

SEXUAL ASSAULT

PART ONE

Understanding Sexual Assault in LGBTIQ+SB Communities

A QLIFE GUIDE
FOR HEALTH AND
SOCIAL CARE
PRACTITIONERS,
SERVICE PROVIDERS,
AND FOLKS WHO
CARE

A note on language

The term 'survivor' is often used when referring to people who have experienced sexual violence as the term carries a measure of strength, perseverance, and empowerment, and is a reminder that they did survive the assault.

The term 'victim' is also used to emphasise that the person who has been assaulted is the victim of a serious crime and it was not their fault. This guide uses victim-survivor to acknowledge that someone can be either or both depending on the circumstance or their preference.

The term perpetrator is used for clarity and simplicity. Though many people prefer terms such as 'people who use abuse' which highlights the fact that violence is a choice.

In this QGuide we are using the acronym LGBTIQ+SB. LGBTIQ+SB stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Intersex, Queer, Sistergirls & Brotherboys. We use Sistergirls & Brotherboys to explicitly include LGBTIQ+ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities under the umbrella. The + aims to cover other sexualities and genders including Asexual, as an example, who are welcome at QLife. However, we acknowledge this is not ideal, and many community members have critiques of the acronym. We will continue to explore terminology over time.

What is sexual assault?

The general term 'sexual assault' is used to cover a range of sexual acts against a person's will or without consent. This includes situations where coercion, force, manipulation, threats or violence were used as well as situations where the victim is too young, intoxicated, scared or otherwise unable to give consent. It covers a wide range of unwanted sexual behaviours that can include:

- Rape.
- Incest (sex with a close relative).
- Unwanted kissing and touching.
- Forcing someone to watch pornography, sex or masturbation.
- Distributing sexual content of a person without their consent.
- 'Stealth' (when someone removes a condom during sex without the other person's knowledge or consent).
- Not paying an agreed price for sex work.

Child sexual assault is any sexual act imposed on a child by an adult, young person or older child. This guide uses the terms child and young person for people aged under 18 years. Child sexual assault can include:

- Exposing children to pornographic material or behaviours.
- Taking images of children for pornographic purposes.
- A person exposing their genitals or masturbating in front of a child.
- Touching a child or young person's genitals or in a sexual nature.
- Forcing or persuading a child to touch another person in a sexual nature.

Contact QLife

Health professionals wanting to know more can contact

ask@qlife.org.au

QLife is available 365 days a year, 3pm - midnight.

call 1800 184 527 | webchat

www.qlife.org.au

QLife acknowledges the Traditional Owners of country throughout this land now known as Australia, their diversity, histories and knowledge and their continuing connection to lands, waters and communities. Work for this QGuide was completed across Yuin, Gadigal, and Whadjuk Noongar Countries. QLife pays our respects to Elders and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples across this country we know as Australia. This QGuide was developed in collaboration with Kai Noonan.

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Sexual assault is not primarily about sexual desire or attraction, rather it is about power, control and harm. Perpetrators of sexual assault use sex to assert dominance and exert control over victims.

Someone sexually assaults another person to:

- *Control them.*
- *Feel powerful.*
- *'Punish' someone for a perceived grievance.*
- *Gain status amongst other violent peers.*

Some impacts of sexual assault within LGBTIQ+SB communities

- As with many other marginalised community groups, sexual violence impacts LGBTIQ+SB communities at higher rates than those in broader society. Within LGBTIQ+SB communities, individuals and groups of people who are from other marginalised groups are at an increased risk of abuse.
- Transgender women, especially trans women of colour, face disproportionate levels of violence which includes sexual violence.
- A perpetrator can target parts of the body that transgender and gender diverse people don't align with in an attempt to humiliate them, undermine their gender or disempower them.
- Many people believe that a woman or more feminine person cannot sexually assault another person, or that the harm caused is less severe. This results in additional challenges for a victim to seek help and to receive adequate support.
- Internalised homo/bi/inter/transphobia mean that many LGBTIQ+SB people feel like they deserved the assault, or that if they weren't LGBTIQ+SB then it would not have happened to them.

