

Sexual violence

A snapshot of those
harming LGBT+ people

Galop 2023

the LGBT+ anti-abuse charity



About Galop

Galop is the UK's LGBT+ anti-abuse charity. We work directly with thousands of LGBT+ people who have experienced abuse and violence every year.

We specialise in supporting victims and survivors of domestic abuse, sexual violence, hate crime, and other forms of abuse including honour-based abuse, forced marriage, and so-called conversion therapies. We are a service run by LGBT+ people, for LGBT+ people, and the needs of our community are at the centre of what we do.

We use what we learn through working on the frontlines with clients to work on national and local policy change, to improve outcomes for LGBT+ victims and survivors of abuse and violence. We build evidence through key pieces of research around LGBT+ people's experiences of abuse and violence. We push for legislative change, improved statutory guidance for victims, and better understanding of the needs of LGBT+ people around the country.

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Credits

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LGBT+ people are too often excluded from the public narratives around sexual violence. In this, the fourth report in our series on LGBT+ experiences of sexual violence, we look closely at those who perpetrate the sexual abuse experienced by members of our community.

Throughout this landmark series we have shown that, while there are ways in which our community's experiences are no different from other survivors, there are important parts of our stories which are not represented — as we will see here too.

Galop's LGBT+ specialists have been working with members of our community affected by sexual violence for over a decade. We must ensure victims and survivors of sexual violence are not forgotten, and that our experiences are understood and included in the overall picture of what sexual violence looks like in the UK.

My thanks to Sarah West, Catherine Bewley, Lou Withers Green and Dr Erin Carlisle for producing this important piece of work which can inform positive change, and the entire team at Galop who work hard every day to improve the lives of LGBT+ adults and young people across the UK. We are also hugely grateful to Hannah Lim and the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation who funded this project. To the many LGBT+ survivors who believed in this research, engaged with it, and shared so generously with their time and experiences, thank you.

Leni Morris, Chief Executive Officer



Galop undertook an online survey and 25 semi-structured interviews asking over 1,000 LGBT+ people in the UK about their experiences of sexual violence, as well as their experiences of support services and the criminal justice system, including the police.

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

Survey respondents were asked about the perpetrator of their most significant experience of sexual violence — the experience that had the greatest impact on them. All survey findings in this report are in relation to the perpetrator(s) of this most impactful experience. This report focuses specifically on experiences of sexual violence in adulthood, since the age of 18 years.

This report is part of a series exploring LGBT+ sexual violence survivors' experiences, drawn from the larger research project mentioned above. Other reports in this series focus on sexual violence as a conversion practice, sexual abuse experiences as children or young people, and the criminal justice system and support services.

3 Key findings



- **High proportions of LGBT+ survey respondents reported experiencing sexual harassment (88%) and sexual assault (77%) since the age of 18.**
- **The vast majority of LGBT+ survivors surveyed indicated that they were sexually abused by someone known to them (79% of 755 who experienced sexual violence since the age of 18).**
 - The three most frequently named perpetrators of sexual violence who were known to the LGBT+ survivor were a partner or ex-partner (30%), an acquaintance (18%) and a friend (15%).
- **Around 1 in 6 LGBT+ survey respondents reported being sexually abused by a stranger (17%). Interview participants also described being subjected to sexual violence by strangers or people not known to them.**
 - Compared with LGBT+ respondents overall (17%), the trans women surveyed reported nearly twice the proportion of sexual violence perpetrated against them by a stranger (31% of 49 respondents).

3 Key findings



- **Survey respondents were asked about the gender and sexual orientation of the person who perpetrated the most impactful experience of sexual violence against them:**
 - The vast majority (76%) of LGBT+ survivors surveyed indicated that their most significant experience of sexual violence was perpetrated by a man/men.
 - Most (54%) of the LGBT+ survivors surveyed reported that the orientation of the perpetrator of their most impactful sexual violence experience was heterosexual.
 - There was some evidence of LGBT+ people experiencing sexual violence perpetrated by another LGB+ person/people (21%).
 - Around 1 in 6 (15%) LGBT+ survivors surveyed reported that their most impactful experience of sexual violence was perpetrated by a woman/women.
 - Many interview participants, as well as many survey respondents, described being subjected to sexual violence perpetrated by a man/men in the context of intimate relationships but also sexual assault and harassment in public or workplace settings.
 - Interview participants, as well as some survey respondents, described being subjected to sexual violence perpetrated by a woman/women, often in the context of intimate relationships.



