

The use of sexual violence as an attempt to convert or punish LGBT+ people in the UK

Galop 2022

the LGBT+ anti-abuse charity



Overview

The Coalition to Ban Conversion Therapy's definition of so-called "conversion therapy" includes all practices that have the predetermined outcome to change, "cure", or suppress an individual or group of individuals' orientation or gender identity.

In 2020, Galop carried out research into LGBT+ people's experiences of sexual violence in the UK. As part of this research, 935 LGBT+ people answered the question:

“At any age, have you experienced sexual violence that you believed was intended to convert you to heterosexuality or your assigned gender at birth, or to punish you for your gender or sexual identity?”

220 respondents said yes – that's almost a quarter of the people that took part in the research.

While respondents who had experienced this kind of corrective sexual violence were people of all LGBT+ orientations and gender identities, those who were trans women, trans men, non-binary people, ace people and intersex people were more likely to tell us that they had experienced sexual violence that aimed to convert or punish them.

Participants who told us they had experienced this form of sexual violence came from a wide range of ethnic and religious backgrounds, including those who were not religious. The LGBT+ survivors of these forms of corrective sexual violence were relatively evenly spread across the full range of age groups – including those currently under the age of 25, showing that this form of abuse is still being used against LGBT+ people in the UK today.

This research was conducted independently of Galop's specialist LGBT+ sexual violence and young people's victim support services, but closely mirrors the evidence seen from working intensively with current victims of so-called "conversion therapies". Galop's frontline services see cases where sexual violence has been used as a way to change, "cure", or suppress the victim's LGBT+ identity – including corrective rape and other forms of assault. These cases include sexual violence perpetrated by family members and members of the victim's community, as well as 'corrective' sexual assaults that are arranged to be carried out by third parties.

Key survey findings

The survey was not designed to indicate prevalence in the UK LGBT+ population.

However, our survey found a high number of respondents indicating sexual violence as being used to convert or punish LGBT+ identities.

- 23.5% of 935 LGBT+ respondents told us that they had experienced sexual violence which they believed was intended to convert or punish their LGBT+ identity.

Respondents from certain demographics of the LGBT+ community disclosed different rates of experiencing sexual violence with the intention to convert or punish.

- 20.4% of lesbian or gay respondents told us that they had experienced sexual violence which they believed was intended to convert or punish their LGBT+ identity.
- 20.5% of polysexual respondents told us that they had experienced sexual violence which they believed was intended to convert or punish their LGBT+ identity.
- 34.4% of ace people told us that they had experienced sexual violence which they believed was intended to convert or punish their LGBT+ identity.
- 29.63% of trans women told us that they had experienced sexual violence which they believed was intended to convert or punish their LGBT+ identity.
- 31.9 % of non-binary people told us that they had experienced sexual violence which they believed was intended to convert or punish their LGBT+ identity.
- 34.7% of trans men told us that they had experienced sexual violence which they believed was intended to convert or punish their LGBT+ identity.
- 50% of intersex people told us that they had experienced sexual violence which they believed was intended to convert or punish their LGBT+ identity.

A more comprehensive breakdown of these statistics can be found in Table 1.

Key survey findings

Reports of sexual violence with the intention to convert or punish LGBT+ identities remained notable across every category of ethnicity, religion, region, and age group. However, 18–24-year-olds reported higher levels of sexual violence with the intention to convert or punish their LGBT+ identity than any other age group. This suggests that these practices are current and ongoing rather than historic, demonstrating the necessity for the Government to introduce the so-called ‘conversion therapy’ ban without delay.

These statistics come from the response to the survey question

// *“At any age, have you experienced sexual violence that you believed was intended to convert you to heterosexuality or your assigned gender at birth, or to punish you for your gender or sexual identity?”* //

Respondents answered the question based upon their interpretation. In the final sample, 935 answered the question.

It should be noted that the survey was not designed to indicate prevalence in the UK LGBT+ population. The survey was advertised as a survey on sexual violence, increasing the likelihood that survivors of sexual violence would have self-selected to respond to the survey. Only 46 respondents reported that they had not experienced any form of sexual violence. These figures are therefore more likely to represent a population of LGBT+ people who have experienced sexual violence than the LGBT+ population as a whole.

Key survey findings

Table 1: Breakdown of disclosed sexual violence with the intention to convert or punish LGBT+ identities by different demographic categories

