



Spotlight #6: Episode 1

Podcast transcript

I: Welcome to Spotlight, the podcast for the domestic abuse sector. I'm Collette Eaton-Harris from the SafeLives Knowledge Hub and over the next seven weeks we'll be shining a spotlight on lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans victims of domestic abuse. Our figures show that the prevalence of all types of abuse amongst LGBT clients is higher than those who do not identify as LGBT and yet LGBT people are hugely underrepresented, both within domestic abuse services and at MARAC. In our most recent figures only 1% of cases at MARAC were noted to involve LGBT people. An informed guidance would suggest that in urban areas we should expect a proportionate representation of 10%. Our figures also show that LGBT clients are almost twice as likely to be abused by multiple perpetrators, are twice as likely to report historic abuse from family members and show much higher rates of complex needs such as substance misuse, suicide attempts and self-harm, and this presents us with some pressing questions about how the sector can better reach out to and engage with LGBT people. With this in mind, I spoke to Jude who manages the National LGBT Domestic Abuse Helpline for Galop, the LGBT+ anti-violence charity.

I: **Today I'm at Galop with Jude, the Helpline Manager. Welcome, Jude.**

J: Hello. Thank you for having me on this podcast

I: **So Jude, we're here to talk to you today about the National Helpline. Could you say a bit more about what the Helpline is and who it's for?**

J: Yes, I can. The Helpline is broader than just a helpline service. We are predominantly known for being a 'phone line service, but we also offer email support and we also offer webchat support. We find that sometimes people who are even feeling nervous about picking up a 'phone and speaking to somebody will start by contacting us via a webchat or via email and that acts as a stepping stone to our helpline service where they can speak to somebody over the 'phone about the situation they're experiencing. What we offer as part of those three services is we can work with somebody on a 'phone call for up to an hour to really go through their situation, the circumstance and help them and pick what is happening.

We can also then follow up on that conversation that we've had with them by perhaps exploring some choice that they might live to move forward with in their local area and contacting those local services just to confirm with them that they are open and happy to work with LGBT people. Or to explain that we have a particular caller who would like to access local services, that they're worried about how they might be perceived by the local domestic violence service. Just to kind of get some reassurance for them that it's fine, the service is totally open to taking a referral from them and they're ready to talk to them. We'll also send the self-help resources. So from that one contact we can

do quite a lot of helpful work for someone who's just at the beginning of their journey of help seeking. We can as well refer into our Domestic Abuse Partnership programme which is a London-based caseworking service and advocacy service to support anybody who is at high risk of domestic abuse to access counselling, helping, court support, which is very, very helpful I think to people who are in total crisis with domestic violence and abuse.

I: We know that LGBT people are hugely underrepresented in domestic abuse services, so it's really useful that your service is able to help bridge that by making that initial contact and encouraging your callers to then take it further with a local domestic abuse service.

J: Yeah, I think so. I think it's quite useful for us to think about the thing that our contacts or callers come to us with or the gateway into other services is sexuality and gender. That is the starting point for their whole interaction with any services and that's where we should meet them. Often people who are very reassured by the fact that it is a helpline that is run by the community for the community, they will always be talking with an LGBT plus member of the team. That is where often people will wanna start. They just wanna start with, "I'm in a gay relationship. I'm a bisexual person in a relationship with a woman." They don't want to explain that to somebody, they just want that to be understood. From there we can explore the dynamics of the abuse which is often the same or very similar as violence against women and girls abuses, and then we can go to the local services and say, "We have this person. They want support and help. Will be able to offer that to them with some of the thing they're experiencing?" Nine times out of 10 the local service is like, "Absolutely. Sure, we've worked with lots of LGBT plus people. Send them over" and then we're able to do that. But the starting block is gender and sexuality for the caller. That's what they want to begin the discussion and that's where we should meet them.

I: I think you have some stats here to give us an idea of the breakdown of calls that you have been receiving.

J: Yeah. I was looking at the helpline statistics for 2017. I'm looking at who is contacting us and what are the kind of issues that they are presenting us with. So looking at those that've called us who are surviving domestic violence and abuse, 62% of our callers are women, 35% are men and 12% are transwomen and binary. I think those categories could be explored a little bit further which I think we will be doing going forward through our monitoring and data collection. For men, when they call the helpline, it nearly always is about intimate partnership violence from their current partner or from their ex-partner. For women it is more complicated than that. Sometimes it is in an intimate partnership but it can also be childhood abuse that is now...the trauma of that is causing them issues in the current relationship that they're in. It could be a male member of the family that has been abusing them, especially if they're a young caller and they're coming out; they're in their LGBT first relationship or they're questioning their gender identity. That's not uncommon. We do get quite a lot of young callers. So it's being kind of aware of who the callers are and who is doing what to whom, who is abusing whom.

So those are the callers that we get. We also get...I'd say about 10% of our callers may be perpetrators or self-identified perpetrators. When speak to them and explore their situation it isn't clear that they are the primary victim.

I: I was just thinking that our own insight data shows that LGBT people are much more likely to experience abuse have multiple perpetrators identified and I guess that echoes then what you're describing. That for some callers there will be historic abuse, even from previous partners or from family members as well as perhaps a current abusive relationship.

J: Definitely. When we look at our trans callers, we can see that there is often significant risk from multiple perpetrators. For transmen in particular, they appear to be very much at risk at family violence and domestic violence from an intimate or current partner. So these two things are coming at the same time and it is really worth us knowing that and exploring that further so we can offer them the best support that they can get.

I: Could you give us an idea of some of the calls your helpline workers might take?