LGBT+ victims and survivors need to be made visible in the “public story” and policy and legislative responses to domestic and sexual violence and abuse.

This must include:

- Expanding funding to specialised LGBT+ sexual violence services and increasing the availability of specialised services to meet need across the UK, including therapeutic support, advocacy and safe accommodation.
- Developing robust perpetrator programs that: acknowledge the experiences of LGBT+ survivors; are tailored specifically to address the actions of those who perpetrate sexual violence against LGBT+ survivors (who may not themselves be LGBT+); and recognise the relationship contexts where LGBT+ people are subjected to sexual violence, such as in intimate relationships or the family home.

4 Recommendations

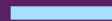


- Creating respectful relationships campaigns and education resources for all ages that address both coerced and forced sex, and which include LGBT+ people and people with intersecting minoritised identities.
- Shifting the “public story” of sexual violence to incorporate LGBT+ peoples and relationships, and correcting gendered and heterosexist ideas about “real victims” or “real perpetrators” of sexual violence.
- Addressing transphobic and anti-LGBT+ prejudice as key driving factors for stranger sexual assault or harassment towards trans and non-binary people.



Public stories about sexual violence

The “public story” of sexual violence is the way society imagines violence and abuse, which in turn shapes the way we think about sexual violence and respond to the issue at a policy and legislative level. It also shapes the ways that services identify and support survivors.



1 Suarez and Gadalla 2010; Waterhouse et al. 2016; Minter et al. 2021.

2 Office for National Statistics 2021a.

For sexual violence, the public story includes myths about what violence and abuse “looks like” or the contexts in which this violence and abuse takes place. One of the main myths, both in the UK and internationally, is that “real rape” involves violent sexual assault by a stranger in an isolated public setting, often under threat from a weapon.¹ However, data from the Crime Survey England and Wales (CSEW) for 2017 to 2020 suggests the vast majority of rape or sexual assault (or attempts) against adults in the UK are perpetrated by someone known to the survivor: namely, by a partner/ex-partner, other people known to the survivor (such as a friend, date or acquaintance) or a family member (85%).²

3 Office for National Statistics 2021b.

4 Galop 2022a; 2022b.

The CSEW data also indicates that sexual violence is most likely to take place in either the victim’s or perpetrator’s home.³ In comparison, sexual assaults perpetrated or attempted by a stranger are far less common (16% of assaults against adults in the UK between 2017 and 2020). LGBT+ survivors are not yet included in CSEW prevalence or victimisation data; however, Galop’s recent studies similarly indicate that LGBT+ people are most likely to be subjected to sexual violence by someone known to them, often in intimate or family relationships.⁴

5 Background



5 Donovan and Barnes 2019.

Public stories about sexual violence also construct ideas about who perpetrates this violence, and who is subjected to it.

6 Donovan and Barnes 2020.

Perceptions about “real perpetrators” and “genuine victims” are informed by particular gendered stereotypes and construct sexual violence as a heterosexual phenomenon, while also centring white, able-bodied people: where the bigger, stronger white cis man overpowers the smaller, demure white cis woman.⁵ The heterocentric and ciscentric framing of sexual violence in the public story thus excludes LGBT+ people and relationships by default,⁶ and creates a context where it becomes unthinkable that women could be perpetrators or men victims of sexual violence.⁷

7 Donovan and Hester 2015; Javaid 2018.

8 Donovan and Barnes 2018.

Additionally, by centring cis women and heterosexual relationships, public stories about “genuine victims” can result in attitudes which dismiss LGBT+ survivors’ experiences (for example that GB+ men survivors should have “fought back”, that bi+ people are hypersexual and thus always consenting, that trans people or GB+ men are potential perpetrators,⁸ or that “real” sexual assault cannot and does not occur in lesbian relationships).⁹

