Organisation 2012; Sokoloff and Dupont 2005).

Violence in the domestic sphere has been construed as the intentional and non-consensual enactment of intimidation and power of one person over another. Intimate partner violence involves the infliction of harm and punishment (for example, public humiliation, physical and sexual abuse), isolating a partner from sources of support and depriving an individual of adequate psychological, physical and economic safety. It is important to note that intimate partner violence and abuse in any dynamic relationship can vary in nature; for example, psychological abuse may be present within one relationship with no form of physical, economic or sexual violence having transpired (Santaya and Walters 2011).

### **Theme 2: Examining the lack of same sex relationships in core domestic violence literature**

What happens when literature and academic exploration of domestic violence is thought about through a heterosexual lens? Baker *et al.* (2012) argue that same -sex intimate partner violence (IPV) has not been incorporated in the core conceptualisation of the research and theorizing regarding IPV. Due to the nature of same-sex relationships and their inherent disconnection from the patriarchal and hetero-normative marriage model, violence experienced by the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender community must be further examined. The research on violence and harassment in the domestic sphere has largely focused on men and women (Archer 2000; Hamby 2009). However, there is increasing acknowledgment that domestic violence within the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (LGBT) community is an urgent issue (Baslam *et al* 2005; Duke *et al* Davidson 2009; Eaton *et al* 2008; Hassouneh *et al* Glass 2008; Messinger 2011; McLaughlin *et al* Rozee 2001; Renzetti 1992; Stanley *et al* 2006).

With regards to the work of Cannon and Butell (2015), intimate partner violence is viewed through a critical lens and can be critiqued for its lack of empirical research on same -sex abusers and victims. Intimate partner violence can surface in many forms and does not discriminate between race, economic or social status, gender, religion, nationality or sexual orientation (Qureshi 2017). Furthermore, empirical research has shown that intimate partner violence is present in same sex relationships (Greenwood *et al* 2002; Pitt and Dolan-Soto 2011; Renzetti 1998; Stall *et al* 2003). Another aspect of the research has revealed that one out of four to one out three same-sex relationships have experienced domestic violence (Qureshi 2017). The paper argues that violence inflicted by a spouse, loving

companion or partner is not an issue for a particular gender, group or faction society but rather a wider issue of humanity.

### **Theme 3 The Gendered nature of IPV Theory**

The most commonly understood form of domestic violence involves heterosexual couples engaging in destructive behaviour, where the victim is usually female (Qureshi 2017). From reviewing the literature, a common theme emerges as intimate partner violence is seen as a casualty for women and a crime committed by men. As a result, terminology in academic discourse often reflects those attitudes; for example, the gender -specific terminology (i.e. the female victim, the male perpetrator, etc.) is often applied. By critically reflecting upon the literature, this paper argues that violence simply does not affect just the female portion of the populace, as chronic abuse in the domestic sphere is not a gender issue.

However, the World Health Organisation (2012) states that the overwhelming global burden of intimate partner violence is borne by women and as such terminology is often gendered. The literature has revealed that while women can be violent in relationships with men, often in self-defence, and while violence can occur in same - sex partnerships, the most common form of violence is against women and is inflicted upon male intimate partners or ex-partners. By contrast, men are far more likely to experience violent acts by strangers or acquaintances than by someone close to them.

Furthermore, the majority of systematic research examining the behavior and variables of perpetrators of abuse is based on heterosexual men (Hamberger 1996; Lawson 2008; Moor and Stuart 2005; Moore *et al* 2008; Peralta *et al* 2010).

By closely examining the literature, the research paper argues that domestic violence theory should not be seen through a gendered lens. Statistics show that one in three women and one in four men have been victims of physical violence by an intimate partner within their lifetime (National Coalition against domestic violence 2015). In terms of the Irish context, an Irish charity organization called Amen, which supports male victims of domestic abuse, has disclosed in its annual report in 2016 that the organisation has received a total of 5,196 disclosures of domestic abuse towards men (Halpin 2017).

The literature has also discovered that 13.6% of men in 2015 and 2016 state they have been a victim of domestic abuse since they were 16. For every three victims of domestic abuse, two will be female and one will be male. These figures are the equivalent of 2.2 million male victims and 4.3 million female victims. (Man Kind Initiative 2017). The paper concurs with these findings, as it takes a stance that intimate partner violence is not an obstacle for just one single gender, but rather an obstacle for humankind.

Baker et al (2012) suggests that viewing intimate partner violence through the same-sex lens removes gender-based assumptions regarding the many levels of IPV theory, which enables one to see how other cultural and systematic factors can play a role in the violence. To conclude, this paper argues that when scholars, professionals and researchers focus solely on the heterosexual female victims and male abusers of violence, as academia in this field often does, it, unfortunately, ostracises the vulnerable minority group such as male victims and many members of LGBT community.

