

LGBT+ Experiences of Abuse from Family Members

Galop 2022

Foreword

Abuse within families is a largely hidden form of abuse, often perpetrated against members of the LGBT+ community at the hands of family members or caregivers. This report aims to shine a light on abuse happening to LGBT+ people behind closed doors in the UK, and explore the potential barriers victims face when seeking help and support.

This research confirms what Galop has seen in our services – a significant proportion of the LGBT+ population in the UK experience abuse from family members, with the vast majority feeling that their LGBT+ identity was either the main reason, or part of the reason, for the mistreatment they faced.

Often happening behind closed doors, familial abuse remains largely hidden. Our findings reveal that a sizeable number of respondents were younger than 18 years old when the abuse began, with this maltreatment most commonly coming from parents. When someone suffers abuse which targets them for who they fundamentally are, especially at such a formative age and at the hands of such an influential person, the repercussions are often lifelong. This report echoes the severity and complexity of cases we are supporting at Galop, often within which victims have never told anyone about their experience.

We believe these findings evidence the need explore the institutional barriers keeping these victims unseen by support services, emphasise the need for specialist LGBT+ advocacy, therapeutic services, and advice to be available to victims of familial abuse across the country, and for a prompt, complete ban of so-called 'conversion therapy' with no loopholes.

My thanks to Lou Withers Green, Honor Gray and the team at YouGov for producing this timely and important report, and the entire team at Galop who work hard every day to improve the lives of LGBT+ people across the UK.

Leni Morris, Chief Executive Officer

The Study

Galop commissioned YouGov to survey 5,078 LGBT+ people across the UK about their experiences of violence and abuse from their families, the impact that it had on them, who they told and who they accessed support from. This report presents the findings of that research.

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Key findings

29% of LGBT+ people surveyed had experienced abuse from a family members or members.

43% Trans and non-binary people surveyed had experienced higher levels of abuse from a family member or members.

5% of LGBT+ respondents had been subjected to so-called 'conversion therapy' through a family member attempting to change, 'cure' or suppress their sexual orientation or gender identity.

- 60% of respondents who had experienced abuse from their family felt that their LGBT+ identity was either the main reason or part of the reason.
- 63% of LGBT+ people surveyed were under 18 when they first experienced abuse from their family.
- 31% of LGBT+ people surveyed were 18 or over when they first experienced abuse from their family. These people were more likely to feel that their LGBT+ identity was related to the abuse than their younger counterparts.
- The most common perpetrators of abuse against the LGBT+ people surveyed were parents – mothers (45%) and fathers (41%).
- 21% of the familial abuse victims surveyed had never told anyone about their experience.
- The impact of familial abuse is substantial – 92% of respondents told us that it had a negative impact on them.
- A significant number of victims who experienced abuse from their families think support would have been helpful, but did not, or were not able to access it. This includes advocacy (42%), practical assistance (40%), formal advice and information (38%) and therapeutic services (24%).

Recommendations

The UK government needs to provide dedicated, long-term national funding for specialist 'by and for' services supporting LGBT+ victims and survivors of abuse and violence. This funding should ensure holistic support, including advocacy, therapeutic services, formal advice and information (e.g. helplines) and practical support (e.g. emergency accommodation).

- The UK government should bring forward a comprehensive ban on so-called “conversion therapy” without delay. The ban needs to cover the entirety of the LGBT+ community and must include the full range of so-called “conversion therapy” practices that exist.
- Police and other statutory agencies should improve referral pathways to specialist ‘by and for’ LGBT+ services to ensure that all LGBT+ victims and survivors are offered support that meets their needs.
- Support services need to improve their knowledge and understanding of trans and non-binary people’s identities and experiences of abuse, in order to improve their responses to these groups.
- Frontline workers in statutory services should be provided with training to ensure that they can understand, identify and address patterns of abuse that LGBT+ people may face from their families, including specific training for those working with young people. Notably, more work needs to be done by the police in order to address the LGBT+ community’s continuing lack of confidence in police responses.

