



Researching Same Sex Domestic Violence: Constructing a Survey Methodology

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Abstract

The article discusses the issues and problems that need to be addressed in the development of a comprehensive survey approach to explore same sex domestic violence in relationships involving individuals identifying as lesbian, gay male, bisexual, transgender or queer (LGBT&Q). It draws on the most detailed study to date in the UK comparing love and domestic violence in same-sex and heterosexual relationships. The survey methodology built on previous research, attempting in particular to overcome the limitations of earlier studies; and to produce data that could be compared with existing data on domestic violence in both heterosexual and LGBT&Q communities. The result was a questionnaire that reflected a wide range of abusive behaviours; examined impact of the violence alongside a quantification of particular acts; took into account experience of violence from a partner, as well as use of violence against that partner; and incorporated issues related to equality/inequality and dependency. The questionnaire was successfully distributed across the UK to provide a national 'same sex community' survey of problems in relationships and domestic violence.

Keywords: *Domestic Violence; Same Sex Relationships; Survey Method; Response Rates; Validity*

Introduction

1.1 This article discusses some key methodological issues arising from the development of a survey to explore domestic violence in same sex relationships in the UK. The article draws on the most detailed study to date in the UK comparing love and domestic violence in same sex and heterosexual relationships, funded by the ESRC (award RES-000-23-0650). The research used a multi-methodological approach involving a national same sex community survey plus focus groups and interviews with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBT&Q) individuals, and heterosexual women and men. This article focuses on the development of the same sex community survey. In designing the survey we had two objectives: to build on the work that has already been done, including learning from the methodological limitations of previous studies; and to produce data that could be compared with existing data on domestic violence in both

heterosexual and LGBT&Q communities. Our review of current literature together with our previous work on heterosexual domestic violence and same sex relationships led us to identify some areas of concern that we attempted to address in the design of this survey. That is, how we might:

- Move towards a representative sample.
- Define domestic violence.
- Compare experiences of domestic violence across same sex relationships, and between same sex and heterosexual relationships.
- Reflect a wide range of abusive behaviours.
- Examine impact of the violence alongside a quantification of particular acts.
- Take into account experience of violence from a partner, as well as use of violence against that partner.
- Incorporate issues related to equality/inequality and dependency.

1.2 We begin by outlining some of the previous studies and identifying some of the key limitations in them. The article then discusses in more detail how we attempted to address these problems in our approach.

Previous studies

2.1 While there is an extensive international literature on domestic violence in heterosexual relationships (Hester, 2004; Hester et al., 2007), research on domestic violence in same sex relationships has a more recent history and has tended to focus on lesbian relationships (McClennen, 2005). Studies from the US increasingly suggest that prevalence of domestic violence may be similar across same sex and heterosexual relationships, but what differs are help-seeking behaviours (McClennen, 2005). Even so, it can be difficult to make comparisons as studies on same sex domestic violence use a variety of methodologies and samples, and apply varying definitions of violence and abuse. Samples in research on same sex domestic violence have often been relatively small and purposive, reflecting the experiences of white, middle class, lesbians and gay men who are between the ages of 25-35 years and who are 'out' enough to engage with venues that carry and support the surveys being done. As a consequence, rates of incidence and prevalence have varied enormously across the studies. For example, in her review of the American literature, Turrell (2000) found prevalence rates for physical violence in lesbian relationships in the range of 8-69%; for sexual violence a range of 5-50%; and for emotional violence a range of 65-90%. By contrast the prevalence of physical violence in gay male relationships was in the range of 11-47% (Turrell, 2000). Waldner-Haugrud and colleagues (1997) found rates of physical violence of 47.5% in lesbian relationships and 29.7% in gay male relationships.

2.2 Few studies directly compare lesbian and gay male domestic violence, or attempt to compare abuse in same sex and heterosexual relationships. The study of 499 gay men, lesbians, bisexual and transgendered people by Turrell in the US (2000), involving a questionnaire survey, is one of the few to compare experiences of domestic violence across LGBT sexualities (see also Halpern et al., 2004). The national US Violence Against Women survey (NVAW) (Tjaden, 1999; Tjaden and Thoennes, 2000), which included a small sub-sample of individuals identifying as gay or lesbian, is one of the only studies to compare heterosexual and same sex samples. The NVAW survey found that in same sex relationships, male respondents were more likely than women to report violence from intimate partners; and that women in heterosexual relationships were the most likely to report violence (Tjaden, 1999). While the NVAW survey did include questions about injury caused, previous same sex studies have rarely attempted to explore the context in which the abusive behaviour researched took place or the impacts of such behaviour.

