

CHAPTER 2

WORKING WITH ISSUES OF SAME-SEX FAMILY VIOLENCE

Shona McLeod

Family violence is a pattern of power and control long considered a heterosexual phenomenon whereby men perpetrate violence against women and children. The perpetration of violence in same-sex families, although free from the stereotype of man as perpetrator and woman as victim, is an undiscussed and hidden phenomenon. Research on lesbian and gay family violence is a fairly recent occurrence, particularly when compared with research into men's violence against women (Renzetti 1988). New Zealand research into the topic is virtually nonexistent (Brown 1995; Machen 1999; McLeod 2001) and the development of services for either perpetrators or victims of same-sex family violence has hardly begun.

Despite our limited understanding of family violence in same-sex relationships, the available national and international literature indicates that violence perpetrated in same-sex relationships occurs in similar frequency to (Goldfarb 1996; West 1998), and is as serious as, violence perpetrated in heterosexual relationships (Burke & Follingstad 1999). Given this, the lack of service provision for both the victims and perpetrators of same-sex family violence in New Zealand is an intolerable reality that needs to be remedied.

This chapter examines the estimated prevalence and the undeniable silencing of family violence in same-sex relationships. It then deals with theories of same-sex violence, in anticipation that an understanding of these theories will assist with the development and implementation of support services for victims and programmes for perpetrators of violence in same-sex relationships. The current issues for lesbians and gays experiencing or perpetrating family violence, including issues of homophobia and heterosexism, myths around mutual abuse and other contemporary issues are also discussed.

The prevalence of same-sex family violence

As previously stated, the current literature suggests that the perpetration of violence in lesbian, gay and heterosexual relationships occurs at similar rates (Coleman 1994; Hamburger 1996). The reported prevalence rates range between 17% and 52% (Poorman 2001; Ristock 2002). This large range in reported rates can be partly explained by the inconsistent definition of family violence applied by researchers (Machen 1999). For example, Brand and Kidd (1986), using a definition of family violence as physical abuse, found that 25% of their sample reported abuse in lesbian relationships. In contrast, Lie and Gentlewarrier (1991) found that 52% of their sample of lesbians had identified as being abused (this included physical, verbal and sexual abuse).

Despite the discussion of the rates of violence in same-sex relationships, no true studies of prevalence using a random sample of the lesbian or gay population has ever been carried out (Renzetti 1998; Machen 1999). Studies on family violence in lesbian and gay relationships have so far used small samples which are self-selected and by no means representative of the lesbian or gay population (Hamburger 1996; Renzetti 1998). However, this does not render them useless. The rates do in fact show that violence does occur in lesbian and gay relationships, and “that it is not so infrequent as to be an anomaly, and that once it occurs it is likely to recur and increase in frequency and severity” (Renzetti 1998 p119). In addition, given the current climate of heterosexism and homophobia, and the negative stigma that is often attached to ‘claiming an identity they taught me to despise,’ it seems unlikely a true prevalence rate of family violence in same-sex relationships could ever actually be calculated.

Silencing same-sex family violence

Generic discussions of family violence include violence against women and children most commonly perpetrated by men. The violence that occurs in same-sex relationships usually fails to be recognised in these generic discussions of family violence (Gummer & van Wetering 1996; McLeod 2001). As a result, a level of silencing in policy, research and statistics around same-sex family violence occurs. The serious nature of family violence occurring in same-sex relationships is minimised and perceived as less important, less serious or as not ‘real’ violence (McLeod 2001).

Theories of same-sex family violence

Theories of same-sex family violence have emerged over the past 12 years

as a response to the use of adapted heterosexual models to explain same-sex violence. Theories of heterosexual family violence fail to acknowledge internalised and cultural homophobia (Zemsky 1990), heterosexism, lesbian or gay discourse and the difficulty lesbians and gays have in accessing family violence services (McLeod 2001). To respond to this, theorists developed specific theories of same-sex family violence, namely, Island and Letellier's Basic Theory of Same-sex Domestic Violence (1991), the Social Psychological Theory (Merrill 1996) and the Theoretical Model of Lesbian Battering (Zemsky 1990).

