

Perspectives:

The LGBTQI experience of family violence

queerspace* (drummond street services) is a health and wellbeing service for LGBTQI+ people, and their families. QRespect is queerspace's queer intimate partner violence and family violence service, working with individuals, families and couples/partners. We spoke to Kate and Maryclare from queerspace about the experience of family violence in LGBTQI relationships.

What are the challenges unique to LGBTQI people experiencing family violence?

KF: Queer people often have to argue against people stereotyping them even while seeking help so there are two types of pressure with family/intimate partner violence, the situation they're in and just being queer in the world, those two things come together in a painful and sometimes dangerous ways.

In the queer community there's family violence and intimate partner violence but there's also lateral violence. 'Callout culture' is one example; callouts on social media where people will be publicly shamed and their reputations damaged.

MM: Callout culture is an accountability mechanism developed from transformative justice where the community holds each other to account. As younger people we were called to account but it took longer. Now, through social media, it's instant and goes so far.

KF: So those are things that some of our clients are dealing with. QRespect responds to our clients where those points of pressure meet; what's happening in the relationship/s, what's happening in the world and what's happening in the community.

MM: LGBTQI+ covers a huge range of experiences too; the L and the G and the B and the I and the T and the Q all bring their own experiences. drummond street, and queerspace, is a family service but the definition of family is a very broad. Every individual has a family whether it's a family of origin or a family of choice.

KF: Reinventing family is a very strong function in queer communities. Family of choice can involve people who are having children together, households of young people coming together to form community, sometimes in the context of alienation from their family of origin. This is important when considering family violence because we may be speaking about a different form of family: people with several partners, children with two couples as parents, for example.

How does intersectionality operate in practice in prevention and response? What is currently being done?

KF: The question of cultural knowledge is really important in applying intersectionality to prevention. It can't just be an add-on, but has to be at the core of the thinking in both preventing family violence and responding to it. At the state government level, Family Safety Victoria (FSV) is consulting with the queer community on a campaign that starts from the basis of diversity.

MM: At a practitioner level it's important to set aside any preconceptions and just be open to what's in front of you, so that you don't miss anything that seems unimportant to you but is of huge importance to them.

What is needed to collaborate with other stakeholders? What are the gaps?

KF: We're working in a very fast environment but we need to recognise that there's a huge amount of work and time involved in good collaboration. Diverse representation is step one but then you need to align practices, work out who does what well, and how we learn from each other, and how to foster solidarity. There will be tension involved because the purpose of the partnership is about creating new stakes.

Will the Rainbow Tick enable family violence services to respond better?

KF: FSV funded 19 services to complete the Rainbow Tick accreditation. Specialist family violence services undergoing the Rainbow Tick can use our training as evidence of their intention to become a queer affirmative service but it's not linked in a formal sense.

Our aim is to build on decades of experience and practice knowledge about how to recognise and act on family violence and expand the capacity of mainstream services to recognise and respond to people who do not identify as heterosexual. ■



iHEAL RECOVERY

iHeal Recovery is a free service for women and children, especially those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, LGBTQI+ community or with a disability, who have experienced family violence. The team have lived experience with family violence and provides counselling, help navigating services, support groups and recovery education. **Access iHeal through drummond street, Victorian Aids Council and Merri Health.**



*This article uses the term 'queer' because it covers a program called 'queerspace'. The word 'queer' was historically used as a slur, but since the 1980s 'queer' has been reclaimed by some as an all-inclusive term, distinct from 'gay'. This article uses 'queer' in that way.