Researchers Mainstream and LGBTQ organizations

LGBTQ Domestic Violence Targeted Recommendation:

Accurately and responsively collect sexual orientation and gender identity data

National
LGBTQ DV Capacity Building
Learning Center

Recommendation: Accurately, responsively collect data

Rationale

Many DV programs regularly collect data on the survivors they serve, and increasingly, this includes measures of sexual orientation and gender identity. Gathering this data provides more opportunity to learn about the unique strengths, needs, and experiences of LGBTQ survivors. However, it also poses challenges for researchers and DV advocates and programs in ensuring the accuracy, utility, and privacy of the data they collect on survivors.

One challenge in collecting this data is the historic well-founded mistrust of research by LGBTQ communities. Some research has been used to further stigmatize LGBTQ communities, so demonstrating trustworthiness remains a challenge and a relevant consideration for programs and researchers. Further, accurately and sensitively identifying members of LGBTQ communities can be challenging due to emerging terminology and expanding notions of gender and sexuality.

While some LGBTQ survivors will experience questions related to gender identity and sexual orientation as an affirming example of inclusion and visibility, others will fear their answers will result in extra scrutiny or discriminatory service by staff.

There is no "one right way" to gather this information. Numerous measures of sexual orientation and gender identity exist, and different questions may work better or worse depending on the intended use of the data, the target population, and the varied experiences of diverse LGBTQ communities.

The data from each measure can be analyzed in a multitude of ways, so programs and researchers need to understand why they are collecting the data and how they are hoping to use it. Finally, the sensitivity of sexual orientation and gender identity data underscores the need for researchers and programs to ensure the confidentiality and privacy of the data they collect from survivors.

Recommendations for Researchers

1. Work with LGBTQ people and experts in LGBTQ anti-violence to shape sexual orientation and gender identity questions used in research studies.

2. Be clear on how you intend to use and analyze any sexual orientation and gender identity data you collect. This should influence how you measure these constructs.

3. To avoid further stigmatizing LGBTQ people and communities, ensure that your research examines not only weaknesses or risks but also strengths and opportunities related to LGBTQ communities.
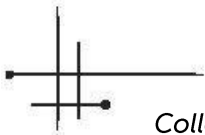
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4. Given the sensitivity of sexual orientation and gender identity data, it is important to honor the participants who risked vulnerability in sharing this information. One way to do this is by sharing the findings of the study with participants, giving back to them as a way to show respect and appreciation.

Recommendations for mainstream and LGBTQ organizations

1. Ensure advocates who collect sexual orientation and gender identity information receive comprehensive and ongoing training around distinctions of gender, sexuality, LGBTQ identities and terminology, and needs and experiences of LGBTQ survivors.

2. Be prepared to explain the rationale for gathering sexual orientation and gender identity data to service recipients, as well as how your agency will ensure confidentiality and containment of the data within and outside of programs.

3. Participation in data collection must be voluntary. Providing information for the purpose of programs' or funders' data collection purposes should never be a requirement to access services. This allows LGBTQ people and others to make decisions about the risks of revealing sensitive information without sacrificing access to needed services.

4. Identities and orientations are complicated. Understand that what an LGBTQ person reveals for data gathering purposes might not correspond with what they are ready to share with other participants or even staff. For example, a trans or bi woman may not wish to be identified as such in support group. Respect survivor's preferences about revealing sexual and gender identity.

5. With funders, advocate for more expansive categories (including options for self-identification outside of established categories) regarding sexual orientation and gender identity data in required reporting forms.

6. Take guidance from LGBTQ programs and researchers regarding best practices for collecting sexual orientation and gender identity data.

Resources

- Williams Institute (2016), Reachable: Data collection methods for sexual orientation and gender identity
- Williams Institute (2014), Best Practices for Asking Questions to Identify Transgender and Other Gender Minority Respondents on Population-Based Surveys
- Williams Institute (2013), Gender-Related Measures Overview
- Greytak, E., Gutierrez, E., Greene, K. (2012) Don't Ask, Can't Report: A practical guide to collecting data on LGBT people in a culturally responsive way. Presentation to American Evaluation Association

Collect Data
One in a series of targeted recommendations from the LGBTQ Domestic Violence Capacity Building Learning Center intended to improve policy, research, intervention and prevention efforts regarding LGBTQ DV.

The LGBTQ DV CBLC is a project of the Northwest Network for Bisexual, Trans, Lesbian and Gay Survivors of Abuse vvith foundational partner the National Coalition of Anti Violence Programs