	Yes	No	Unsure	Number of respondents
All LGBT+ respondents	23.5%	63.2%	13.3%	935
Gender				
Trans woman	29.6%	57.4%	13.0%	54
Cis woman	20.3%	68.5%	11.3%	355
Trans man	34.7%	51.4%	13.9%	72
Cis man	8.0%	85.4%	6.6%	137
Non-binary	31.9%	49.6%	18.5%	276
Questioning	15.2%	72.7%	12.1%	33
Sexual orientation				
Asexual and other ace-spectrum identities	34.4%	46.7%	18.9%	212
Polysexual (including bisexual and pansexual)	20.5%	65.8%	13.7%	444
Lesbian or gay	20.4%	71.4%	8.2%	269
Intersex Status				
Intersex	50.0%	33.3%	16.7%	18
Not intersex	18.7%	71.7%	9.6%	198
Age				
16-17	21.5%	63.3%	15.2%	79
18-24	26.8%	60.0%	13.2%	310
25-34	22.7%	61.0%	16.3%	282
35-44	21.9%	68.8%	9.4%	128
45-54	22.7%	70.7%	6.7%	75
55+	18.0%	68.9%	13.1%	61
Ethnicity				
Asian	24.0%	60.0%	16.0%	25
Black	17.6%	82.4%	0.0%	17
Mixed ethnicity	9.8%	75.6%	14.6%	41
'Other' ethnicity	38.9%	44.4%	16.7%	18
White	24.0%	62.7%	13.3%	834
Religious or spiritual identity				
No religion, agnostic or atheist	20.3%	65.7%	14.1%	548
Buddhism	11.8%	82.4%	5.9%	17
Christianity	22.1%	65.4%	12.5%	104
Islam	9.1%	72.7%	18.2%	11
Judaism	42.1%	36.8%	21.1%	19
'Other' faith or religion	32.3%	51.6%	16.1%	31

Disparities in the number of respondents for each category represent respondents not answering all questions in the survey and the omission of some sub-categories.

Percentages have been rounded which accounts for categories where percentages do not add exactly to 100%.

Findings from Galop's services

The results of the interviews and survey align with findings from Galop's services, which encounter far more reports of conversion practices than is widely assumed to exist in the UK today.

Between April and September 2021:

- Galop's young people's specialist service, which provides advocacy and support for young LGBT+ people aged 13-25 facing violence and abuse, recorded that 24% of current service users were currently experiencing or had previously experienced conversion practices.
- Galop's sexual violence specialist service, which provides advocacy and support to LGBT+ people who have experienced sexual violence, recorded that 11% of current service users were currently experiencing or had previously experienced conversion practices.

Within these figures, Galop's advocates and caseworkers have seen cases of sexual violence perpetrated by family and community members, forced marriage, and attempts to arrange sexual assaults to be perpetrated by third parties to 'convert' a child. Galop has also intervened in situations where young LGBT+ people have been at risk of sexual abuse through conversion practices, preventing this violence from taking place.

These numbers are additionally likely to be an underestimate, as service users do not always disclose historic (as opposed to current and ongoing) conversion practices that they have experienced.

Furthermore, advocates and caseworkers find that when working with current victims of this kind of abuse, they rarely identify what has happened to them using the term 'conversion therapy', meaning that these cases are likely invisible to prior research on so-called 'conversion therapy' in the UK, and equally to support services.

Recommendations

- The findings underline the necessity of a comprehensive ban on conversion practices which the Government needs to bring forward without delay.
- Trans women, trans men, non-binary people, ace people, and intersex people must be included in the Government's upcoming so-called 'conversion therapy' ban.
- Those seeking to research or understand so-called 'conversion therapy' need to recognise that victims and survivors of these practices often do not identify their abuse as such. Research practices that rely solely on self-identification with the term 'conversion therapy' are therefore likely to significantly underestimate the true number of survivors. The Government needs to take this into account when analysing and designing research on conversion practices.
- Sexual violence experienced by LGBT+ people requires specialist understanding and response. The Government needs to provide specific funding for specialist advocacy and specialist counselling services for LGBT+ victims and survivors across the UK.

Methodology

An anonymous online survey for LGBT+ individuals aged 16+ living anywhere in the UK was carried out using a convenience sampling strategy.

Due to the current difficulty in accurately calculating the size of the UK LGBT+ population, the sample must be considered a non-random community sample and cannot be used to calculate the prevalence of sexual violence within the LGBT+ community in the UK.

The survey was live for 15 weeks between February and May 2020. It was advertised as a survey on sexual violence and was promoted via social media and email networking including sponsored social media posts.

The questions used in the survey were designed in collaboration with a reference group of LGBT+ survivors. Members of the reference group also piloted the materials, ensuring they were accessible to individuals with varying ability levels and language skills and could be completed on a range of devices.

Respondents were informed in advance about the nature of the questions, and how the survey would be presented.

While the survey was live, responses were monitored to check for necessary amendments. One significant amendment was made to add a demographic question on intersex status, which was included in the final third of the recruitment period.

In total, 1468 survey responses were received, of which 1020 were included in the final sample. Responses were removed on the basis that: the respondent did not identify as LGBT+; lived outside the UK; did not progress sufficiently far through the survey; stated they were aged under 16. Under 16s were disqualified from progressing past the page of demographic questions and redirected to a page of support resources for young people.

Table 2: Further demographic breakdown of respondents who answered the question on disclosing sexual violence with the intention to convert or punish LGBT+ identities.

Category	Number of respondents
Disability status	
Disabled	586
Not disabled	332
Unsure	12
Prefer not to say	5
Country	
Scotland	83
Northern Ireland	12
Wales	77
England	763

Get help

If you are LGBT+ and experiencing violence or abuse, such as hate crime, domestic abuse or sexual violence, you can contact Galop directly:
galop.org.uk

National Conversion Therapy Helpline

0800 130 3335

CThelp@galop.org.uk

LGBT+ Hate Crime Helpline

020 7704 2040

HateCrime@galop.org.uk

National LGBT+ Domestic Abuse Helpline

0800 999 5428

help@galop.org.uk

Galop

info@galop.org.uk
galop.org.uk