9 Donovan and Hester 2015; Javaid 2015.

10 Galop 2022c.

Moreover, the public story’s heterosexual framing excludes forms of sexual violence which specifically target LGBT+ people, including where sexual violence is used as an attempt to “convert” the LGBT+ person,¹⁰ or transphobic or anti-LGBT+ hate crime in the form of sexual violence.¹¹ The public story thus renders LGBT+ survivors, and the perpetrators of their violence, invisible. This invisibility can make it more difficult for LGBT+ survivors to name their abuse as abuse, to seek help, and have their experiences heard and validated by others.¹²

11 Hubbard 2021.

12 Donovan and Hester 2015; Donovan and Barnes 2019.

This report speaks to these aspects of the public story about sexual violence by outlining findings on those perpetrating sexual violence against LGBT+ people, from the voices of LGBT+ survivors. The public story of violence and abuse needs to shine a light on LGBT+ survivors and their experiences, and LGBT+ people must be better incorporated into the policy and legislative agenda that aims to address and respond to domestic abuse and sexual violence in the UK.

Experiences of sexual violence

Survey respondents were asked if someone had ever performed a particular sexual behaviour on or to them without their consent.

In this report, the term “sexual violence” includes all the forms of sexual violence and abuse outlined in Figure 1. “Sexual violence” includes acts, as well as attempts or coercion.

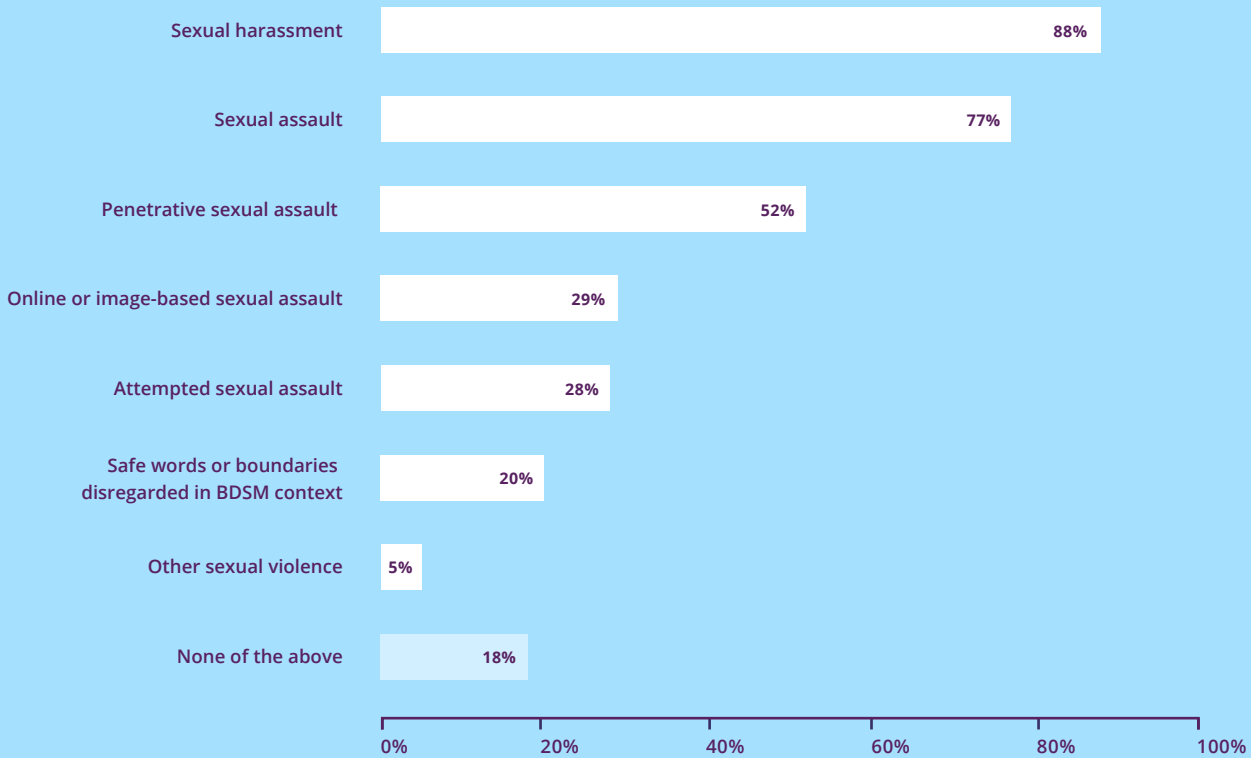
13 Galop 2022b.