Scale and nature of abuse and violence

The survey explored the nature and extent of abuse directed at LGBT+ people from their families. We asked what abusive behaviours respondents had experienced from family members. The findings indicated high levels of abuse within family environments across the spectrum of LGBT+ people surveyed - with particularly high levels reported from trans and non-binary people surveyed.

29% of LGBT+ people surveyed had experienced at least one form of abuse from family members. This was higher for trans and non-binary respondents, with 43% having experienced abuse from family members.

A wide range of abuse was identified through the research, as 13% of respondents had been subjected to verbal abuse including humiliation or harassment; 9% had experienced physical violence, and 7% had been threatened with homelessness or forced to leave their home. 14% of respondents had been blamed for their perpetrator's abusive behaviour.

5% of LGBT+ people surveyed had experienced attempts to change, 'cure' or suppress their LGBT+ identity. This increased to 11% of trans and non-binary people surveyed.

This abuse falls within the definition of so-called "conversion therapy" outlined by the 'Ban Conversion Therapy' coalition¹. It is notable that these findings are higher than those found by the 2017 National LGBT Survey² which is likely due to that survey relying upon self-identification of the term 'conversion therapy' - one which victims and survivors of the practice rarely identify with³.

" [M]y brothers found out and one blackmailed me for a few years for money not to say. "

" I was sent for Christian counselling when I came out to my family at age 18. During this period they also controlled my comings and goings more in an effort to encourage me to change my sexual orientation. "

" I wasn't allowed to leave the house without permission [...] I didn't have access to ID, National Insurance number, bank cards, birth certificate or passport until after I moved out of the home. I couldn't get work because I couldn't prove my identity, [as] they were locked away by my parents. I was kicked out of the home after refusing to do what they said. "

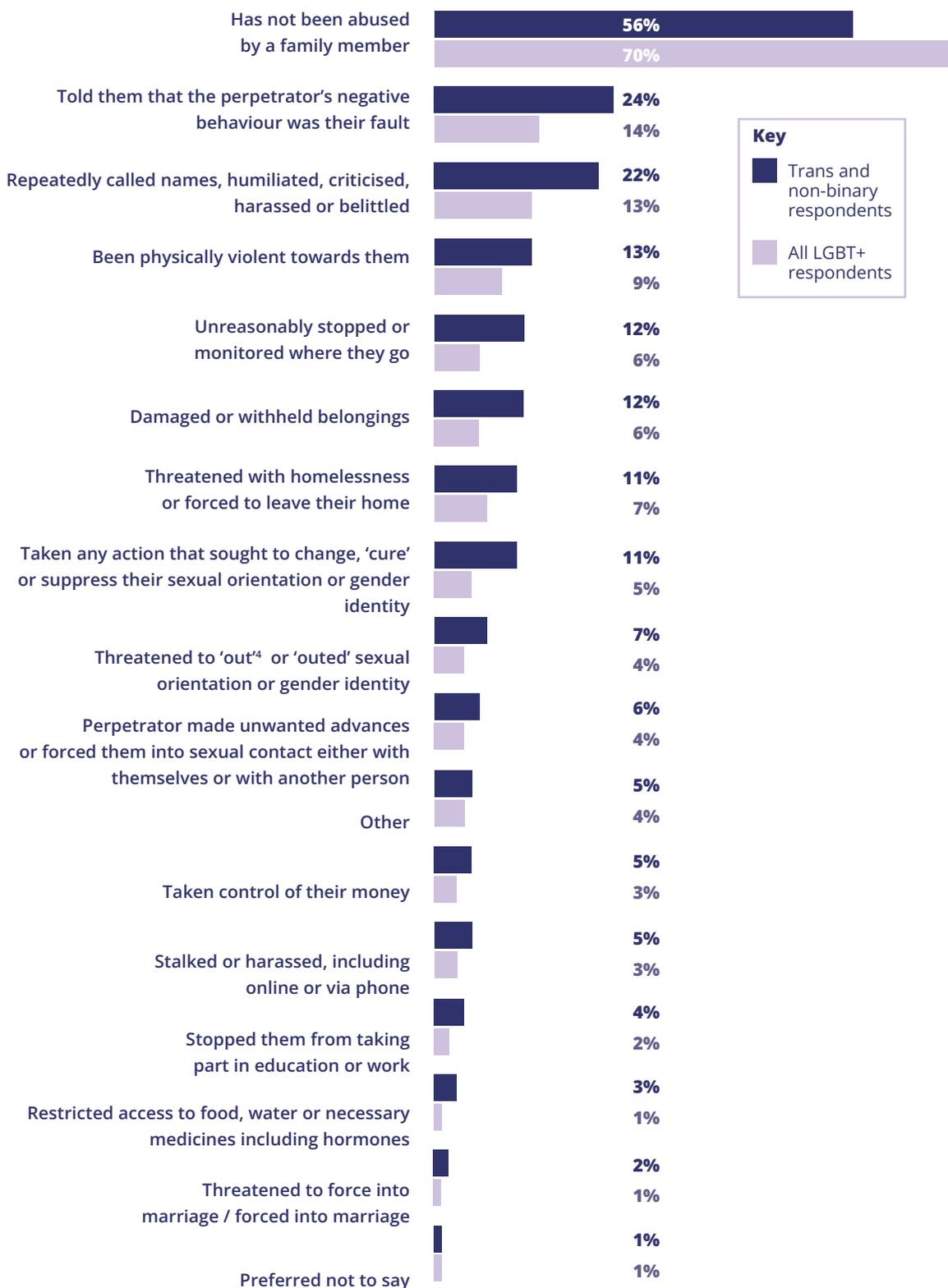
1 <https://www.banconversiontherapy.com/>