Island and Letellier's (1991) theory is based on a psychological theory of family violence. The theory was developed as a gender-neutral theory with a focus on the psychology of the perpetrator (Merrill 1996). According to this theory the incidents of domestic violence are predicted by "individual psychological factors in a context of cultural tolerance" (Campbell 1991 cited in Letellier 1994, p97). The theory outlines four basic explanations for the existence of violence in same-sex relationships:

- mental disorder
- punishment theory
- positive reinforcement
- negative reinforcement

Island and Letellier (1991) rebutted the concept of a feminist theory altogether, criticising firstly that it was heterosexist because it failed to explain or even acknowledge the existence of violence in same-sex relationships. Secondly, they claim (not without controversy) that domestic violence is "not a gender issue" (p255). They further argue that the gender classification of perpetrators of domestic violence in feminist theory needs to be changed to a behavioural classification, if it is to be an adequate psychological theory (Merrill 1996).

The Social Psychological Theory of Same-sex Violence was developed from this theory. Merrill (1996) recognised the importance of various aspects of both feminist socio-political theory and psychological theory. Building on Letellier's (1994) notion that an integrated theory of domestic violence is required to account for victims and batterers of either gender, Merrill allows for the inclusion of the social context of homophobia and heterosexism in which same-sex battering occurs. The theory allows for an analysis of domestic violence which acknowledges the importance of gender after all: "heterosexual domestic violence is, in fact, primarily perpetrated by men against women" (Merrill 1996, p14). The theory also

links the individual psychological characteristics of the perpetrator with an examination of the social context in which the violence is occurring. This theory includes violence which occurs behind the second closet (the theoretical notion that gays and lesbians must not only disclose the violence in their relationships but also their sexuality) in gay and lesbian relationships (Letellier 1994).

The theoretical model of lesbian battering

The theoretical model of lesbian battering identifies three contributing factors to the occurrence of abuse in lesbian relationships (Zemsky et al 1990). These are:

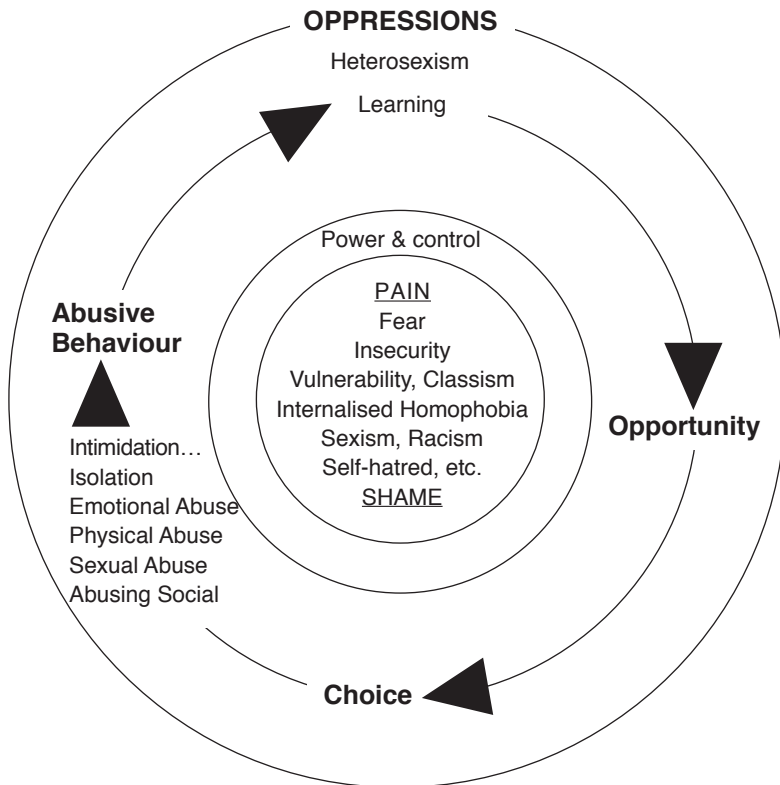
- learning to abuse (through socialisation, modelling, instruction and reinforcement)
- having the opportunity to abuse (through laws, tradition, attitudes and isolation)
- making the choice to abuse (the decisions made by the abuser about who they are violent toward, how frequently they direct their abusive behaviour and when and where the abuse is going to occur)