### **Theme 4: Pressure to not expose problems to LGBT community**

This paper aims to shed light on the reasons why LGBT men and women might choose not to report intimate partner violence. Through an extensive review of the literature, one can identify a link between the reluctance to report abuse and protecting the LGBT society as a whole. Many of its members associate openness and communicating the violence to showing a lack of solidarity or patronage to the LGBT community. Furthermore, at a time when LGBT individuals were struggling to cast off

from the public perception of homosexuality as something privative or immoral, there was considerable social pressure to avoid public exposure of issues impacting on same-sex relationships (Baker et al 2012).

Many members of the LGBTQ network remain silent about the abuse out of a profound fear that the society in which they belong to will regard their relationship and same-sex pairings in general as dysfunctional or perilous (*Ibid*). One must examine the experiences and perspectives of these LBGT individuals to understand how a history of stigmatisation regarding their sexual identity and a need to protect their community from further harm has and continues to have an impact on their lives.

### **Theme 5: The fear of being “outed” and exposed to society**

This paper takes the stance that a society that has a history of stigmatization, discrimination and violence towards LGBT identities (see Appendix 1), despite the progress of time will continue to breed silence, friction and hostility. Another aspect of the data reveals a clear distinction between heterosexual and homosexual couples, as the perpetrators from the same sex relationships will threaten “outing” their victim or revealing their sexual orientation to work colleagues, family and friends (Qureshi 2017).

Evidence-based research on violence in same-sex couples has revealed that lesbians and gay victims are more reluctant to seek support or make a report of abuse to the relevant legal authorities. Survivors of chronic abuse may not contact law enforcement agencies due to the fear or reluctance to reveal their sexual orientation or gender identity to the outside world. Research has shown that psychological abuse is the most common form of abuse and physical abusers will often blackmail their partners into silence. This often involves threatening to ‘out’ their partner or expose their sexual orientation to members of society, which ultimately can prevent those in same sex abusive relationships from contacting service providers and seeking support (*Ibid*).

## **Section 2: Methodology**

One of the main challenges of the research study was choosing the best -suited methodology. Choosing a research method was a complex process, due to how any proposal to conduct primary research with vulnerable persons (i.e. LGBT members that are in domestic violence relationships) requires ethical approval from the Research Ethics Committee in Dundalk Institute of Technology. Based on this requirement and by acknowledging the vulnerability of LGBT individuals in intimate partner violence relationships, an agreement was made to identify a different sample population that would still attain the objectives of the research project.

Research has highlighted the value of selecting the appropriate candidates for interviews (Creswell 2007). Due to time-consuming nature of interviews, the sample size was restricted to three highly regarded professionals. The potential candidates were assessed and selected by their experience of working on a one to one basis with LGBT service users that may have experienced intimate partner violence: hence, these informants had the most likelihood of yielding the most valuable information. The key informants included those in leadership roles within LGBTQ organizations, fellow researchers who study the area of domestic violence and professionals who work in domestic refugee shelters in Ireland. It is important to note that the majority of the informants had a professional kinship to Dundalk Institute of Technology to which the concept of the research design was conceived.

### **Purpose statement**

This report describes a qualitative study to gain further insight into if and how violence in the domestic sphere impacts the lives of those in the Irish LGBT community. The purpose was to explore through a process of enquiry and investigation, the perceptions, attitudes and experiences of professionals and practitioners in the domestic (or related) fields in order to understand the violence that occurs within same-sex relationships.

Semi-structured interviews were employed as the most suitable research method to capture the experiences of professionals in the field. Five themes were examined by reviewing the secondary data and literature on domestic violence. The themes include: terminology of domestic violence; examining the lack of same-sex relationships in domestic violence literature and the reasons as to why LGBT individuals in intimate partner violence relationships refrain from seeking help.

### **Aims and objectives of the study**

For this study, the researcher conducted face-to-face semi-structured and in-depth interviews with professionals and practitioners in order to discover if intimate partner violence shapes the lives of the LGBT community. The data inquiry aimed to be systematic and rigorous in nature as to gather primary data to highlight if intimate partner violence (IPV) in same-sex relationships is an issue in Ireland. The data that was collected on professional perceptions of IPV within the LGBT community will be used to join with the current academic literature and to fill the knowledge gaps that were identified when reviewing and evaluating the discourse regarding intimate partner violence.