2 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-lgbt-survey-summary-report>

3 <https://galop.org.uk/resource/the-use-of-sexual-violence-as-an-attempt-to-convert-or-punish-lgbt-people-in-the-uk/>

Figure 1: Abusive behaviours experienced from family members

Type of abuse



Sample size 790 Trans and non-binary respondents 5078 LGBT+ respondents

Each respondent could select multiple categories. Percentages are rounded.

4 Disclosing an LGBT+ person's orientation or gender identity without their consent.

“

When my mother found out I was gay, she sent me to my GP to get cured.

She tried to force me to tell my GP that I was not happy with being gay and want to be treated.

”

“

My mother once threw boiling hot tea over me,

regularly belittled and slapped me, and forced me to dress in dresses and play with barbies, even if I didn't want to [...] As a result, I was made homeless.

”

“

My dad and brothers would lock my bedroom door, preventing me from getting out so I couldn't be seen.

They told me I was an embarrassment and disgraced the family by 'mincing' around in feminine clothes & make-up.

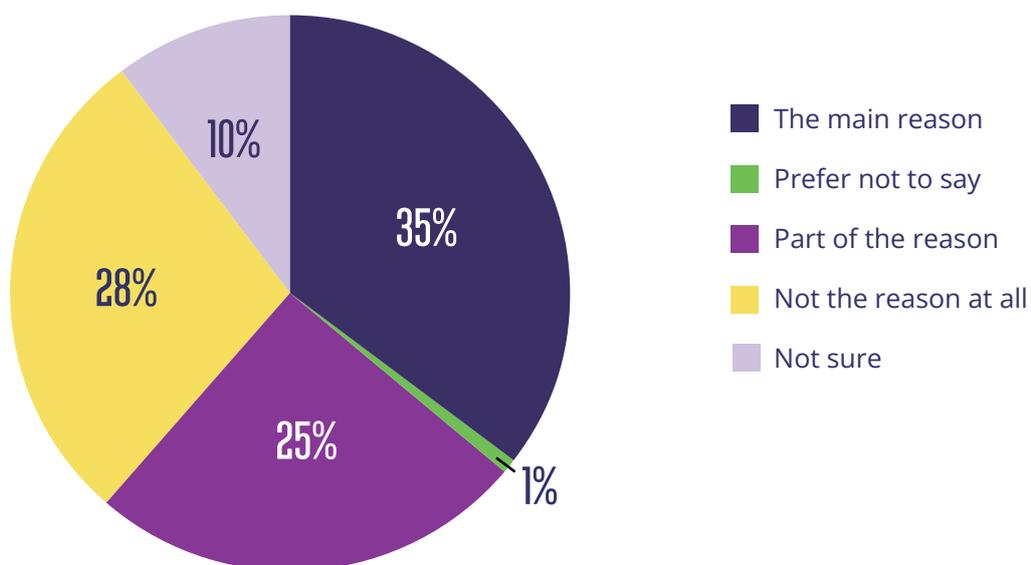
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LGBT+ identity and abuse

