The Voices Unheard Project was established by a group of young people from LGBT Youth Scotland to find out about young LGBT people's experiences of domestic abuse. Using peer research, the young people from the Scottish Borders sought to find out people's understanding, knowledge and experiences of domestic abuse in their families and in their relationships. This research consisted of three things:

- Mapping of services in their area.
- Workshop with nine young people to find out young LGBT people's knowledge and understanding of domestic abuse.
- “Paper-based survey with seven young people to find out their knowledge and experiences of domestic abuse.

SERVICES

Peer researchers in the Borders investigated where young LGBT people could go to access support if they were experiencing or witnessing domestic abuse. The researchers wanted to find out what services young people would come across when they searched online. Researchers recorded what was advertised online and what they were told when the organisations were phoned.

BORDERS WOMEN’S AID

www.borderwomensaid.co.uk

- Provides a service for women and children
- Does not mention young people or LGB or T people on its website.
- Does not advertise a service at evenings or weekends.
SAMARITANS
www.samaritans.org
- Provides a service for women, men, children and young people
- Website mentions young people, but has no information about LGB or T people.
- Advertises a service at evenings and weekends

CITIZENS ADVICE
www.cas.org.uk
- Provides a service for women, men, children and young people.
- No local website but national website mentions young people, LGB and T people.
- Does not advertise a service at evenings or weekends

LOTHIAN AND BORDERS POLICE
www.lbp.police.uk
- Provides a service for women, men, children and young people.
- The website mentions young people, LGB and T people.
- Advertises a service at evenings and weekends

VICTIM SUPPORT
www.victimsupport.org.uk
- Provides a service for women, men, children and young people.
- Website mentions young people, LGB and T people.
- Does not advertise a service at evenings and weekends

SERVICES OVERALL
- Only one service dealt specifically with people experiencing domestic abuse.
- Most of the services found offered gender neutral services.
- Only the police and Victim Support mentioned LGBT people in the literature or on their website.
- No services providing refuge accommodation for men were found.
- Young people in certain areas of the Scottish Borders would need to travel long distances to access a service
A women only service was phoned by a peer researcher during the research. When asked who they provided a service for, the young person was told that the organisation would not provide a service for transgender people.

The young people in the Borders knew a range of services that they could go to if they were experiencing domestic abuse, either in their families or relationships. These included their doctors, the domestic abuse helpline, Samaritans and Women’s Aid. When asked where they would go to if they were experiencing domestic abuse, however, most said that they would go to a friend (43%) or their mum (43%). Many of the young people said that they would need to know and trust the person.

All of the young people said that they would be confident in telling a service that they were LGB or T. Still, many acknowledged that they would be concerned about the reaction that they might get after coming out, when they accessed a service.

“(I would be) too scared or frightened what they would think.”

**THE POLICE**

Most of the young people (71%) said that they would not feel comfortable to report domestic abuse to the police.

When asked if they thought the police would take seriously reports of same-sex domestic abuse, over half said no or that they were unsure. Reasons for this included fear of what would happen or worries that they may experience a homophobic response.

“When my mum was experiencing domestic abuse the police wouldn’t do anything. They refer you to (the) domestic abuse line and said they couldn’t do nothing. This was for her ex-husband and ex-female partner.”
YOUNG PEOPLE’S KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING

The young people had a good understanding of the different forms of domestic abuse and acknowledged that LGBT people may experience additional forms of abuse such as homophobic abuse from a partner or ex-partner.

The young people who took part in the research also acknowledged that domestic abuse happens over a period of time and may not be physical and can therefore be difficult to see that what a person is experiencing is abuse.

“If it’s emotional abuse then your confidence is rock bottom.”

COMING OUT WHEN EXPERIENCING DOMESTIC ABUSE

Throughout the research young people in the Borders talked about the specific and unique issues that may be experienced by LGBT young people who witness abuse in their families. They acknowledged that this would have a “major impact” on young people being able to come out.

“It would be traumatic for the person coming out.”

“It’s hard enough to come out under normal circumstances never mind if you’re being abused too.”

People talked about young people being scared or frightened about talking to their parents about their sexual orientation if domestic abuse was happening in their homes. They thought that people would have lower self confidence and self esteem.

“I never told him, until I was eighteen because I had seen what he had done to my mum.”

- Young person, Scottish Borders
EXPERIENCES OF DOMESTIC ABUSE
Most of the young people said that they had not experienced domestic abuse, although almost half knew someone who had. Most of those who had experienced domestic abuse had experienced it within their families.

WHAT COULD BE DONE TO MAKE THINGS BETTER FOR LGBT YOUNG PEOPLE EXPERIENCING DOMESTIC ABUSE?
The young people in the Scottish Borders were asked what could be done to make things better for LGBT people who are experiencing domestic abuse. The three most popular responses were:
- More information and advice for young LGBT people on domestic abuse.
- Increased support for LGBT young people from domestic abuse services.
- More advertising of services that work with young LGBT people.
Recommendations

- The design of gender-based violence policies and service provision in the Scottish Borders should include a focus on the specific experiences and needs of young LGBT people.

Organisations that provide a service for people who have experienced domestic abuse should:

- Positively include LGBT people and young LGBT people in advertising and materials including on their website and literature.
- Improve online presence through improving their websites position on search engines.
- Provide outreach to young LGBT people who experience domestic abuse who may not be able to, or want, to access an office within working hours.
- Training for staff to increase LGBT awareness and the unique experiences, and specific needs, of LGBT people who experience domestic abuse.

THE POLICE

- Training for officers to increase LGBT awareness.
- Provide active outreach to LGBT young people through youth groups, schools and other organisations.
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