

# LGBTQ+ Communities and Whatcom County's Lethality Assessment Protocol

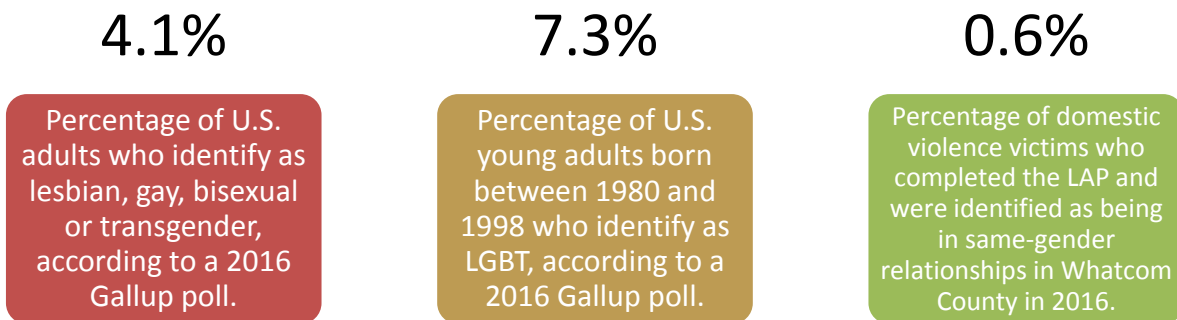
Data, Interview Themes and Survivor Quotes  
September 14, 2017

## Background

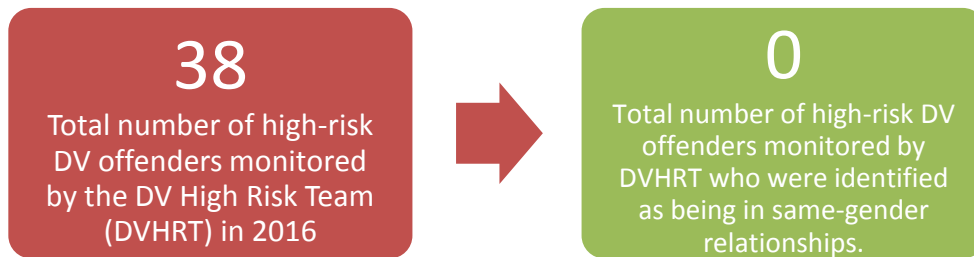
In 2013, the Commission Against Domestic Violence implemented the Lethality Assessment Protocol (LAP) and Domestic Violence High Risk Team (DVHRT) to improve identification of and response to high lethality domestic violence. Key partners included: Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Services (DVSAS) and local criminal justice agencies.

## Local and National Data on Domestic Violence in LGBTQ+ Communities

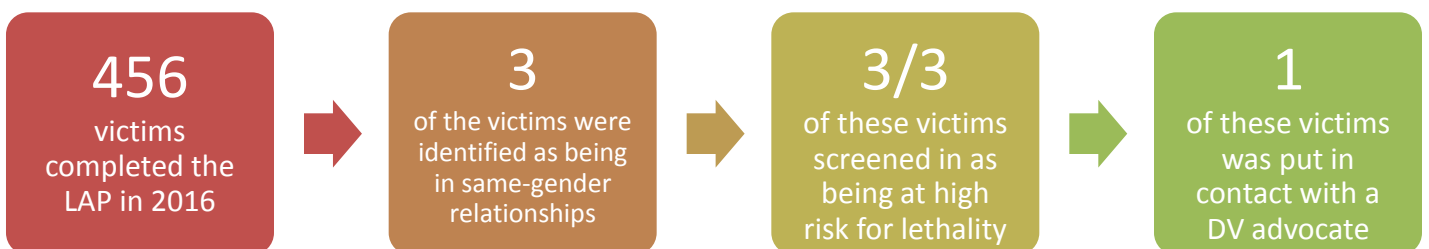
Gallup Poll<sup>1</sup>, 2016:



DV High Risk Team, 2016:



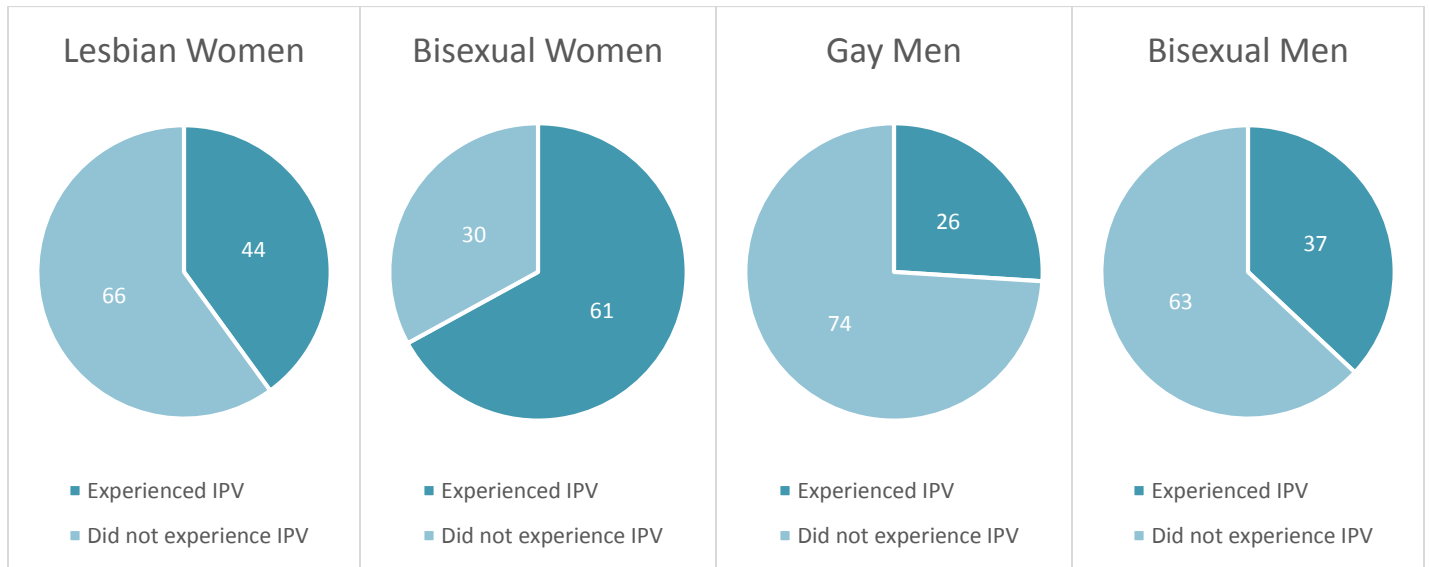
Lethality Assessment Program, 2016:



Gallup. "In US, More Adults Identifying as LGBT." January 11, 2017. Available at <http://www.gallup.com/poll/201731/lgbt-identification-rises.aspx>

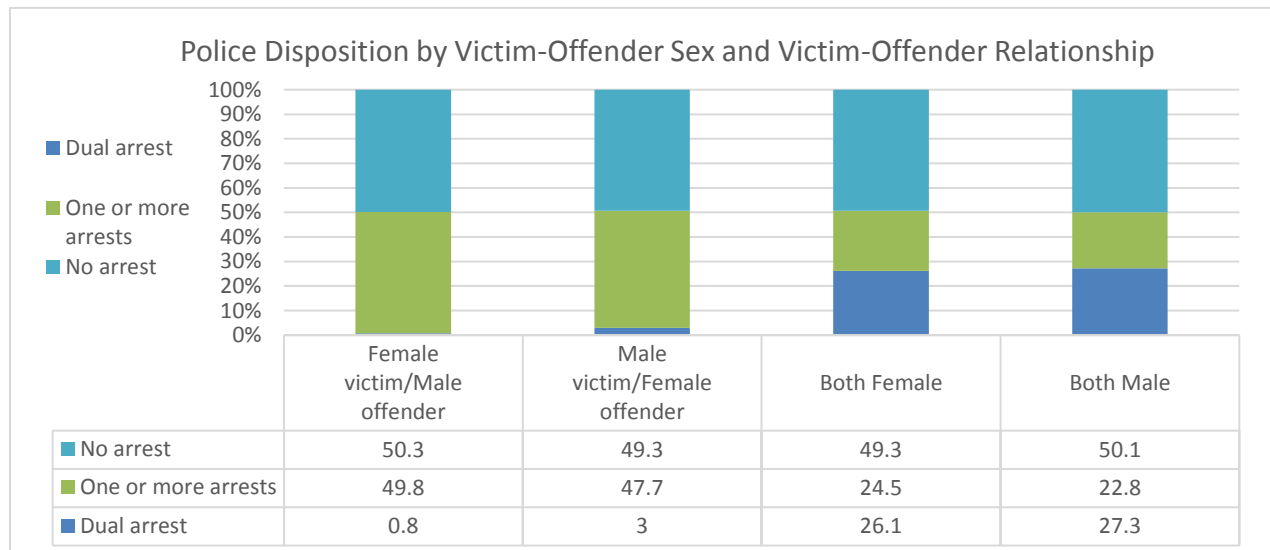
## Prevalence of Domestic Violence in Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Communities