The survey explored whether the abuse people experienced was related to their LGBT+ identities. Respondents who had experienced abuse from their family were asked whether their LGBT+ identity was the reason for the abuse. There were 1,503 responses.

60% of respondents felt that their LGBT+ identity was either the main reason or part of the reason for the abuse they faced.

Figure 2: The extent to which respondents felt their LGBT+ identity was a reason for abuse



Percentages are rounded.

Cis men surveyed were more likely to identify their orientation as a reason for the abuse (75% felt this way) while cis women surveyed were less likely to identify their orientation as a reason for the abuse (41% felt this way).

“ I was asked to leave home aged 15 because my behaviour wasn't acceptable. ”

“

My time in education was made very difficult indeed,

my clothes were rarely washed and never replaced. As a result, I smelled badly. I was always told my problems were my fault, and that my parents wished they knew what was apparently wrong with me.

”

“

[M]y mother would take my things and lock them in her room.

She also withheld food from me, going so far as to not purchase any food for the house, for a significant period of time.

”

“

My stepfather was a domineering man who abused me emotionally and sometimes physically.

He used religion as justification for his behaviour. Growing up I wa[sn't] allowed to go anywhere, only school and home, I wasn't allowed to enter further education and was eventually kicked out when I argued about going out and wanting freedom [...] My older brother was constantly touching me inappropriately and would creep into my room at night to touch me up and look at me.

”

“

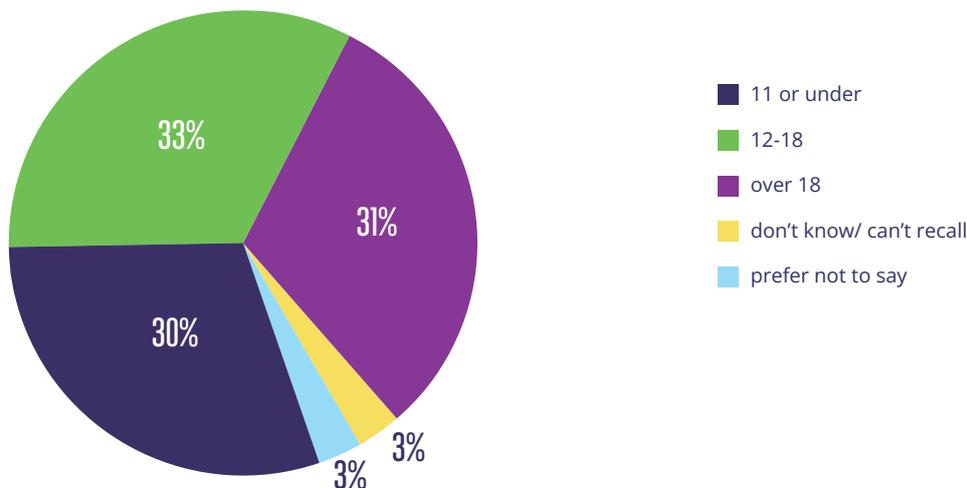
My parents [were] thinking that being gay was unnatural, perverted and that [it] could be cured, my father forced me to leave the house.