### **What is Qualitative Research?**

Qualitative research embodies a diverse range of theoretical and philosophical traditions that, usually stems from an interpretivist view of the world. This method is used to explore and gain insight into social phenomena and processes. Generally, the qualitative research seeks to explain or gain insight into how certain people experience and interpret their lives. Qualitative analysis allows the research worker to describe and explain social experiences or explore what is taken for granted about a society and its cultural practice (Howson and Alexandra 2013).

(Mannan 1983) determines that the qualitative approach consists of an array of interpretive techniques that seek to decode, translate and otherwise fathom or understand the meaning, not the frequency, of naturally occurring phenomena in the social world. Qualitative research can be conceptualized as the systematic collection, organization and interpretation of textual information. Researchers must operate in natural settings or research contexts to establish trust, participation, access to meaning and in-depth understanding (Saunders *et al* 2012). Qualitative methods can produce a comprehensive description of processes, mechanisms and settings; it can also provide unique contributions to health services and clinical research (Curry 2015).

### **The use of semi structured interviews as a tool in the qualitative study design**

This paper employed a qualitative interview approach to collect new data on intimate partner violence. The systematic investigation utilized semi-structured interviews to capture the experiences of professionals and practitioners that work in the domestic violence (or related) field. When one attempts to collect people's life stories, they partake upon a journey to discover the various aspects of the human experience: therefore, the primary way a research worker can gather human stories is by interviewing people. While the researcher may use utilize an array of techniques, at the very core of the qualitative research is the desire to expose the human part of a story (Jacob and Furgerson 2012)



Interviews are a method of collecting data in which selected participants are provided with questions to discover what they think, do or feel. Interviews fall under the interpretive paradigm and are concerned with exploring primary data on human understandings, opinions, memories, attitudes and experiences (Collis and Hussey 2009). Interviewing provides an excellent opportunity for the researcher to probe deeply to uncover new inklings, delve into new dimensions of a problem and to secure vivid, accurate and inclusive accounts based on human experience (Smith *et al* 1991).

Researchers have argued that semi-structured interviews are fruitful and provide valuable information when the researcher's overall aim of the interview is to develop an understanding of the respondent's world. It is also recommended that the subject matter must be treated as confidential or commercially sensitive (Smith *et al* 1991) For this paper, a positivist approach was retained as the study involved a series of semi-structured interviews and a selection of questions where prepared by the research worker in advance. However, there was an opportunity for the respondents to introduce new information, topics and themes in the midst of the interview process.

### **Sampling design**

(Creswell 2007) highlights the value of selecting the appropriate candidates for interviews. He recommends that the researcher should utilize one of the various types of sampling strategies such as criterion-based sampling or critical case sampling. The applicable sampling method will allow the researcher to obtain qualified candidates that will provide the most credible information to the study. The study utilized expert sampling, which seeks out experts in a particular field to be the subjects of the purposive sampling (Etikan *et al* 2016). The purposeful sampling design of the study included highly regarded professionals and practitioners that could have insight into domestic violence in the LGBT community

### **Scope and limitations of the Semi-Structured Interviews**

The interview process is flexible in nature as the analyst can adapt or modify their approach during the interview if a topic of interest emerges. The form of qualitative research allows for interactivity and social interaction. This can provide both parties with an opportunity to check with one another if they understand the nature of the investigation, as well to clarify extend and enhance the quality of the questions (*Ibid*). However, Collis and Hussey (2009) recommend that when asking questions, the researcher must be aware of the potential for inadvertent class, race or sex bias. Interviews are particularly prone to bias and as such interviews need careful planning, communication and conscientious recording in order to generate valid and reliable information.

According to Kvale (2007), the pilot test will enhance the quality of the research by determining if there are flaws, limitations, or other weaknesses within the interview design. For the purposes of the study, messages of communication were piloted and carefully scripted as to not influence the potential participants. This involved the researcher showing the emails, interview scripts, interview questions and participant forms to their supervisor located in Dundalk Institute of Technology as well as fellow colleagues, before they sent them out to the respondents of the study.

The paper argues that despite the quality of rich information, confirmatory bias can occur. This involves the analyst selectively hearing or recording the preferred data. The researcher must find the balance between trying to prove their hypothesis or overall point and accepting the outcome or the data accumulated. Research has highlighted that during the interview process certain subtle influences can be present and impact the data. This can include the tone of voice, the language employed and the insertion of additional or altered

questions which can all have an effect on the outcome of data collected (Cameron and Price 2009).

As this paper has utilized a face-to-face interview approach, the researcher was mindful of non-verbal cues such as body posture, smiling or frowning facial gestures. Qualitative research design can be complicated depending upon the level of experience a researcher may have with a particular type of methodology (Turner 2010). Therefore, one can argue that the limitation of the qualitative research approach and interviews is the reliance on the interpersonal, professional and interview skills of the researcher.