This model illustrates the influences that heterosexism and internalised homophobia have on domestic violence in lesbian relationships. The three identified contributing factors of abuse — learning, opportunity, and choice — are represented, as are the tactics of abuse. This theory of lesbian violence was the first attempt to integrate “the phenomenon of same-sex partner abuse into feminist domestic violence tactics of abuse theory” (Merrill 1996, p12). Although this development occurred over a decade ago, the current literature has failed to include it in discussion of violence in lesbian relationships. Furthermore the model has not been implemented for use in practice.

The Power and Control Wheel is a heterosexual model of family violence which has been adapted for use with lesbian or gay violence. Despite the international criticism that the adaptation of models developed for heterosexual relationships ignores internalised and societal homophobia (Zemsky 1990), the power and control wheel remains the most commonly used model of same-sex family violence in New Zealand. Ristock (2002) warns against the use of adapted power and control wheels as a diagnostic tool when working with same-sex family violence, describing them as oversimplifying the experiences of homophobia, heterosexism and some of the tactics unique to gay or lesbian family violence.

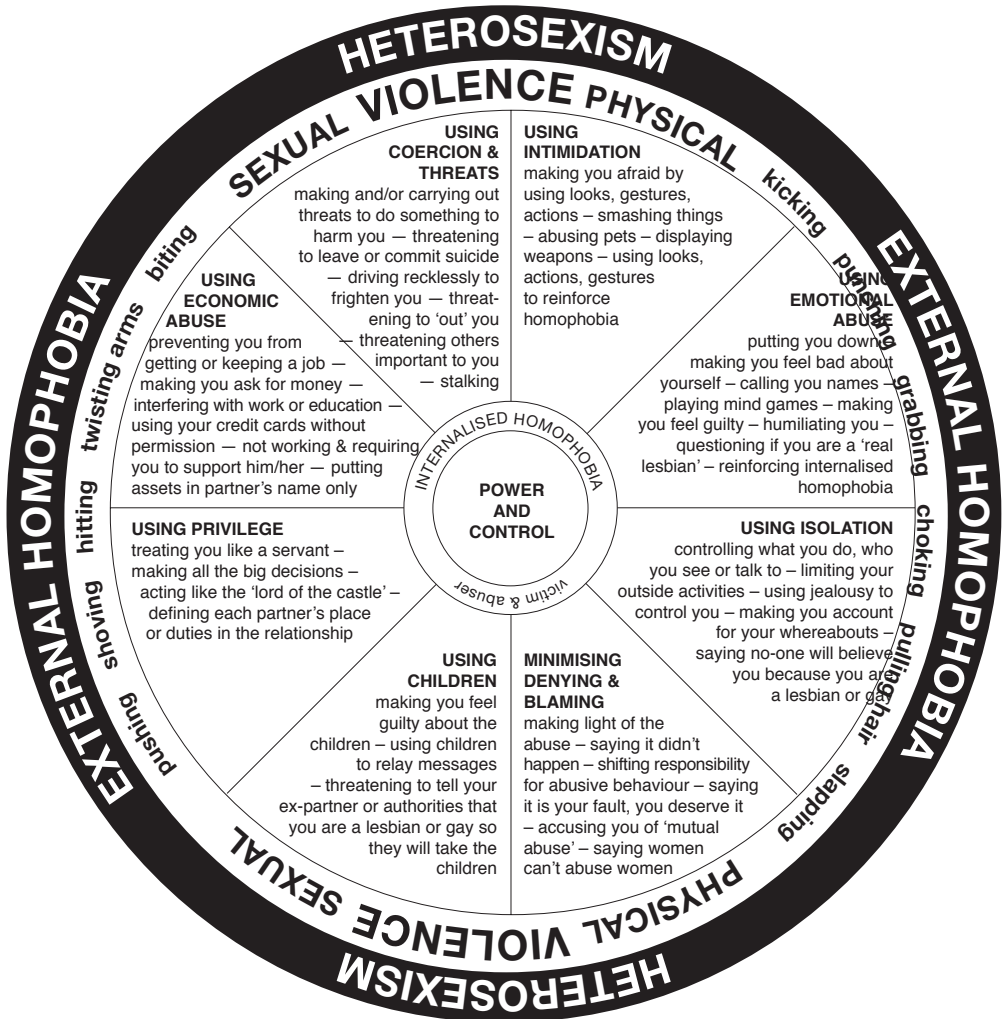
A recent adaptation of the Power and Control Wheel for same-sex violence by Roe and Jageodinski (2002) addresses the concerns of Zemsky (1990). The wheel incorporates tactics of family violence specific to lesbians and gays and conceptualises the experience of violence in same-sex relationships in the homophobic and heterosexist society that lesbians and gays live in. Contextualising lesbian and gay experience in their version of the power and control wheel has created a useful tool for working with the issues of lesbian and gay family violence, both with clients and for training purposes.