”

Age of first instance of abuse

Victims and survivors of familial abuse were asked how old they were when the first instance of abuse took place. There were 1,493 responses.

Figure 3: Age when the first instance of abuse from a family member took place



Familial abuse of LGBT+ survivors surveyed first took place at different points across their lives. 30% first experienced abuse within a family environment when they were below the age of 11, 33% first experienced familial abuse between 12 and 18 years old and 31% were over 18 when they first experienced abuse from their family.

Respondents who experienced their first instance of abuse at age 11 or under were less likely to feel their LGBT+ identity was the reason for the abuse, with 53% stating that they believe their identity was not the reason compared to 23% feeling it was the main reason or part of the reason. Older victims had a different experience: 72% of those who suffered their first instance of abuse aged 26-30 felt their identity was the main reason for the abuse, compared to 13% who felt it was not the reason at all.

“ My father used to beat me as a small child because I was different. ”

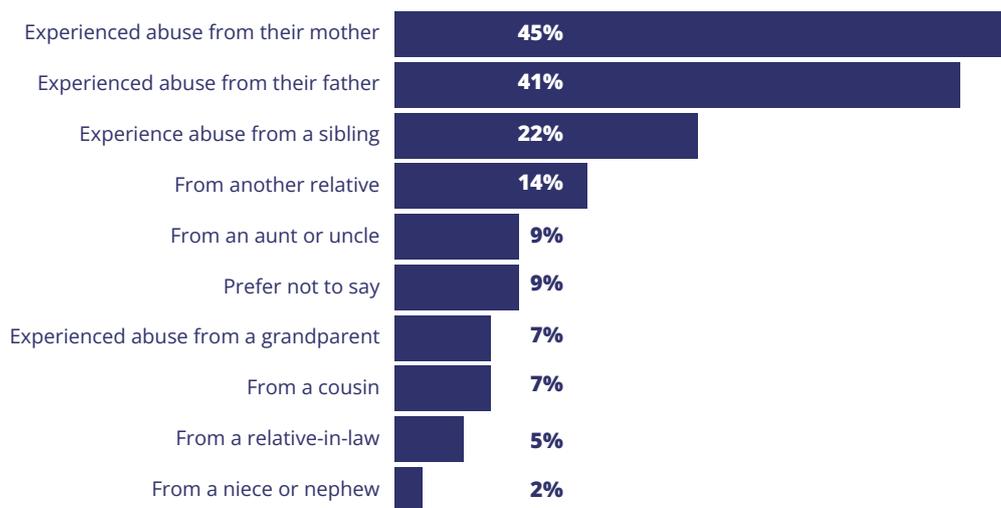
“ I was abused by my mother. Beaten, starved, she was taking my money, abused sexually until I was 17 and abused verbally and psychologically. I wasn't allowed to go out or have friends. ”

Relationship to perpetrator

Respondents who had experienced abuse from a family member were asked which family member or members had perpetrated the abuse.

There were 1,493 responses.

Figure 4: Perpetrators of abuse



Each respondent could select multiple categories. Percentages are rounded.

Perpetrators of familial abuse were most commonly the victims' parents, with 45% having experienced abuse from their mother and 41% having experienced abuse from their father.

This figure differed slightly for trans and non-binary respondents, for whom 49% experienced abuse from their mother, and 40% experienced abuse from their father. Asexual respondents experienced noticeably higher rates of abuse from their mothers (56%).

Respondents who had experienced attempts to change, 'cure' or suppress their orientation or gender identity were particularly likely to have experienced abuse from their parents, with 65% experiencing abuse from their mother and 48% experiencing abuse from their father.