LGBT+ survey respondents reported experiencing a range of types of sexual violence during adulthood (since the age of 18 years). Nearly 3 in 10 (28%) LGBT+ survey respondents reported experiencing four or more different types of sexual violence since the age of 18.¹³

The high proportion of experiences of sexual violence in the sample may be explained by the recruitment method used in the study, where the survey was advertised as being about the topic of sexual violence, which may have led an increased number of survivors to participate. It is important to remember that the survey was not designed to indicate prevalence among the UK LGBT+ population.

6 Experiences of sexual violence

Figure 1. Experiences of sexual violence in adulthood



n=892. Percentages are rounded. Percentages do not total 100% because respondents could select multiple categories.

Relationship to perpetrator(s)

79%

Of those who experienced at least one form of sexual violence as an adult (n=755), the vast majority of LGBT+ survivors surveyed indicated that they were sexually abused by someone known to them (79%). Of the survey respondents who experienced sexual violence in adulthood, the three most frequently named perpetrators known to the survivor were: a partner or ex-partner (30%), an acquaintance (18%) and a friend (15%).

The range of perpetrators described by interview participants were primarily partners, ex-partners or family members. Interview participants also shared stories of sexual violence by adults in positions of trust or power.

6 Experiences of sexual violence

Additionally, LGBT+ survey respondents indicated that their most significant experience of sexual violence took place in familiar contexts: in the home of the perpetrator (25%), within their home (24%) or at a place of work or study (10%).

In contrast to pervasive myths about “stranger rape”, these findings underline that sexual violence against LGBT+ people is largely perpetrated by someone known to the victim and in spaces familiar to them.



An ex-partner forced himself on me. I said no multiple times but he didn't stop, I tried to fight him off but he overpowered me and continued.

Survey respondent



During my abusive marriage my consent was ignored.