In conclusion there is no one theory of same-sex violence that can describe all of the aspects of lesbian or gay family violence completely. Experiences of family violence vary and these theories provide explanations



Based on work by B Zemsky, L Gilbert, PB Poorman and members of the Advisory Board of the Lesbian Battering Intervention Project of the Minnesota Coalition for Battered Women.

The Gay and Lesbian Power and Control Wheel



Adapted from the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project 'Power and Control wheel' by Roe and Jageodinski 2002 (www.metrobatteredwomen.org/lesbians.htm)

of violence in same-sex relationships more accurately than simply applying a heterosexual model of violence. There is, however, no single model that can simply be adopted for use when working with victims or perpetrators of violence in same-sex relationships. Only by having an awareness and understanding of both same-sex and heterosexual models, and the effects that other factors (such as ethnicity and minority status) have on the experience of family violence, can service providers begin to develop services appropriate for lesbian and gay victims and perpetrators of family violence.

Current issues in same-sex family violence

Gendered definition

The definition of family violence is gender-based, defining men as the perpetrators and women as the victims of violence (McLeod 2001). In addition to this, the assumption that the term ‘family violence’ means a heterosexual family results in same-sex family violence becoming obscured and thus unimportant. Hence, same-sex family violence is concealed by a definition of family violence that fails to acknowledge that violence can, and does, occur in lesbian and gay relationships. As a result of defining violence as gendered, family violence services have developed to serve women as victims and men as perpetrators. The violence perpetrated in same-sex relationships does not follow this definition, hence the services provided do not meet the needs of gay and lesbian victims or perpetrators of family violence.

The use of a gendered definition of family violence and the provision of gendered family violence services has implications for the acknowledgement of violence in lesbian and gay relationships. If ‘family violence’ only occurs in heterosexual relationships then what occurs in gay and lesbian relationships is not ‘family violence’. This affects the ability of lesbians (and, I suspect, gay men) to acknowledge their experience as family violence and to access services.

Same-sex discourses

Same-sex discourses are an issue when working with same-sex family violence. Firstly, they influence the ability of victims and perpetrators to acknowledge their experiences of violence and to seek assistance from services. Secondly, they influence service providers, policy makers, law enforcement agencies and societal perception about the existence and seriousness of violence occurring in same-sex relationships.

Lesbian and gay discourse emerges at equally conflicting junctions. The historical and social construct of lesbians and gay men is that they are 'pathologically disturbed' (Dallos & Dallos 1997), 'criminal deviants' (Hart 1994) and 'sexual perverts' who are a danger to children (Margolies, Becker & Jackson 1987; cited in Letellier 1994). In contrast to this, women are seen as innately 'caring' and 'nurturing', therefore lacking in the violent traits of men. This results in the belief that lesbian relationships are fair, egalitarian and free from violence, which is considered to be perpetrated by men (Ward 1995). It has been suggested that this dialogue goes further as women are perceived as physically inferior to men and hence unable to seriously harm anyone (Ward 1995). Thus violence between women either doesn't exist or is less serious than violence perpetrated by men against women in heterosexual relationships.