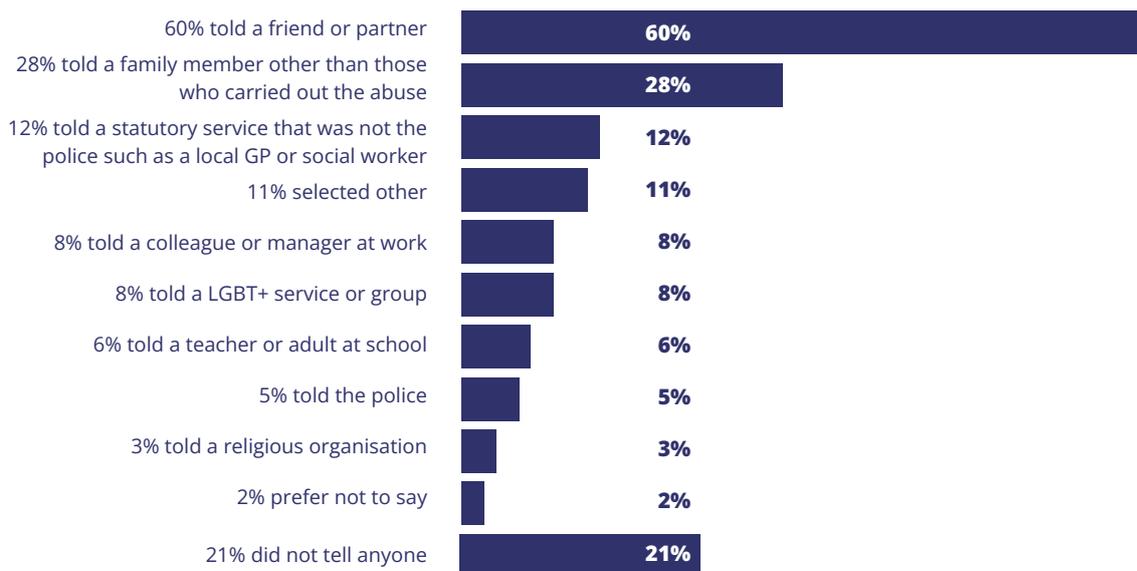
“ My parents gave me the roof over their head, in the small village that I grew up in, but ensured that I couldn't get a job there. ”

“ My father threatened to tell my mother (who suffered domestic violence at his hands) that I was dating a woman. He then stalked me when I cut contact with him. ”

Who survivors tell

Respondents who had experienced abuse from a family member were asked who, if anyone, they told about the abuse. There were 1,493 responses.

Figure 5: Who respondents told about the abuse



Each respondent could select multiple categories. Percentages are rounded.

The majority of respondents told a friend or partner about the abuse they experienced. However, 21% have never told anyone.

Cis men were less likely to tell a friend or partner about the abuse they faced, with only 54% of those surveyed stating they had, compared to 69% of cis women surveyed. Correspondingly, cis men surveyed were more likely to have never told anyone about the abuse they suffered (28%).

Trans and non-binary respondents were more likely than other groups to tell an LGBT+ service or group, with 14% having done this, compared to 8% of LGBT+ respondents in general.

Only 5% of respondents reported the familial abuse that they had experienced to the police. Of the victims who did report, almost half (48%) said that their trust in the police had been negatively impacted.

“ Brother and sister followed me and watched who I was meeting and reports back to family. Brother accused me of causing stress in family. ”

“

I was shouted at, ignored, belittled and told that my sexuality was the burden that they carried.

Clearly who and what I am was my fault. So much so that even when my grandfather came out to my mother and myself at the age of 70 my mother made it clear it was my fault. To make matters worse he died less than six months later and I carried the blame for that.

”

“

I was at school when my sexuality was discovered.

I was due to go to 6th form, but my grandmother (who I lived with during term times) refused to have me back, so I had to forego that option of further education...

”

“

I left home – was forced to by my parents – immediately after a suicide attempt at the age of 16. I had no job, no money and nowhere to go.