2.3 In the UK there has been a small number of local and national surveys and qualitative research exploring same sex domestic violence (Henderson, 2003; Stovold et al., 2005), and a number of postgraduate studies on abuse in lesbian relationships are underway. In general, these surveys have included very limited questions regarding domestic violence and have omitted exploration of contextual factors. The qualitative studies have tended to focus on lesbian relationships, involving small purposive samples. One of the earliest studies of same sex domestic violence in the UK using a survey approach was

commissioned by Stonewall in 1995. Taking a wide definition of domestic violence that included both intimate partners and other family members, the study found that '38% of LGBT people aged under 18 years experienced homophobic domestic violence and abuse from parents and family members' (Broken Rainbow, 2003:18). The Sigma surveys (Henderson 2003), which included a section on domestic violence in a gay men's health survey and questions about domestic violence in a separate questionnaire to lesbians distributed through Pride events, found that 22% of lesbians and 29% of gay men had experienced physical, mental or sexual abuse or violence from a regular same sex partner at some point. None of these surveys have taken into account the impact of the violent and abusive acts on those concerned.

2.4 The main prevalence data on domestic violence in the UK is derived from the British Crime Survey interpersonal violence module (Mirrlees-Black 1999; Walby and Allan, 2004). However, the British Crime Survey does not identify individuals in same sex relationships (although is likely to do so in future) and may currently be perceived as a 'heterosexual' sample. The Sigma surveys and British Crime Survey provide similar levels of prevalence of domestic violence where women are concerned, with the British Crime Survey (BCS) indicating that one in four women and one in six men report experiencing domestic violence at some time.

Using survey approaches

3.1 Much of the debate about use of surveys in researching domestic violence has focused on measures and approaches used in heterosexual surveys. However, similar measures have increasingly been used for same sex domestic violence surveys, and also need to be examined if comparison is to be made across heterosexual and same sex relationships. Consequently, many of the critiques in relation to heterosexual surveys are also of relevance to the development of a survey approach for same sex domestic violence.

Developing the questionnaire

4.1 Our questionnaire design involved mainly closed questions, and was comprised of six main sections that addressed the issues outline above. The sections were:

- 1. Personal Information
- 2. Your Relationship
- 3. Partner Behaviour (emotional/physical/sexual) – including impact
- 4. Seeking Help
- 5. Your Behaviour (emotional/physical/sexual) – including asking why they did this
- 6. Views and Opinions

4.2 It should be noted that we supplemented the survey data with in-depth interviews with a sub-sample of those LGBT&Q individuals who had responded to the questionnaire. These interviews allowed us to further examine the meanings ascribed to particular acts by the individuals experiencing them and to ask respondents how they had tackled particular questions in the questionnaire survey.

Demographics

4.3 The section on 'Personal Information' collected general demographic information on age, and ethnicity, religion, disability, income, accommodation and education. These were generally similar to the questions asked in the BCS, except in relation to gender, sexuality and children.

4.4 We opted for an open ended response to the question of 'gender' as closed questions may have excluded some self-definitions. For clarity there was a parenthesis with examples of what was required '(i.e. female/male/transgender)'.

4.5 With regard to sexuality it was important to be inclusive of all the LGBT&Q communities while obtaining useable data. In the pilot version of the questionnaire there were eight closed potential responses: Bisexual, Gay man, Gay woman, Homosexual, Lesbian, Queer, Heterosexual, and an open response for 'Other

(please state)'. Following the pilot it became clear that the 'Other (please state)' open question would be unmanageable and we decided to have an eighth closed 'Other' option. While the questionnaire was aimed at people with experience of same sex relationships, the 'Heterosexual' option was included to allow heterosexuals who had never had a same sex relationship to be screened out (see also Turrell, 2000).