Gay men on the other hand experience an equally confusing and conflicting junction of discourse. A 'real' man is expected to protect himself in any situation and hence cannot be seen by society or himself as a victim, as it is inconsistent with male identity (Letellier 1994). As a result they do not assign a 'victim' label to themselves as they cannot see themselves as both men and victims (Letellier 1994). To admit being a victim is to admit to being less of a man (Christie 1996). Gay relationships are more likely to be perceived by gay men and service providers as relationships of equals (Christie 1996).

The existence of these conflicting discourses has major implications when acknowledging the existence of violence and in taking the step to access family violence services. Lesbians and gays face the implications of a conflicting discourse in similar ways. Lesbians face this through the fear or actual experience of not being believed when accessing services because women can't perpetrate violence, or that it is not 'real' violence (McLeod 2001). They often face the difficulty of accessing services which they fear will be reinforce the discourse that lesbians are violent, criminal and deviant. They may also face the realistic fear that their experience may be described as deserved because they have deviated from society's norms (McLeod 2001; Ristock 2002).

Gay men also face the fear or experience of not being believed by service providers or, worse, by being further abused through discrimination, homophobia and heterosexism by providers of family violence services. Gay men have lived with both the law and society functioning to keep them invisible and are punished for their sexual behaviour. Thus societal

discourses lead gay men to hide family violence in gay relationships for fear that it would be used to subvert attempts to gain civil rights (Christie 1996).

Homophobia and heterosexism

Homophobia is the irrational fear of homosexuals and is a tool of sexism that creates the opportunity for lesbians and gays to abuse their partners, just as sexism creates the opportunity for heterosexual men to abuse their female partners (Elliott 1996). Heterosexism is the belief or notion that — unless otherwise stated — everyone is and should be heterosexual. Combined, homophobia and heterosexism have a distinct impact on lesbians' and gays' experience of family violence.

Heterosexism results in the minimisation of gay and lesbian experiences of family violence, the failure of lesbians and gays to identify their experience as family violence (McLeod 2001) and the development of services for heterosexual perpetrators and victims of family violence. Reports of lesbians being asked “what did he hit you with?” (Lobel 1996) or facing other assumptions about the gender of an abusive partner, are examples of heterosexism which work to prevent lesbians and gays from accessing health and social services.

Tactics of abuse

There are several dynamics of family violence similar in same-sex and heterosexual relationships (Elliott 1996). Family violence in same-sex and heterosexual relationships follows a cycle and increases in severity and frequency over time. Additional similarities include the intergenerational transmission of violence (Coleman 1994), power imbalances (Renzetti 1994), the influence of alcohol abuse (Schilit et al 1991 cited in West 1998), conflicts around dependency and autonomy (Lockhart et al 1994), as well as the use of physical, verbal and psychological abuse (Zemsky 1990).

Despite these similarities, crucial differences between same-sex and heterosexual family violence have been identified (Elliott 1996). These include the myth of mutual battering or mutual combat (Island & Letellier 1991; Renzetti 1992; Elliott 1996), internalised homophobia (Hart 1986), homophobic control and the associated isolation and difficulty in accessing services (Hart 1986; Margolies & Leeder 1995) and minority stress (Balsam 2001). In addition to these is the use of the perpetrator's or victim's HIV/AIDS status (Island & Letellier 1991; Letellier 1994, 1996) which predominantly relates to violence in gay male relationships.

Mutual battering/combat

The perpetration of physical violence in same-sex relationships is often referred to as mutual battering or mutual combat. The assumption here is that violence in same-sex relationships refers to the perpetration of physical violence between evenly matched individuals (Bell 1989; Island & Letellier 1991). It is a pattern whereby partners who are physically evenly matched are willing and capable of fighting each other with similar force and regularity (Letellier 1994) or go through periods in which one abuses the other until the victim gains the upper hand and abuses their abuser (NiCarthy 1986).