When exploring the individual experiences and perceptions in great detail, the interview mechanism can be an extremely time-consuming form of data collection for both the researcher and respondent. Studying patterns of behaviour and individual perceptions can require large amounts of time and time must be carefully spent on organization, the arranging of interviews, travelling, conducting the interview and transcribing the data. Furthermore, analyzing the qualitative data can put a huge time demand on the researcher (Cameron and Price 2009). Notwithstanding, the time consuming nature of interviews, this research method can provide valuable data regarding the research topic.

### **Addressing Ethical issues**

Ethical issues can be present in any kind of systematic inquiry. Several authors have claimed that the researcher is accountable for the protection of human rights and that any kind of research should be guided by the principles of respect for people, beneficence, and justice (Dresser 1998, Kvale 1996, Munhall 1988, Raudonis, 1992). The research process creates tension between the aims of investigation to make generalizations for the good of others and the rights of participants to maintain privacy (Orb *et al.* 2000). This paper chose a qualitative data approach and interviewed professionals in the field, so it, therefore, had to consider the following ethical implications.

An ethical principle closely linked with research is beneficence, which involves the researcher evaluating if the study is doing good for others and preventing harm. As a moral obligation, the researcher must maintain the principle of beneficence by overseeing the potential consequences of revealing participants' identities. An aspect of the literature recommends the use of pseudonyms (Orb *et al.* 2000). This paper has allowed the participants to choose if they would like to publish their name or remain anonymous. If the respondent of the semi-structured interviews chooses to remain anonymous, the researcher will ensure that using 'pseudo' names protects their identity. These anonymous markers will be used throughout the body of the study.

An ethical principal that this paper has considered is autonomy. In terms of this study, the principle of autonomy was honoured through informed consent, which means that participants exercise their rights as autonomous persons to voluntarily accept or refuse to participate in the interview process. (Orb *et al.* 2000). The respondents of a study have the autonomy to end the interview process at any time. (See Appendix for consent form that preserved autonomy of respondents)

Consent has been referred to as a negotiation of trust, and it requires continuous renegotiation (Field and Morse 1992, Kvale 1996; Munhall 1988). For the purpose of this study, the researcher provided each participant with sufficient information regarding the study, then proceeded to provide each respondent with a consent form in which they signed before the interview process commenced. All confidentiality agreements between researcher and participants were respected. The researchers provided information to respondents regarding data protection and storage. All data collected during the study was stored sufficiently in a safe place.

### **Section 3: Findings**

This section of the paper documents the specific findings of the research that were derived from the qualitative data analysis. Firstly, the researcher explored how intimate partner violence is an issue for the Irish LGBT community. In addition, the paper has sought out reasons why members of the LGBT community might remain silent and refrain from seeking out assistance from service providers and mainstream domestic violence services. The section is divided into six themes that include the following;

#### **Theme 1: Recognition of Intimate Partner Violence in the LGBT community**

The following is evidence produced in the qualitative study which consisted of three semi-structured interviews. By consulting with experts in the field, this paper has concluded that intimate partner or domestic violence is a palpable issue that impacts the lives of the Irish LGBT community. It is also by acknowledging the issue that one can attempt to understand, examine and rectify it. As reported by participant x: “Domestic violence in same-sex relationships it is as big an issue as it is for the heterosexual community, domestic violence does exist within same-sex relationships”

As an advocate for the LGBT community, interviewee x was asked about their experiences when working with LGBT service users. The participant states that from the first day of launching a Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender community centre, they have encountered LGBT individuals who have experienced some form of intimate partner violence. Twenty-two years later, the interviewee remarks that they continue to cross paths with LGBT members who stem from violent or abusive relationships. In the last five years of working in the LGBT community centre, they have supported over fifty LGBT service users who have experienced intimate partner violence.

Lynne Cahill, the second participant of the study, has spent the last four years in Trinity College Dublin with the School of Social Work and Social Policy to pursue a PhD. Through a qualitative study, Lynne Cahill set out to gather and voice the experiences of lesbian bisexual women who experience intimate partner violence from female partners. The findings concurred with the paper’s position that those in same-sex relationships can experience intimate partner violence. According to the interviewee, the sample of nine bisexual and lesbian women in her study had experienced all the hallmarks of an abusive relationship.

Theresa Woods is a practicing psychotherapist who set up a domestic refuge shelter in 1998 called *Drogheda Women and Children’s Refuge*. When asked about her experiences working with the LGBT community and the members who experienced abuse within a relationship, Theresa disclosed that in her twenty years as a psychotherapist for the domestic violence refuge, she has supported between twenty to thirty LGBT clients .