Survey respondent



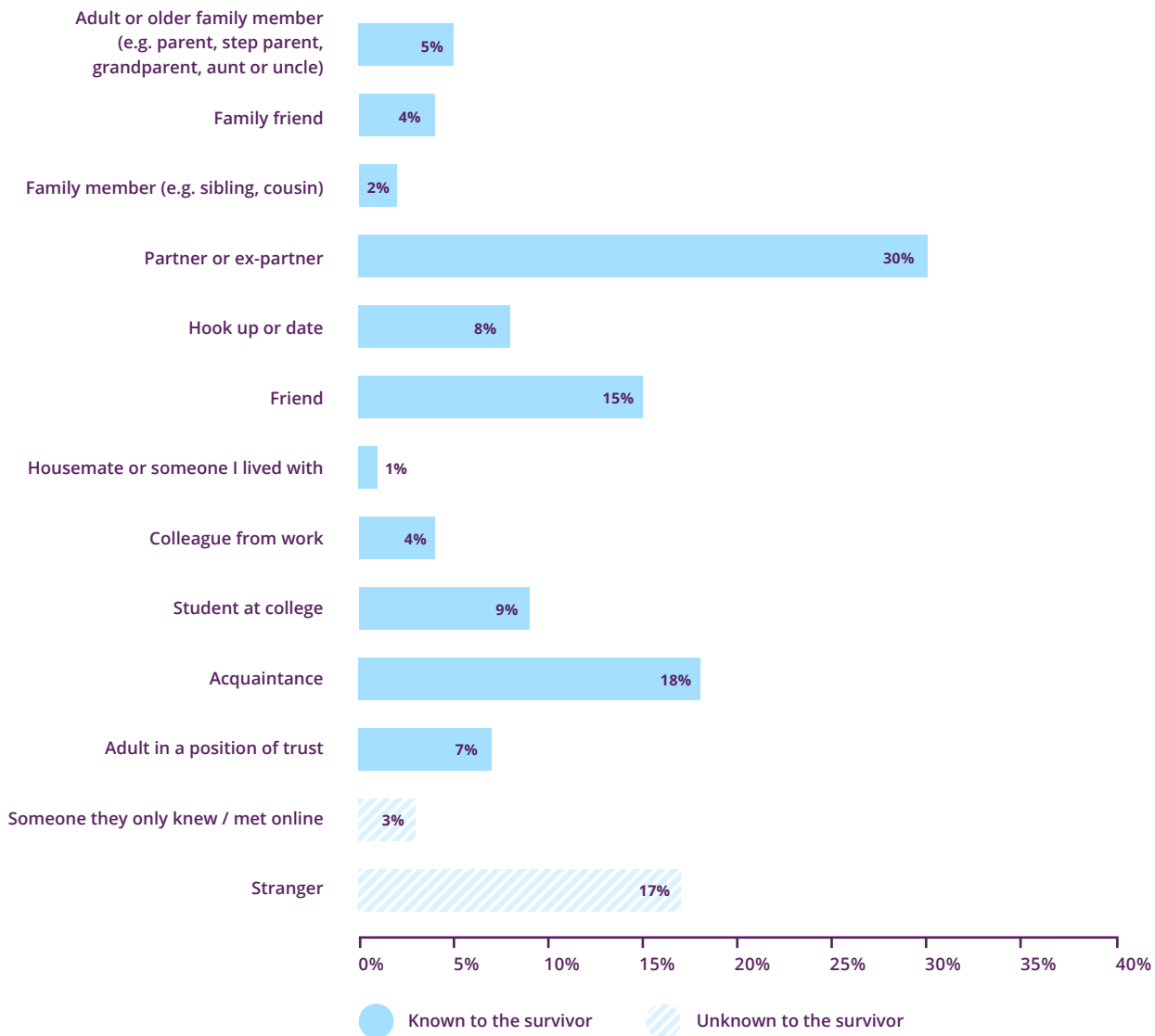
I was raped by an ex-partner ... after coming out as trans, as they believed that they could 'remind me that I am in fact female again'.

Survey respondent



6 Experiences of sexual violence

Figure 2. Relationship to perpetrator(s) of sexual violence experienced in adulthood



n=755. Percentages are rounded. Percentages do not total 100% because respondents could select multiple categories. This chart includes data for the main and most selected categories for this question; others have been excluded from this chart. These figures are for sexual violence broadly, which includes all behaviours listed in Figure 1. In the survey, "acquaintance" was defined as "someone I only knew a little, e.g. a friend of a friend".

However, around 1 in 6 LGBT+ respondents reported they were subjected to sexual violence by a stranger (17%). Additionally, compared with LGBT+ respondents overall (17%), the 49 trans women surveyed reported nearly twice the proportion of sexual violence perpetrated against them by a stranger (31% of 49 respondents). Interview participants also described being subjected to sexual violence by strangers or people not known to them.

6 Experiences of sexual violence

“

I was sexually assaulted a few times as a teenager: once by a stranger on a beach, once by a manager at a job, once at a job interview [...] When I was 19 I was drugged and raped by a customer/ customers at a pub where I worked.

Interview participant

”

“

I experienced unwanted sexual contact whilst travelling on the tube, aged about 19. Other forms of verbal sexual harassment have been prevalent throughout my life, including being approached in the street under pretext, being shouted at, being addressed as if sexually available.

Survey respondent

”

The high proportion of stranger-perpetrated sexual violence in the survey results may be explained by the extent of experiences of sexual harassment among the sample. Free-text responses in the survey, as well as some responses by interview participants, suggested many of the LGBT+ people in this study — especially trans women — experienced sexual harassment in public.

“

This happened on public transport ... A crowd of men touched me and put their hands down my pants as I got on a train.

Interview participant

”

“

I have been groped, had my behind slapped, been stroked inappropriately, had people make sexual comments about me.