This notion has long been identified as a myth of same-sex family violence (NiCarthy 1986; Island and Letellier 1991) and is a major difference between same-sex and heterosexual family violence (Elliott 1996). The myths of mutual battering and mutual combat serve to prevent abused gays and lesbians from accessing health and social services and are used by perpetrators of violence to control their partners (Hart 1986; Renzetti 1998). Identifying yourself as the abused partner becomes difficult if you are told and come to believe that you are mutually abusive (McLaughlin & Rozee 2001). This failure to identify that you are abused, and the difficulty in accessing services from providers (who may express difficulty in identifying who is 'really' the abusive partner, or believe that same-sex violence is mutual, only a 'lovers tiff' or a 'cat fight'), prevents abused lesbians and gays from accessing family violence services.

Internalised homophobia

Internalised homophobia is the internalisation of negative attitudes and assumptions about homosexuality by gays, lesbians and bisexuals (Balsam 2001). It appears to be more acute in the initial period of the coming out process, however, it can persist once the person has come out and appears to have come to terms with their sexual orientation. In its most overt form, internalised homophobia can manifest as the desire to change one's sexuality, a belief that one is sick because of one's sexuality or an intense hatred of one's homosexuality. More covert manifestations include a discomfort being with other gay, lesbian or bisexual people, feelings of shame or guilt about one's sexuality or attempting to 'pass' as heterosexual (Balsam 2001).

Some current literature examines the notion that internalised homophobia is a cause of violence in same-sex relationships by which the perpetrators take out their self-hatred on their intimate partner (Johnston

& Valentine 1995; Byrne 1996). This suggests that society's discrimination against homosexuals encourages internalised homophobia, the result being an increase in feelings of powerlessness, low self-esteem, denial of group membership, and a difficulty in establishing and maintaining trusting and committed intimate relationships (West 1998). Internalised homophobia is an added pressure distinctive to same-sex relationships, which is considered a trigger for family violence to occur in lesbian and gay relationships.

Internalised homophobia can also be used as a tool of violence. An 'out' partner may use their 'closeted' partner's internalised homophobia to control them, either by making sure their partner knows that they can't tell anyone about the violence because they are lesbian or gay (and no one will believe them), or by telling them that they will be discriminated against by service providers because they are lesbian or gay

Homophobic control

Homophobic control is the process by which an abusive partner uses the sexual orientation of their intimate partner as a tool by which to gain power and control. This includes making threats such as 'outing' your partner to their employer, family, friends, church, community, colleagues, landlord or the police. In same-sex relationships the whole idea of 'outing' in a workplace or to family can represent major abuse (Gummer & van Wetering 1996).

The use of homophobic control appears to be a common occurrence in lesbian relationships (West 1998), with 21% of Renzetti's 1992 study indicating that her abusive partner had "threatened to out her." In Ristock's 2002 study, 51% of women interviewed identified homophobic threats, including threats of 'outing' and the use of verbal abuse exhibiting the perpetrators' homophobic attitudes, as dynamics of abuse in their relationships. Other tactics of homophobic control include:

- Telling you how to be a 'real' lesbian or gay man (how to dress, and behave and who in the gay or lesbian community you can associate with)
- Threatening to tell your ex-partner or the authorities that you are a lesbian or gay so they will take the children away
- Telling you that women can't abuse, or men can't be abused
- Using isolation (saying no one will believe you because you are gay or lesbian, controlling who you do and don't see)
- Using looks, actions and gestures to reinforce homophobic control

Homophobic control ensures that the victims of same-sex family violence believe that no one will help or believe them (Hart 1986, Island & Letellier 1991), or that they deserve to be abused because they are lesbian (Hart 1986) or gay. Christie (1996) describes the difficulty gay men have in seeking help being related to having to admit that they are both gay and in a violent relationship. This can have significant consequences for personal interactions with others, and may mean that the lesbian or gay person they are forced to come out to his or her family, work colleagues or clients, and the police may get to know (Christie 1996). Ideally this would be a non-issue, however homophobic attitudes still exist and this enables abusive partners to use sexual orientation as a tool of power and control.