”

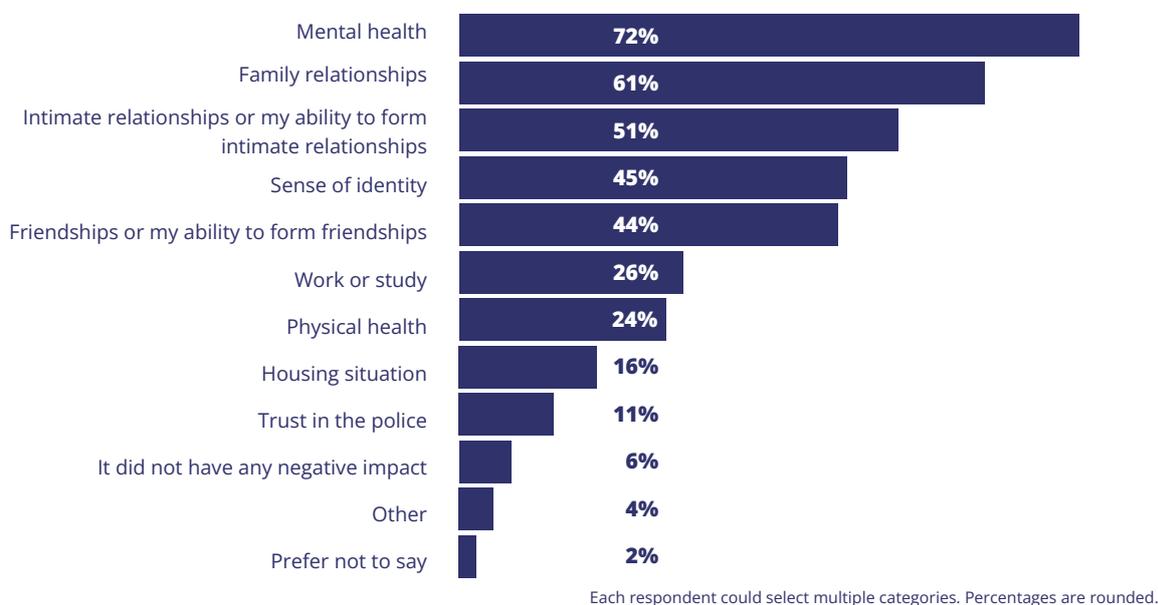
Impacts

Respondents who had experienced abuse from their families were asked which areas of their life had been negatively impacted by the experience. There were 1,493 responses.

92% of LGBT+ respondents said that the abuse from their family had a negative impact on them.

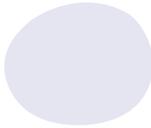
Almost all LGBT+ respondents (92%) reported that the abuse they faced had some form of negative impact, with significant numbers reporting impacts on their mental health (72%), their family relationships (61%) and their intimate relationships (51%).

Figure 6: Impacts



“ I don't trust anyone. My family failed me, my teachers, the police, social services, I begged and begged for help and no one believed me. ”

“ I had no safety net, no one to protect me or teach me how to live. I knew nothing, not how to pay a bill or budget or write a cv. How to enrol in college. So I ended up knocking around, claiming benefits, wasting my life, doing drugs, being traumatised and in denial for years. I destroyed myself, basically. ”



Almost half (45%) of respondents said that the abuse resulted in a negative impact on their sense of identity. This figure increased to 57% for trans and non-binary respondents. Cis men surveyed were less likely to have their sense of identity negatively impacted (36%).

Respondents who were first subjected to abuse aged 11 or under reported higher than average negative impacts. For example, 74% reported impacts on their intimate relationships or the ability to form intimate relationships, compared to 51% average, 65% reported impacts on their friendships or ability to form friendships compared to 44% average, and 88% reported impacts on their mental health compared to 72% average. Only 1% of those subjected to abuse aged 11 or under reported no negative impacts.

LGBT+ respondents described experiencing a variety of impacts as a result of abuse carried out by family members.

“ I was made homeless at a young age and struggled financially for a number of years, without having any sort of safety net. I was too young to access benefits, couldn't access social housing and got into debt that took a couple of years to get right.”

“ As a result of their treatment, my mental health suffered, my identity was affected as I tried really hard for a few years to be “straight”, which made me feel depressed and anxious, and I struggled as a result, lying to myself and to others.”