#### **Theme 2 Challenging the Domestic Violence Terminology**

All three of the respondents of the qualitative inquiry were asked to elucidate on the meaning behind intimate partner violence and what it personally means to them. They were also questioned on what terminology they applied or preferred on the field when describing violence in a relationship. The paper argues that the findings of the inquiry have shed light on flaws and deficiencies that exist within domestic violence terminology and literature.

Participant x has provided a critical analysis of the term “domestic violence” that is widely implemented in literature and theory regarding abusive relationships. Subject x argues that the definition of domestic violence, specifically the term “domestic”, is often disconnected and misleading. From interviewee x experience of working in the field, many LGBT services users do not relate to the term “domestic” which can be associated with a home environment and married life. This is accurately the case for LGBT members that are



more likely to be dating, forming new relationships and not cohabitating with their partners. On that issue, participant x commented;

Domestic violence really conjures up the idea of a house, a home. Because it has been adapted by heterosexual couples, so I think that it talks very much about home dynamics, for when I hear domestic violence I think of a man and women in a house and the man is beating the women.

According to Lynne Cahill, the term domestic violence has strong connections with violent and abusive straight relationships. In order to recruit LGBTQ women who have experienced domestic violence for her qualitative study, Lynne Cahill designed posters to advertise her study online and in public spaces. After dialogue with service providers, she was advised to use the title “have you experienced domestic violence?” in the body of the poster. When Lynne Cahill received feedback from the subjects of the study, they reported that the poster and specifically the term “domestic violence” was initially difficult to relate to. This, Lynne Cahill, would argue is because domestic violence has very strong cogitations with predominantly heterosexual relationships. The interviewee stated the following:

Domestic violence is the terminology used in Ireland, it is reflected in our legislation, policies and practice. However it has very strong connotations to the heterosexual experience. Domestic violence is very much aligned with a married domestic set up, which again is very much aligned with the heterosexual construction of domestic violence. It doesn't fit everyone's experiences. For example, you have abusive relationships ongoing for two individuals that are not cohabitating and you have a large portion of abuse occurring when the relationship is terminated, so there can be nothing domestic about it. To be more neutral we must move away from using the domestic violence piece.

The insight into domestic violence theory was valuable for the research.

### Recommended Terminology for the future

While this paper has critically reflected upon the terminology of intimate partner violence, it does, however, provide innovative inklings to amend the shortcomings of the domestic violence terminology. This was also done due to the enriched experiences and knowledge of the participants with regards to the LGBT populace and the domestic violence sphere. The paper argues that inaccurate or unreflective terminology can isolate and exclude many agents of society, which will ultimately prevent them from seeking help. The respondents were given the opportunity to offer modern approaches to describe intimate partner violence.

The interviewee x offers a unique way of understanding intimate partner violence that this paper would argue provides a more detailed and inclusive definition of violence in the domestic sphere. The participant considers intimate partner violence to be by means of any act carried out by one of two people in an intimate relationship that demeans or diminishes the other person. Either in a same sex or opposite sex couple, one person will attempt to have some form of power control over the other individual. The perpetrator of violence is someone who uses different measures and methods to coerce their partner, which is in a manner that is deemed unfair or wrongful to the other person.

During her research on the experiences of non-heterosexual women encountering domestic abuse, respondent Lynne Cahill opted for the term “Intimate Partner Abuse” (IPA). This she explains is due to how the term “Intimate Partner” is gender neutral, as the term “partner” can be considered respectful to those in both heterosexual and homosexual relationships. The interview selected “abuse” rather than “violence” as the term violence promotes an image of physical aggression which conflicts with the varied nature of the issues

in deeply troubled relationships, (for example, emotional, psychological or financial abuse etc.).

### **Theme 3. LGBT communities fail to recognize domestic violence**

During the interview, Participant x revealed that while working in an LGBT community centre, they have encountered several service users who experienced intimate partner violence, but more so, they have supported large numbers of LGBT people that fail to recognize that they themselves are in a domestic violence relationship. Lynne Cahill disclosed that when conversing with the bisexual and lesbian women in her study, they defined domestic violence using gendered terms and failed to see the connection to the harmful behaviour that they experienced to intimate partner violence.

### **Theme 4. Protecting the LGBT community**

A theme that was underpinned in both the literature and the qualitative study was how the LGBT individuals felt the need to protect their community. This meant that rather than stain the reputation of the community, the LGBT members that derive from violent and unhealthy relationships might choose to remain silent and not seek out professional help. During the interview, Subject x offers a rationale as to why those in the LGBT community may feel the need to defend and safeguard the LGBT community

It comes back to an LGBT issue. Due to being part of the LGBT community you were already considered not alright, that it wasn't ok to be gay. So a lot of LGBT people that are in domestic violence relationships did not ever mention it, because why would they mention it? Why would you give those who choose to deny the existence of your sexuality ammunition or taint the name of being LGBT? People already thought badly of LGBT people without thinking that we beat each other up.