Survey respondent

”

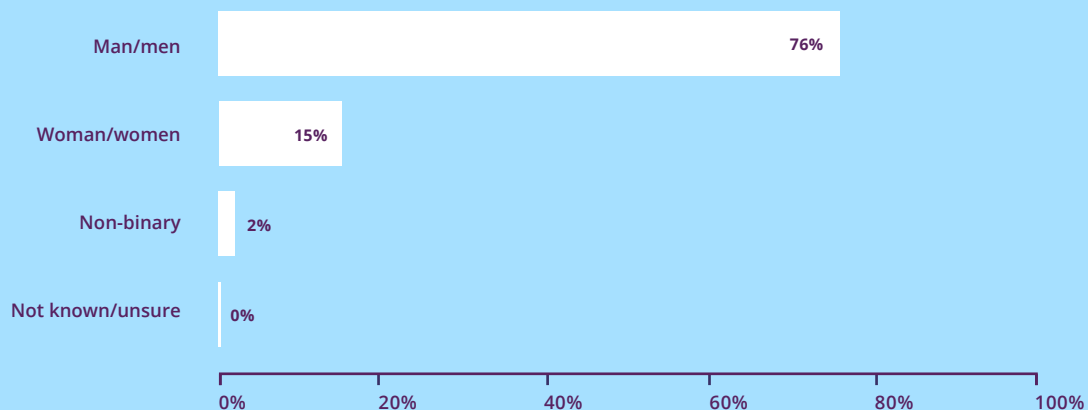
Gender and orientation of perpetrator(s)

Survey respondents were asked to report the gender of the person who perpetrated their most significant experience of sexual violence against them. The vast majority (76%) of LGBT+ survivors surveyed indicated that their most significant experience of sexual violence in adulthood was perpetrated by a man/men.

14 Home Office (2021).

These findings align with broader national UK data which indicates that perpetrators of sexual and domestic violence (against women) tend to be men.¹⁴

Figure 3. Gender of the perpetrator of most significant experience of sexual violence in adulthood



n=755. Percentages are rounded. Gender categories include both cis and trans. Percentages do not total 100% because respondents could select multiple categories. These figures are for sexual violence broadly, which includes all behaviours listed in Figure 1.

15 Galop 2022c.

Many interview participants, as well as many survey respondents, described being subjected to sexual violence perpetrated by a man/ men, often in the context of intimate relationships but also sexual assault and harassment in public or workplace settings. Some LGBT+ survivors (both in interviews and in survey responses) described a man/men using sexual violence as a method of converting or punishing them for being LGBT+.¹⁵

6 Experiences of sexual violence



Attempted rape by an ex-partner (male) after I came out to him as gay.

Survey respondent



My current marriage is no better. I'm raped often by my husband as he sees it as it's my duty to satisfy his needs.

Survey respondent



A man had sex with me while I was asleep. I woke up to find him there. I am not attracted to men and he knew that.

Survey respondent



I was raped during freshers week as I identified as homosexual and biromantic so had never slept with a cis man — he thought this was a challenge.

Survey respondent



Around 1 in 6 (15%) LGBT+ survivors surveyed reported that their most impactful experience of sexual violence was perpetrated by a woman/women. A much smaller percentage of respondents indicated their experience of sexual violence perpetrated by a non-binary person (2%). Compared with LGBT+ respondents overall, higher proportions of trans women (29% of 49 respondents) and trans men (19% of 48 respondents) surveyed indicated they were sexually abused by a woman/women.

Interview participants, as well as some survey respondents, described being subjected to sexual violence perpetrated by a woman/women, often in the context of intimate relationships.



My ex-girlfriend coerced me into having sex when I didn't want to and into performing sexual acts I was uncomfortable with.

Survey respondent



Ex-girlfriend used mental and emotional coercion to make me have sex with her, and if I said no (any variation) or was too ill, she'd make it happen anyway.

Survey respondent



6 Experiences of sexual violence

Some interview participants who were women and who were assaulted by other women discussed being unaware that women could be perpetrators, due to this not being represented in society and media (i.e., in the “public story” of abuse), resulting in them not recognising their experiences as sexual violence at first.