J: Yeah. Perhaps, I'll pull out some of the things that I, as the Manager, has found interesting and would probably like to explore further. One thing is it's not uncommon to get calls around how immigration status is being used as a tool to abuse somebody. So somebody could be coming from a country that has very homophobic institutions and their partner is constantly using that as a tool to threaten with deportation. And the truth of this is if actually they do go back to their country of origin, that is homophobic and they've been outed, that is a very, very serious consequence of it. That is something that we see as a power tool that is used all the time.

I: So for some people they might be having to make this really awful choice between, "Do I just stay with the abusive partner because, actually, that feels more manageable or less frightening than going back to violence or worse in my own country?"

J: Definitely. I've heard people literally say that. "Here I know what the harm risk to me. If I go back I don't know what will happen to me." That is a very, very challenging position; especially if a perpetrator knows they have that level of control or power over somebody. So that is not an uncommon type of contact or call we might receive. Another interesting thing for our helpline is that 40% of our callers last year were under 24. Now that is very young for a domestic violence and abuse helpline. The demographic tends to be older than that. And there appears to be real vulnerability about being a young adult who's questioning their gender identity, questioning their sexuality, maybe having their first intimate partnership in the LGBT community. Or they might be experiencing domestic and sexual violence from a family member at home and are questioning and coming out at the same time. These three things work together to cause real vulnerability to violence and abuse. I also think we have such a high level of young callers because often they may not have an LGBT community around them at all. Often they want to speak to a person in the community and really that's a very important thing about the demographic because they haven't got a group of friends that are all LGBT.

I: That's so interesting because what we usually find is that young people tend to just talk to each other and don't proactively call services and that can be a huge barrier for services to reach out to young people. So it's really interesting that you're saying that actually because they have a lack of that peer group then that's motivating them to make contact with you.

J: Yes, definitely. And also they seem to be very, very vulnerable in the situation. Questioning something new to them, that they may be not be out to everybody, and that can result in some people preying on them; as they do in many other contexts. Or they may well be questioning their identity, coming out and experiences domestic or sexual violence from a family member at the same time. So you're looking at these two issues and the trauma that's being caused by the existing abuse that's been happening to them as they're looking to venture into what is an unknown world for them too. So that is a group I would definitely like to see more work done for and with.

Something else that I've really found, something I'd like to explore more, is that I noted 33% of our callers are people of faith. When we look at the casework service over the last five years that went up, 50% of their casework were people of faith. So there seems to be a real overlap of having some type of religious faith and being part of the LGBT community resulting in a...and then having a domestic violent relationship. That combination seems to be very significant to the callers that we're getting because, perhaps, people who have faith and are part of the LGBT community, we cannot go back to their faith groups and be expected to be supportive. That's not always the case, but that may well be the experience for many and that's why I think we receive so many calls or contacts from people of faith.

I: Yeah, and you can just see how there is an overlap there of two potentially really big barriers. So to come out as LGB or T to your faith community there's obvious barriers there, and then to disclose domestic abuse there are also barriers there for many people. Their faith will talk about having a commitment to your partner and not speaking out about these kind of things, so you can see when those two things converge, the messages someone might be getting about keeping quiet, not disclosing.

J: Yeah, definitely. Or them being written off, just like, "Oh that's so and so they're really complex and we can't really help them" and actually not recognising that the relationship and the abuse they're experiencing has the same characteristic as a traditional heterosexual relationship and marginalising them even further within their church community. I think I mentioned to you that 61% of the people that make contact with the helpline cite that they have a disability and of that 61%, 81% cited mental health as being a disability to them. Anecdotally, we have a lot of people that are talking about suicide; having suicidal thoughts, planning suicide, have self-harmed in the past, are self-harming, very severe symptoms of mental ill health. A lot have formal diagnosis already attached to them which has been a surprise to me actually. To see that the acute level of mental health. Obviously, how can you experience domestic violence without it having an impact on your mental health. but this really needs exploring for this particular community.

I: That really apposed our own findings in terms of the differences between people that identify as LGB or T and those that don't. We are seeing that real difference in reporting mental health difficulties. You describe there some really complex issues that then have to be considered or bore in mind when reaching out to LGB or T victims of domestic abuse.

J: Yeah, definitely. I think it's complex. When we look at domestic violence and abuse generally it's complex. It's nuance and what the violence gets from women and girls sectors done a really good job is really exploring those nuances considerately and carefully. We would like the same to be done for the abuse of LGBT+ people as well so we make sure that we look at that group of young coming out people and make sure that carefully meet their needs effectively.

I: With that in mind, if there are professionals that have referrals for LGB or T people or are thinking about how they can reach out but are thinking, "This is not an area I feel confident in" what can the helpline offer those people?

J: Professionals are absolutely encouraged and welcome to call the helpline themselves. We get a lot of calls from professionals just wanting to soundboard something that's happening or have a particular situation with a client and would like a conversation and some advice around what is the most appropriate things to do next. We welcome those calls and professionals feel free to make contact with us. Their question isn't a silly question at all. I'd also say to professionals, "If you're working with LGBT+

survivors, please do encourage them to call the helpline because we are able to offer a listening service to them alongside any additional support that they were receiving from their local domestic violence service. Please do encourage them to call them. They'll always get through to somebody who is part of the community and understands the nuances of violence and abuse." So I would say, "Professionals, feel free to call us. Victims and survivors of LGBT+ community, do call us too. It's a free 'phone number. If you don't want to 'phone you can email us. You can also use the webchat service."

I: That's great. Thank you so much, Jude, for talking to us about your work here on the helpline with Galop.

J: No problem at all. Thank you for inviting me.

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