Use of HIV/AIDS status

The use of a person's HIV/AIDS status as a tool of family violence predominantly relates to the experience of gay males (Island & Letellier 1991). However, as HIV/AIDS spreads this pattern may change, and the tactic of power and control may also become relevant in lesbian relationships. The HIV/AIDS status of a person does not cause or justify in any way the presence of violence in an intimate relationship (Letellier 1996), but it can be used as a tool by the perpetrator of violence to control their intimate partner.

Perpetrators of violence in same-sex relationships may use their own HIV positive status to control their partners. According to Letellier (1996) "Battered gay and bisexual men are clearly at high risk for HIV infection ... A man who will beat and/or sexually abuse his partner is not likely to care enough to protect him from HIV infection" (p72-73). Furthermore, conversations about safe sex can become triggers or excuses for violence and battered men don't have a say in the use of condoms (Letellier 1996). A further control is the deliberate infection of, or threats to infect, a battered partner to ensure that they stay with you.

The HIV positive status of the abused partner can also be used as a tool of control by a perpetrator of violence in gay male relationships. Threats to withhold medication or to disclose a partner's HIV positive status can result in anti-gay or AIDS discrimination, such as loss of employment or health insurance (Schulman 1991 cited in Letellier 1994). Other methods of control include preventing the battered man from taking medication or seeking medical attention, or being told that 'no one else would want them' because they are HIV positive (Letellier 1996).

The HIV positive status of a perpetrator or victim of violence in gay male relationships can have a large impact on a victim's ability to leave a violent relationship (Merrill 1993; cited in Letellier 1996). Providers of services to battered gay men need to be aware of this and ensure that gay men receive the support and information required to make an informed choice about ending a violent relationship.

Minority Stress

The term Minority Stress refers to “the stress of living as a member of an oppressed minority” (Balsam 2001:25). Lesbians and gays experience both internal and external stresses such as internalised homophobia and anti-gay and -lesbian violence or discrimination (DiPlacido 1998; cited in Balsam 2001) because of their sexual orientation.

We lesbians are doubly at risk of experiencing minority stress and the associated negative life events given our multiple minority status as women and as lesbians (Brooks 1981; cited in Balsam 2002). In addition, gays and lesbians who belong to other minority groups such as lesbians and gays of colour, or those with physical or intellectual disabilities, have a multiple minority status. The stress for those of multiple minority status is compounded (Balsam 2002). Literature on abused lesbians and gays is scarce, while literature on lesbians and gays who belong to other minority groups is virtually non-existent (Poorman 2001). This is an area of research still to be addressed. However, service providers can address the issue of minority stress by being aware of the impact it has on gay and lesbian clients.

Lack of service provision and help seeking behaviour

The provision of family violence services to lesbians and gays experiencing family violence is an important issue. Renzetti (1996) describes the situation as a ‘poverty of services for lesbians.’ This poverty is not restricted to lesbians in the USA and it could be said that lesbians and gays living in New Zealand also face a poverty of services. The lack of services for lesbians experiencing or perpetrating family violence in New Zealand is exacerbated by the perception that available services are heterosexual or unsafe (Brown 1995; Machen 1999; McLeod 2001). There are no specific family violence services for gay men in New Zealand (Christie 1996) and there have been no studies of gay men's access to family violence services here. Essentially, gay male victims of family violence in New Zealand must rely on friends and family for emergency housing and support (Sawyers

1995) something which we, as a community, should ensure is provided to all victims.

Christie (1996) describes family violence services as overwhelmingly directed at heterosexuals, and gay men often distrust government agencies such as the police. Family violence in gay and lesbian relationships is not often talked about and is swept under the carpet as often as possible to avoid bad press, so that our communities are not seen as having the same faults as straight society (Sawyers 1995). As a result help seeking behaviours of victims of same-sex family violence differ from the behaviours of heterosexual women victims of family violence. The uptake of these family violence services by lesbians is extremely low, for example nationally less than 1% of women accessing refuge services identify as lesbian or bisexual (personal communication, Janet Bagshaw, National Collective of Independent Women's Refuges 2001). In 1999 there were 1169 applications for protection orders in the Southern Region, however only three of these applications were made by lesbians or gays against same-sex partners (Otautahi Lesbian Outpost, April 2000, p7). There are very few family violence services provided for gay men and little information about men's access to them.