Recent research shows that LGBTQ people experience similar, if not higher, rates of intimate partner domestic violence (IPV) compared to their cisgender or heterosexual counterparts. The 2010 National Intimate Partner Violence and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS) found that 44% of lesbian women, 61% of bisexual women, 26% of gay men, and 37% of bisexual men experience IPV at some point in their lives.<sup>2</sup> Additional research found that LGBTQ youth are more likely to experience all forms of relationship violence compared to heterosexual or cisgender youth.<sup>3</sup>



## Prevalence of Dual-Arrests in Same-Sex Domestic Violence Incidents

The prevalence of dual-arrests in same-sex domestic violence incidents is seen in David Hirschel’s research below.<sup>4</sup>



<sup>2</sup> Walters, M.L., and M.J. Breiding. “The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS): 2010 Findings on Victimization by Sexual Orientation. National Center for Injury Prevention and Control.” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2013).

<sup>3</sup> Dank, Meredith, Pamela Lachman, Janine M. Zweig, and Jennifer Yahner. “Dating Violence Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Youth.” J Youth Adolescence Journal of Youth and Adolescence 43 (2013): 846-57.

<sup>4</sup> Hirschel, David. “Domestic Violence Cases: What Research Shows About Arrest and Dual Arrest Rates.” (2008). Available at <http://nij.gov/publications/dv-dual-arrest-222679/dv-dual-arrest.pdf/>

## Interview Themes and Survivor Quotes

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Based on eight interviews with local LGBTQ-identified survivors of domestic violence, conducted in the summer of 2017

### Theme 1: Fear of being not being believed or taken seriously

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*"It never really occurred to me to call the police about the abuse. I don't know if anything she did would actually qualify as domestic violence in the legal sense. It was mostly manipulation and threats and emotional abuse, but there were a few times that she slapped me."*

***"I think I would be embarrassed to talk to someone about it [for help] and worried that I wouldn't be taken seriously. I grew up in Eastern Washington in a really homophobic family. I know the Bellingham police are probably more progressive, but back home, being a lesbian isn't something that you talk about."***

*"I think here is a misconception that abuse doesn't happen in lesbian relationships because women aren't seen as being aggressive or violent. Even when she would blow up at me, and was screaming at me and throwing things at me, **I had kind of an internal dialogue going that it wasn't that bad, or wasn't really abuse, or that I just wouldn't be taken seriously as a 'real victim' if I told anyone.**"*

*"I think it's easy to minimize the situation you're in and blame yourself, but being a lesbian adds another level of fear. **I was afraid of not being believed, or being seen as attention-seeking or dramatic or something.**"*

*"I was really surprised by how well the police responded to the situation with [my ex-girlfriend]. **I really didn't think that they would take me seriously, but they did take it very seriously and were very protective.** I felt very safe and supported [...] but I wish she didn't need to go to jail for me to be safe."*