Support

We asked respondents who had experienced abuse from their families what support, if any, they had accessed, and whether it was beneficial. If they had not accessed support, respondents were asked whether they think would have been beneficial had they accessed it. There were 1,493 responses.

Only 11% had accessed advocacy, but a further 42% think doing so would have been beneficial.

13% had used formal advice and information e.g. a helpline and found it useful. A further 38% think that would be helpful.

10% accessed practical assistance and found it beneficial, while a further 40% who had not accessed it think it would have been beneficial.

40% had accessed therapeutic services and found them beneficial. A further 24% had not accessed therapeutic services but thought they would have been beneficial.

“

I became homeless and I had a breakdown because I didn't feel safe to stay in my home

”

“

It has meant I have lived a lie! I have tried to deny my sexuality and sense of gender for the majority of my adult life. I have spent many years being scared of being "outed", unable to be true to myself and too scared to try to meet someone.

”

	Had accessed this support and it was beneficial	Had accessed this support and it was not beneficial	Had not accessed this support but thinks it would have been beneficial	Had not accessed this support and does not think it would have been beneficial
Informal support e.g. through family and friends	52%	10%	14%	19%
Therapeutic services e.g. counselling and therapy	40%	17%	24%	16%
Formal advice and information e.g. through a helpline	13%	11%	38%	33%
Medical help (e.g. speaking to a GP, therapist or other health professional)	31%	17%	18%	29%
Advocacy (a service to support you to express your views and stand up for your rights)	7%	4%	42%	41%
Practical assistance (e.g. accommodation, financial aid, etc.)	10%	4%	40%	40%
Social work intervention	4%	8%	22%	60%

Percentages are rounded.

Trans and non-binary people who had accessed support services were less likely to have found them beneficial than their LGB+ peers. 17% had accessed formal advice but had not found it beneficial (compared to 11% of all respondents), 24% of respondents who had accessed medical help did not find it beneficial (compared to 17%) and 23% had accessed unhelpful therapeutic services (compared to 17%).

“ *I became very shy and withdrawn. Ever since then I have struggled with my confidence and have an innate distrust of people which has affected my friendships, work and relationships with my family. I feel that I never really learnt how to function effectively in social situations and have always felt like an outsider* **”**

Methodology

Galop commissioned YouGov to carry out a survey which asked LGBT+ people aged 18 and over in the UK about their experiences of violence in a family environment.

The survey was conducted using an online interview administered to members of the YouGov Plc UK panel of 800,000+ individuals who have agreed to take part in surveys. Emails are sent to panelists selected at random from the base sample. The email invites them to take part in a survey and provides a generic survey link. Once a panel member clicks on the link, they are sent to the survey that they are most required for, according to the sample definition and quotas. Invitations to surveys don't expire and respondents can be sent to any available survey.

All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. The total sample size was 5,078 LGBTQ adults. Fieldwork was undertaken from 28th February - 8th March 2022. The sample:

43% of respondents were cis men and 34% were cis women

16% were trans and non-binary, which in this report includes trans men (2%), trans women (2%), agender (1%), gender queer (3%), non-binary (5%) and questioning (3%) respondents

41% of respondents were gay, 15% were lesbian, 3% were heterosexual, 30% were bisexual, 7% were pansexual, 5% were asexual, 4% were queer and 1% defined in another way.

61% of respondents had no long-term health problem or disability. 25% were limited a little by a long-term health problem or disability, and 14% were limited a lot.

82% of respondents lived in an urban area, 8% in a town or suburb and 10% in a rural area.

86% of respondents were white British, 7% were any other white background, 1% were any other mixed/multiple ethnic background, 1% were Indian, 2% were Irish and 1% were white and Asian.

69% of respondents did not belong to a religion, 12% were Church of England, 1% were Buddhist, 1% Baptist, 6% Roman Catholic, 1% Church of Scotland, 1% Methodist, 1% Jewish and 5% belonged to another religion.

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

the LGBT+ anti-abuse charity

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