Working with lesbian and gay victims of family violence

Family violence perpetrated by gays and lesbians against their intimate partners differs considerably from the violence perpetrated by men against their female partners. To ensure that we work successfully with lesbian and gay victims of family violence we need to acknowledge these differences and work in an appropriate way with victims of same-sex family violence. Those working with lesbian and gay victims of family violence need to have considerable understanding the effects and role of homophobia and heterosexism on violence in same-sex relationships.

The use and awareness of an inclusive definition of family violence which acknowledges that women can and do perpetrate violence, and that men can be and are victims of family violence, is critical. It is critical also that there is an awareness and understanding of the wider discourses surrounding lesbian and gay relationships and the subtlety of the tactics of violence found in violent gay and lesbian relationships, such as the use of homophobic control and HIV status. As service providers we need to ensure that our services are safe for lesbians and gays to access and that we advertise these services so as not to exclude or hide the existence of family violence that gays and lesbians perpetrate with our own hands.

Working with lesbian and gay perpetrators of family violence

The vast differences between same-sex and heterosexual family violence have major implications for those providing services to both the victims and perpetrators of this violence. In working with gay and lesbian perpetrators of family violence there are issues around safety and the effect of homophobic attitudes. Our understanding of lesbian or same-sex violence needs to be addressed and raised by those working with perpetrators of same-sex family violence.

Facilitators of perpetrators' groups or those working individually with gay and lesbian perpetrators need to have an understanding of several issues to ensure the safety of lesbian and gay clients. It is important to ensure that the perpetration of same-sex family violence is not minimised by homophobic attitudes or a lack of analysis of the dynamics of same-sex family violence. In summary, the following are essential: firstly, workers need to be open to issues of sexuality and have an awareness of sexual difference and the differences between homosexual and heterosexual relationships. Secondly, it is important to possess an awareness of homophobia and heterosexism, both internal and external, and an understanding of the impact that internal and external homophobia and heterosexism has on individuals. Thirdly, it is vital that service providers have a comprehensive theoretical understanding of lesbian and gay family violence that includes the different tactics of violence used in same-sex relationships, the myths surrounding same-sex violence and an analysis of the difference in perception of the seriousness of lesbian or gay violence compared to heterosexual violence. Fourthly, workers need to be aware of the lack of services available to lesbians and gays experiencing violence. This causes isolation for both the victim and perpetrator, potentially increasing the level of control in the relationship.

To ensure that perpetrators of violence in lesbian and gay relationships are held accountable for their actions and have an opportunity to discuss their abusive behaviours and learn alternative behaviours, those working with perpetrators of same-sex family violence need to be trained. They must have an understanding and awareness of issues of sexuality, homophobia and heterosexism, and be trained in working with gay and lesbian perpetrators of family violence to elicit change.

Conclusion

Family violence in gay and lesbian relationships is comparable in frequency

and severity to violence perpetrated by men against their female partners. Despite this, there is a considerable difference in our level of understanding and in the provision of services available to victims and perpetrators of same-sex family violence.

The development of specific services for victims and perpetrators of same-sex family violence has barely begun, and to simply use a heterosexual model of family violence minimises the seriousness of same-sex family violence. In addition it fails to acknowledge the differences between violence perpetrated in heterosexual, gay and lesbian relationships and the tactics and issues specific to either lesbian or gay relationships.

To fully address the cycle of violence and to create a society free from family violence an awareness of same-sex family violence must emerge. This must include the adaptation of an inclusive definition of family violence as well as an increased awareness of the discourse surrounding lesbian and gay relationships. Furthermore, there needs to be a comprehensive understanding of and willingness to challenge homophobia and heterosexism and the minimisation of same-sex family violence whenever and wherever it occurs.