Some impacts of sexual assault within LGBTIQ+SB communities

- Due to internalised stereotypes about gay men and a lack of discussion about sexual assault in gay communities, many gay men try to make sense of a sexual assault by calling it a "bad sexual experience" and blame themselves for getting into the situation, especially if they were assaulted by someone they knew.
- Sexual assault can occur as a part of a hate crime as a form of discrimination, degradation, and humiliation.
- 'Corrective rape' is a form of rape perpetrated against someone because of their sexuality or gender identity. It is intended to force the victim to conform to heterosexuality or a normative gender identity.
- Some LGBTIQ+SB people do not want to publicly discuss sexual abuse for fear of further stigmatising the community.
- A culture of sexual liberation in some LGBTIQ+SB communities can be used as an excuse for sexual assault or can mask sexual assault from being recognised for what it is.
- Some ways and places that LGBTIQ+SB people engage in sexual acts place them at higher risk of being assaulted, such as sex on premise venues, 'party and play' events, hook-up apps and beats. People who are assaulted in these circumstances often blame themselves or accept it as a part of engaging in sex in these spaces.
- LGBTIQ+SB people are at higher risk of non-consensual sharing of intimate images and content as perpetrators might use their gender identity and/or sexuality against them through public shaming or outing them.
- Rigid gender norms can be used as validation for sexual assault, such as "tops have a right to sex over bottoms" or "gay men can't control their sexual urges".
- Whilst nuanced and ongoing conversations around consent are highly valued within genuine BDSM communities, some people carry out abusive behaviours under the guise of consensual BDSM. Involvement in BDSM communities can further stigmatise and make it difficult for people to reach out for help due to fear of blame and judgement.
- People who are sexually assaulted whilst doing sex work face additional barriers in seeking support due to the discrimination sex workers face in general and a societal belief that they deserved it.
- First Nations People, People of Colour and People with a Disability experience sexual violence at higher rates than the general population and have additional barriers to accessing services.



“To a certain extent, I think with hook-up culture and certain apps that are oriented towards immediate sexual gratification, I think you learn to expect to be frightened every now and then”

Source: Anonymous participant in community consultations conducted by LGBTIQ+ Health Australia, June 2024. Quoted with permission.

What are the challenges LGBTIQ+SB people face accessing support?

- Years of discrimination, shame, isolation and abuse may mean that LGBTIQ+SB people are less likely to seek help for an assault.
- Some services lack the knowledge and skills to adequately assist LGBTIQ+SB victim/survivors and perpetrators of sexual assault.
- Many LGBTIQ+SB people don't know which support services are inclusive of them.
- Many LGBTIQ+SB people have a well-founded fear of hostility and moral judgement and discrimination from police, health services and counsellors. This may prevent them from seeking assistance from mainstream support systems.
- Many services are promoted as victim support services for female victims of male assault.

How can you recognise that someone is a victim-survivor of sexual assault?

There is no 'right' way for a victim-survivor to respond to sexual assault. Every survivor's recovery from sexual assault will look different.

Many victim-survivors of sexual assault will not be able to recognise or name their experience as a sexual assault or they may take their time to disclose this. You should never pressure someone into disclosing or into describing details of the event.

A victim-survivor of sexual assault may:

- Feel numb.
- Be in denial.
- Feel shame or embarrassment.
- Blame themselves.
- Feel depressed or tired.
- Feel like they have lost control of their body and life or feel powerless.
- Distrust relationships and fear other people.
- Feel disoriented and confused.
- Feel anxious, overwhelmed or have panic attacks.
- Anger and feelings of revenge.
- Experience flashbacks or intrusive thoughts.
- Have blocked out details of the event or disassociated.
- Experience physical symptoms like a loss of appetite, headaches, trembling, gastrointestinal issues, aches and pains and insomnia.

Help them to understand that sexual assault is a trauma. Any symptoms they feel or reactions they are having are a normal response to an abnormal, traumatic event.