### Theme 2: Fear of relationship and gender identity being misunderstood

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*"I did go to DVSAS once, but the counselor wasn't very helpful. She was young and **mis-gendered me and even though she was nice, you could tell that she wasn't super knowledgeable about queer issues.** [...] I just got the feeling that they didn't really 'get it' or understand what being genderqueer meant."*

*"I never really felt like I needed to call the police. [...] **I think if it had gotten worse, I would have been nervous about the police not really getting the situation, like, I don't know how well-versed they are in queer relationships...** And my legal name is not the name I use and I don't know if I would want to deal with all that. I just get really nervous about people's judgement and lack of understanding about being genderqueer."*

*"[I want law enforcement and advocates to] **know about queer, genderqueer and trans issues, to be comfortable with responding to situations where genderqueer or trans people are involved,** to be respectful of pronouns and preferred names, and to not assume that whoever is bigger is the abusive one."*

*"**It's stressful being a queer and genderqueer person and trying to get help. You never know if someone is going to be supportive or if they are going to think you're a freak, if they are trans-friendly or anti-trans.** I am nervous whenever I interact with new places because of that. I think it could help people feel more welcome if social services places were more upfront and outspoken about their support for queer people, rather than us having to take the risk."*

*"I never talked to many people about it at the time. It's a vulnerable issue to talk about for anyone, I think. My family were so upset when my ex-husband and I divorced and I started seeing her. They were unsupportive from the start [...] so it was pretty vulnerable to talk about it not going well."*

*"**It's hard talking to someone about really sensitive issues who is not from your community, who doesn't speak the same [social/cultural] 'language' as you.** I think having more outspoken queer people as police and advocates really builds trust with the community, or even just people who look a little more 'alternative.'"*

"Someone who looks more "queer" is really important, really chill, just go to coffee to talk, pay for the coffee, listen. More people who are representative of the queer community. That would have been amazing for me. A lovely, wonderful police officer look at me. More piercings, spikey hair. Real, authentic human.

### **Theme 3: Need for law enforcement and providers to be skilled in identifying the predominant aggressor**

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"I'm bigger than my ex-girlfriend was, so I'd be worried that they would just look at me and think I must have done it."

"Law enforcement really needs to be good at seeing who is the one abusing the other one. [...] Sometimes mistakes can be made and that, and that makes things even worse."

"[I was "pimped" and addicted to drugs], I thought I'd be arrested for prostitution or whatever if I ever told anyone. It's not easy to get out. **Maybe they would have seen me as a victim, but maybe they would have seen me as a criminal.**"

"**She also told me that I was abusive and that she was going to see someone at DVSAS.** That was really hard because I knew I probably contributed to some of the problems in our relationship, but I really don't think I was abusing her. **After that, I didn't think that going to DVSAS would be an option for me.**"

"[If I tried to get help] I would be scared of her blaming me and then me ending up being the one arrested."

"[Law enforcement should] be able to understand who the real victim is. **What would they do if I told them that she was abusing me, and she told them that I was abusing her?** Hopefully they are trained on being sensitive with people dealing with this."

"Advocates should also be able to figure out who is the real victim. **What if my ex-wife would have gone to DVSAS for help and then I tried to go? I'm guessing that they wouldn't be able to help both of us. How to they determine who needs help?** I was always scared to call them because I was worried they would recognize my name and automatically think I was abusive."

"**Law enforcement needs to have a great deal of skill and training in picking out who the victim is and who the abuser is, or if it's mutual violence.** Abusers can be manipulative and put the blame on the victims and police need to be able to see through that."

### **Theme 4: Isolation and ostracization from LGBTQ+ community due to reporting**

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"I think social capital and social power dynamics played a role. **[I was worried that] If I say that this person is abusing me, the queer community isn't going to accept me.** Bellingham is such a small community that I think that's pretty common. She was pretty well-known and liked and I felt like the whole queer community would side with her."

"I was so scared I barely left my house for two years. She hacked my accounts and harassed me online and posted disparaging comments about me in a bunch of local groups. **I felt like she was trying to turn our whole community against me.**"

"If you are queer you might have no family to support you, and **if you break away from your partner who is a big part of your queer community you are alone.** Who is going to take you in? It's literally trying to rebuild your entire life."