As an LGBT member herself, Lynne Cahill suggests that a major issue within the LGBT community is 'community silence'. The interviewee made the following comment:

In the LGBT community, we have opted to remain silent about the Intimate Partner Abuse. The reason for that is because we are coming from a marginalized community. So we don't air our dirty laundry in public to give people more stones to throw at us. So rather than coming out and talking about the abuse, we tend to keep it quiet

During the Same-Sex Marriage referendum in 2015, Lynne Cahill reported that she struggled to recruit LGBT people for the interviews in relation to her qualitative study that focused on intimate partner abuse encountered by lesbian and bisexual women. At a time when LGBT individuals were campaigning for the right to marry their partner, they may have refrained from openly speaking about the abuse and adversity within their own relationships. On this issue, Lynne Cahill commented;

We, the LGBT community are always trying to promote the best image of ourselves but in doing that it's an unrealistic image. In reality the LGBT community suffer the same things that go on in any relationship. When the LGBT community remains silent about the issues, we are to blame that the heterosexual community at large is not aware, because we do not communicate it and verbalize domestic violence.

### **Theme 5. Remaining silent due to fear of their sexuality being revealed**

During the qualitative investigation, the theme of blackmail and threats regarding sexuality was explored as to why those in same-sex relationships might remain silent about the abuse. All three participants disclosed that they have witnessed measures of

black mail and intimidation when supporting LGBT individuals. Theresa Woods a psychotherapist for a domestic violence refuge, provides more insight into this issue: Oftentimes if they [an LGBT person] conceal their sexuality from their family, friends, peers or employee, this is an extra layer and extra threat used against them by the abusive partner. This can be used against them if they try to leave the relationship or abusive partner. It gives them power over the person.

Respondent x of the study revealed that a young lesbian woman visited the drop-in centre on the morning the interview took place. The woman disclosed that her partner came to her place of work to publically accuse her of having an affair. As a result, the employer of the company dismissed the young woman. The woman lost her job, which meant that she could not afford to pay rent, and therefore, had to move back to her family home. Subsequently, the individual decided to remain in the relationship for fear of what her partner would do if she terminated the relationship.

The interviewee explains that in this case, it is an evident example of intimate partner violence, for while there were no blows, the impact of this incident was severe and forceful. In the pursuit of her PhD and qualitative research, Lynne Cahill described in great detail how she interviewed a lesbian woman who had been in an abusive relationship for twenty-six years. Both partners had been concealing their sexuality which ultimately created a barrier to accessing services. During the interview, the LGBT women commented: “How can you go and say your being abused by your partner when no one knows you’re in a gay relationship?”

#### **Theme 6: Do LGBT individuals in same sex domestic violence relationships seek out mainstream services?**

According to the respondent X, in Ireland, violence in LGBT relationships is an issue that is becoming increasingly prevalent and acknowledged and therefore LGBT individuals are availing from the limited services that are available to them. Mainstream organizations like *Amen*, *Women’s Aid*, *Safe Ireland*, and the *Rape Crisis Network* have publically stated that they have received inquiries and calls from individuals in same-sex relationships. The interviewee discloses that they call on domestic violence refuge centers to provide LGBT awareness training to staff.

Theresa Woods, the founder of *Drogheda Women and Children’s Refuge* explains that while safe accommodation are only available to women and children, the domestic violence organization does support bisexual and gay male survivors of domestic violence in relation to offering childcare, court accompaniment and counselling services. They also help them access homeless services, service providers and bed and breakfast accommodation etc.

The qualitative study has identified a complication, as some members of the LGBT populace who live in a violent intimate partner environment are unaware of the availability and access to mainstream domestic violence services. While this research paper has demonstrated that several of mainstream domestic violence do support the LGBT community and seek out LGBT training, it does, however, expose the issue of barriers of communication, as many of these organizations do not publically acknowledge their work with the LGBT populace. If the LGBT community is often invisible on a public platform, this can result in many of the members feeling misinformed, excluded or even in some cases, unwelcome to these service providers. For example, when asked how the domestic violence organization *Drogheda Women and Children’s Refuge* communicate their message that the services are available to the LGBT community, Theresa Woods replied that there is no specific mention about the LGBT community on

their website but rather they are not gender specific. Furthermore, on the topic, the interviewee commented: "Our website would have a lot of traffic in relation to men, especially gay men. They find it particularly useful because its gender neutral"

The study discovered that often when mainstream services implement gendered specific terminology within their title, mission and ethos statements, it is to convince or satisfy their funders. Examples include *Women's Aid*, *Drogheda Women and Children's Refuge*, *W. O. V.E (Women Overcoming Violence)* etc. On this issue, Theresa Wood commented:

I understand that a lot of it is funding, were called Drogheda Women and Children's Refuge because of funding. Because you have to identify yourself to be available for your funding, where you're going to get your funding from. You have to put yourself in a box so the funders can identify you and where you're coming from. But that's the only reason.