“

I was literally, completely and FULLY unaware that women could commit acts of sexual violence, I had the understanding that only men could do it.

Interview participant

”

“

I feel like sexual violence between women is really neglected, it’s assumed they don’t commit assault and I feel pretty alone as someone who’s had negative experiences with women.

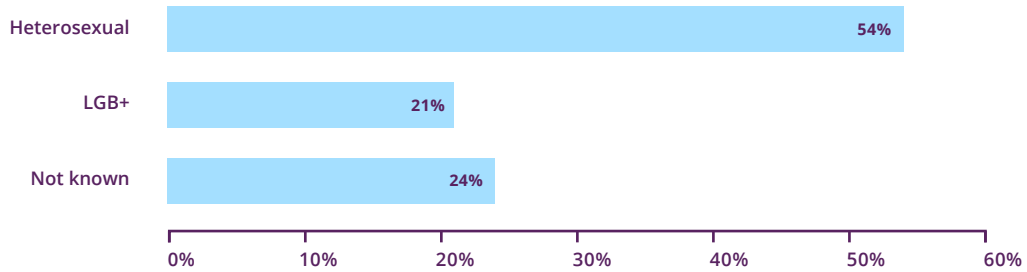
Interview participant

”

Survey respondents were also asked to report the orientation of the person who perpetrated their most significant experience of sexual violence against them since the age of 18. Of the LGBT+ survivors who experienced sexual violence in adulthood (n=755), the majority indicated that a heterosexual person/people (54%) perpetrated their most significant experience of sexual violence against them. Compared with LGBT+ survey respondents overall (54%), a higher proportion of cis LB+ women (68% of 299 respondents) reported that a heterosexual person/people perpetrated sexual violence against them.

6 Experiences of sexual violence

Figure 4. Orientation of perpetrator of sexual violence in adulthood



n=755. Percentages are rounded. Gender categories include both cis and trans. LGB+ is an umbrella category for sexual orientation; T is not included here because trans is not a sexual orientation. Percentages do not total 100% because respondents could select multiple categories. 'Prefer not to say' has been excluded from this chart. These figures are for sexual violence broadly, which includes all behaviours listed in Figure 1.

“

I was raped by a cis-het man at a party. It began as consensual sex but he did not listen when I told him to stop.

Survey respondent

”

“

Sexually assaulted outside a nightclub at 18 by a straight man after he found out I was a lesbian and had been pursuing me all night.

Survey respondent

”

“

About ten years ago I was persuaded to have sex with a man interviewing me for a job. I was unemployed and desperate so I conceded without wanting to. I believe that to be sexual assault persuasion. I did not get the job.

Survey respondent

”

6 Experiences of sexual violence

The survey also found evidence of sexual violence used against LGBT+ people by other LGB+ people (21%). This finding may be explained because of the high proportion of sexual violence perpetrated by current or former intimate partners, which may include LGBT+ intimate relationships. Compared with LGBT+ respondents overall (21%), a much higher proportion of cis GB+ men (57% of 89 respondents) reported that the person who used sexual violence against them was another LGB+ person/people. 1 in 5 trans women and trans men (20% of 97 respondents) reported that a LGB+ person/people perpetrated sexual violence against them in adulthood.

Some interview participants, as well as some survey respondents, described sexual violence in the context of sexual abuse and/or coercion in their intimate relationships with either a heterosexual or LGBT+ partner.

“

I was also in an abusive relationship with another woman and she used intimate images, most of which I was forced to pose for, she used these to keep me in the relationship.

Survey respondent

”

“

Sexual violence in a same-sex relationship.

Survey respondent

”



The research comprised of an online survey and 25 semi-structured interviews which were informed by a desk-based review of the existing evidence.

Online survey:

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 sampling strategy and the current difficulty in accurately calculating the size of the UK LGBT+ population, the sample must be considered a non-random community sample and therefore 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.

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

In total, 1,468 survey responses were received, of which 1,020 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.

The questions used in the survey were designed in collaboration with a reference group of LGBT+ survivors.