According to Lynne Cahill, mainstream services are primarily geared to heterosexual women and their children: often, this is because these are the individuals that will seek out the service. In society, domestic violence is promoted on a public medium often as violence inflicted by males against the female violence. This paper disputes that when the issue is promoted with a male perpetrator and female victim, it therefore only highlights a partial story of what intimate partner violence is :

Currently the way the issue of domestic violence is presented and the way it's constructed to the public is having an effect of those who are not heterosexual. They are not coming forward for services. Because they do not see those services available to them. This is due to the fact that they do not see themselves in the adverts; they do not recognize their experiences in the ads, posters and media campaigns.

Researcher Lynne Cahill suggests a more balanced approach to exposing the issue or public story of domestic violence. This can involve highlighting the varied human experiences of domestic violence: for example, the campaigns regarding domestic violence should depict same-sex intimate partner violence and therefore the actors in the public advertisements should portray lesbian, gay bisexual and transgender roles. According to both participant X and Lynne Cahill, an inclusive or balanced approach on how we inform the public about domestic violence could result in a lot more people coming forward to disclose their experience.

## **Discussion**

Research both quantitative and qualitative across several disciplines has demonstrated that intimate partner violence is present in same-sex relationships. The findings of the qualitative study, however, confirm the existence and prevalence of intimate partner violence in the Irish LGBT populace., by acknowledging the issue of intimate partner violence and chronic abuse in same-sex relationships, the study was able to uncover the various reasons as to why this has remained a relatively silent issue in Ireland and why those that do experience intimate partner violence refrain from seeking help.

The essential work of this qualitative study has brought together the scattered views of professionals, all of whom interface with LGBT service users and work in domestic and related fields. The research study has furthered the crucial academic discussion on the issues that impede the Irish LGBT community. The LGBT community can face obstacles or constructs to seeking help, some of which can include community silence, being excluded in the academic discourse and terminology, threats and blackmail

regarding sexual orientation and the communication barriers between mainstream service providers and the LGBT community.

The literature and the findings confirm the power and influence of language on the experiences of the service user. Three experts in the field have highlighted the importance of language and terminology regarding intimate partner violence that is utilized by service providers. The paper argues that domestic violence terminology if presented carelessly or inaccurately can exclude and isolate many members of the society. For example, the qualitative study discovered that many LGBT individuals felt disconnected from the term domestic violence; which to them has very strong heterosexual connotation and overtones. The qualitative study has laid bare a hidden issue that many LGBT individuals fail to recognize their experiences of unhealthy and toxic relationships as intimate partner violence or domestic violence. This theme overarches to both reasons of why one must critique the domestic violence terminology as it has strong heterosexual and gender cogitations but also why those in same sex abusive relationships may not come forward to service providers.

The empirical research by Qureshi (2017) has highlighted how gay and lesbian victims could be reluctant to seek out advice and assistance on the grounds of fear to expose the problems of the LGBTQ community. Furthermore, the findings of this qualitative analysis confirm that many LGBT entities remain reticent on issues regarding what they conceive to be negative aspects of their LGBT lifestyles (such as abuse within a relationship) because they wish to protect a marginalized community that was once criminalized and maltreated by society (Refer to Appendix 1). This theme was robustly reflected in both the literature review and the qualitative research findings.

The primary qualitative findings also suggest that historic political movements such as lobbying for change and equality were also reasons why the LGBT community opted to stay silent regarding intimate partner violence. An example of this was the same-sex marriage referendum in 2015, which sought to legalize same-sex marriage (Elkink *et al.* 2015). The interviews revealed that while campaigning for the right to marry the ones they love, many members of the LGBT community felt reluctant to speak of the abuse or unhealthy behaviour in their own relationships.

Previous literature has construed that intimate partner violence is the universal and non-consensual enactment of intimidation and power of one person over another. The qualitative investigation has confirmed that abusers will use the sexuality of their partner to intimate, control and have power over their LGBT partner. Practitioners need to be mindful of the use of blackmail and threats within the LGBT community and be overall familiar with the community's experiences of adversity. This is a key learning that appeared in the literature review and was strongly reinforced in the qualitative study. By examining an evidence-based example in the study of the service user that interfaced with participant x and disclosed that her same sex partner had threatened to reveal her sexual orientation and did so in her place of work, which led to her dismissal, the paper argues that this not only confirms the fear of being "outed" or having one's sexuality revealed to society is not only strong in the LGBT community but it is also grounded in experience.

The research project has also substantiated the complex partnership between the LGBT service users and the mainstream domestic violence services. As proven in the findings of the interview process, domestic violence organizations like *Amen*, *Women's Aid*, *Safe Ireland*, and *Rape Crisis Network* have publically stated that they have received inquiries and calls from individuals in same-sex relationships and some organize LGBT training, yet many of these organizations fail to inform the public that they cater to the needs of LGBT community. Barriers to communication must be promptly worked on with mainstream service providers and the LGBT network.



However, the qualitative exploration has uncovered that gender-specific terminology and denominations are frequently implemented by service providers due to funding reasons and are often used to satisfy the organizations and bodies that fund them. Despite this, this paper recommends that service providers promote an inclusive representation of domestic violence issues on a public platform through various communication channels. Media campaigns, advertisement and public messages should touch on the varied human experiences of domestic violence to demonstrate that violence on the domestic sphere can impact the lives of an array of people; it does not discriminate between race, gender and sexual orientation

Ethical challenges acutely influenced this research project, for the researcher had to accumulate the primary data without access to those that are considered vulnerable in society, people such as LGBT service users in domestic violence relationships. While the rationale for choosing the sample of professionals (Lynne Cahill, Theresa Wood, Participant X) was sound and was made on the grounds that each possessed, by virtue of their profession, enriched knowledge and first-hand experience of working with LGBT service users who have experienced domestic violence, if the qualitative study design included interviewing those that directly stem from the LGBT community and have experiences of intimate partner violence, the data collected would have been more detailed, rich and authentic to the issue.

## **Conclusion**

The value of qualitative exploration has allowed the researcher to capture human stories, thoughts and attitudes with regards to intimate partner violence. By bringing together the experiences and perspectives of those who can be considered an expert in the field both in the domestic violence and LGBT area, the paper has contributed to the current literature and has highlighted that Intimate Partner Violence is an issue in Ireland, which currently impacts the lives of the Irish LGBT community.

The systematic inquiry minutely explored the current literature of intimate partner violence as to identify the aspects and themes that confirm the presence of intimate partner violence in the LGBT community and the reasons many LGBT agents are unforthcoming regarding this issue. Some of the reasons included the pressure to protect the LGBT community, their disconnection from domestic violence theory and terminology, their inability to recognize intimate partner violence, their concealment within society itself and their visibility within the domestic violence public story.

This study avoided the use of terminology which views violence through a gendered, heterosexual lens or embodies expulsive connotations. While domestic violence is a term regularly used in Ireland to describe unhealthy human relationships, it is however firmly embedded in a heterosexual female victim experience. Domestic violence has strong cogitations with violent abusive straight relationships. The paper recommends that the same-sex intimate partner violence be fully incorporated in the domestic violence theory and conceptualization. This paper purposes the use of intimate partner violence to frame unhealthy or toxic hominid relationships. On that note, often the author of the study found it beneficial to consider violence, abuse and coercion in relationships, not as a female or male issue but rather as a human issue. The terminology that describes violence in complex human relationships must be inclusive of all the populace so as to encompass the experiences of both men and women of all ages, sexual orientations and who come from all walks of life.

The complex relationship between service providers and the LGBT network was highlighted in the study. While domestic violence's services are supporting the LGBT community, they fail to express this on a public platform. The limited representation of the LGBT community in the core domestic violence public picture has left many LGBT

members feeling disconnected or invisible in mainstream services. The study calls for domestic violence and service providers to promote their accessibility on their websites, campaigns and social media platforms as to demonstrate their openness and willingness to work with the LGBT community. The ripple effect of could be that L GBT individuals begin to recognize and identify intimate partner violence in their own community.

To conclude, by challenging the core domestic violence literature and theory, the study findings have deepened the recognition of intimate partner violence in Irish same sex relationships. Future research might take a larger cohort of service providers and service users that can share more enriched qualitative insight and information. Professionals need to recognize and be mindful of how a history of stigmatization, criminalized and mistreated has and continues to impact on the LGBT community. It is recommended that more service providers complete training on LGBT awareness. One of the most significant implications of this research project is that intimate partner violence is a multifaceted issue that impacts on humanity with no easy solution. However, by changing societal attitudes, amending intimate partner terminology and policies and carrying out further empirical research on this area, we can support the LGBT community in a more beneficial human-rights based manner.

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