Semi-structured interviews:

Throughout the report the use of 'participants' refers to participants that were interviewed.

25 semi-structured interviews were undertaken. Participants were selected through survey respondents who had identified themselves as survivors and who had expressed an interest in taking part. They were additionally selected to include a wide range of ethnicities, genders and orientations. An overview of the questions was also shared in advance of the interview, so that those who wished to had the opportunity to think about their answers.

All interviews were conducted remotely. 22 of the 25 interview participants chose to complete their interview over a video call

Ethical considerations included:

- Participants consented to being recorded and provided written consent prior to the interview.
- Audio files and messages from the interviews were deleted after transcription to ensure confidentiality.
- Information sheets and recruitment emails provided full details to what was involved in the interview process in a simple and non-pressured way.
- Participants were signposted to support resources before and during their interviews, and offered a debrief session with a caseworker from the sexual violence team.
- Questions were only mandatory when linked to eligibility criteria (e.g. age), or routing through the survey (e.g., being routed to different questions based on a previous answer).
- Links to sources of support were signposted throughout the survey.

and three interviewees preferred to participate using a real-time messaging application.

Manual thematic analysis was used to analyse the interview transcripts. Following initial analysis by the primary researcher, a group of survivors contributed to the analysis phase through various activities, replicating the Participatory Theme Elicitation approach. The themes identified by survivors were amalgamated into the coding framework used by the research team during further analysis.

Interview participants and members of the survivor reference group received gift vouchers as a token of thanks for their contributions to the project.

7 Methodology

The full sample was 1,020.

Age

1020 responses

| | |
|-------|-------|
| 16-17 | 12.5% |
| 18-24 | 32.0% |
| 25-34 | 28.4% |
| 35-44 | 13.0% |
| 45-54 | 7.9% |
| 55-64 | 4.2% |
| 65+ | 1.9% |

Trans

1018 responses

| | |
|-------------------------------|-------|
| Has a trans history | 43.5% |
| Does not have a trans history | 54.4% |
| Unsure | 1.9% |

Intersex

253 responses

| | |
|--------------|-------|
| Intersex | 7.9% |
| Not intersex | 85.4% |
| Unsure | 6.7% |

Gender

1020 responses

| | |
|---------------------------|-------|
| Woman inc trans femme | 44.5% |
| Man or boy inc trans masc | 22.0% |
| Non-Binary | 29.6% |
| Questioning | 3.8% |
| Other | 0.1% |

Orientation

1275 responses

| | |
|--------------|-------|
| Ace | 22.6% |
| Bi+* | 47.1% |
| Monosexual | 29.2% |
| Lesbian | 13.7% |
| Gay | 11.3% |
| Heterosexual | 0.9% |
| Other | 0.2% |

* Bi+ includes all orientations that describe attraction to more than one gender.

Respondents could select multiple categories.

Disability

1020 responses

| | |
|-------------------|-------|
| Disabled | 62.5% |
| Not disabled | 35.5% |
| Unsure | 1.4% |
| Prefer not to say | 0.6% |

7 Methodology



The full sample was 1,020.

Religion

1000 responses

| | |
|-----------------------|-------|
| No religion | 59.8% |
| Buddhism | 2.1% |
| Christianity | 11.5% |
| Islam | 1.2% |
| Judaism | 2.3% |
| Paganism | 7.5% |
| Personal spirituality | 12.3% |
| Other faith | 3.3% |

Ethnicity

1019 responses

| | |
|-------|-------|
| Asian | 2.6% |
| Black | 2.1% |
| Mixed | 4.2% |
| Other | 2.7% |
| White | 88.3% |

Region

1020 responses

| | |
|------------------|-------|
| Scotland | 8.6% |
| Northern Ireland | 1.3% |
| Wales | 8.0% |
| England | 82.1% |

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Get help

If you are LGBT+ and experiencing violence or abuse, such as hate crime, domestic abuse, sexual violence or so-called 'conversion therapy', you can contact Galop directly for help and support.

0800 999 5428
help@galop.org.uk
galop.org.uk

Galop

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

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