4.6 From our previous work on domestic violence the existence of children had proved important across many different contexts (Hester and Pearson, 1997; Hester, 2006; Hester et al., 2007), and it was therefore decided to include questions about parenting of children. To reflect the possibly diverse family structures that may exist in relation to LGBT&Q communities (Weeks et al., 2001), in the pilot version of the questionnaire there was a table with seven questions on: age of child; whether the respondent were the biological parent; co-parent; legal parent/guardian; whether they lived together with children; if they had contact and whether children were from a current relationship. We also had each set of questions for up to eight children. After the pilot we decided that such a large amount of data on children was unnecessary and simplified the section to four questions:

- 1. Do you parent children? [closed yes / no response]
- 2. How many? [open ended response]
- 3. What ages are they? [open ended response]
- 4. Do they live with you? [3 closed response options: yes, all children; yes, some children; no]

4.7 The modifications provided basic information about children and living arrangements, which could be analysed in relation to questions on managing relationships and negotiations and behaviour within them, and with questions about abuse.

4.8 The section on 'Personal Information' also had a couple of questions asking if respondents were currently in a same sex relationship and if this was their first same sex relationship. Ristock's (2002) interviews with lesbians indicated that first same sex relationships may provide heightened risk for domestic violence and including this enabled testing of this issue across the wider LGBT&Q communities. Individuals in same sex relationship may enter these relationships later in life and sometimes after having heterosexual relationships. Thus, we needed to ask both about age of respondents and when someone entered a same sex relationship. We also asked about length of relationships and whether they lived together with their partner or not.

Defining domestic violence

4.9 How domestic violence is defined has a direct relationship to how it is measured; definitions have changed over time and in relation to different contexts (Hester, 2004). Based largely on heterosexual women's experiences, but also echoed by interviews with individuals in same sex relationships, domestic violence has increasingly been seen as involving a range of abusive behaviours – including physical, sexual and emotional. While criminal justice definitions emphasise individual acts of violence, feminist academics and practitioners may talk about domestic violence as ongoing patterns of coercive control involving a variety of violent and abusive behaviours. Also, as indicated above, some definitions include both intimate and familial abuse, while others focus on intimate partner violence (Hester et al., 2007).

4.10 The team drew on the understanding of domestic violence as the ongoing coercive control of one partner by another, which may be achieved through different means such as psychological or emotional abuse, physical or sexual violence or, as is more likely, a combination of these. We therefore needed to differentiate between relationships with systematic controlling behaviour and relationships in which violence and abuse may be evident but where one partner does not control the other. In other words, it may be that one or both partners use violence in their relationship but the impact is not a context where one partner lives in fear and is controlled by the other, that is, it is not 'situational terrorism' (Johnson, 2006). Thus, it is intentionality and impact that become especially significant. The survey therefore had to capture the incidence of domestic violence but also the meanings, intentions and outcomes of these abusive actions. For example, in relation to participants who indicated that they had experienced some of these abusive

behaviours against them, we wanted to ascertain whether they experienced these as 'coercive control' in its impact upon them. In relation to those respondents who had disclosed that they had used some of these abusive behaviours against their partners/s, we asked respondents to explain 'why' they had abused their partners and were given a choice of 21 closed responses from which to choose (they could opt for as many as applicable). It should also be noted that this question was only relevant to those who had identified that they had used emotional, physical or sexually abusive behaviours against any of their ex/partners. This question was important in differentiating between behaviour used by partners with the intention of harming or controlling their ex/partners and those behaviours used in self-defence, for example. This is a significant point of departure between our survey and some other surveys that are unable to differentiate between mutual abuse, aggressive abuse and actions carried out in self-defence. The implication in not doing so leads to data that misrepresents some actions as domestic violence when in fact, it was defensive behaviour.

Comparing experiences of domestic violence

4.11 To achieve comparison between same sex relationships, and with heterosexual relationship experiences, the survey drew on the British Crime Survey and its associated self-report module on domestic violence. We identified areas for replication, including time periods and violence/abuse types. Relevant US studies were also drawn on for development of same sex specific questions and items on decision-making and conflict resolution. We drew in particular the work by Renzetti (1992) and Turrell (2000), which allowed the questionnaire to move beyond the 'hetero-normative' approach of the BCS and to allow comparison across LGBT&Q relationships. This was done in a number of ways including, for example, questions relating to being 'outed', which are clearly irrelevant in surveys aimed at heterosexual populations.

Reflecting a wide range of abusive behaviours

4.12 From our previous research on domestic violence (McCarry, 2003, 2007; Radford and Hester, 2006) we were aware that questions regarding experiences of domestic violence needed to be both detailed and nuanced. Also that asking directly about 'domestic violence' risked alienating those people who did not identify themselves as being in an abusive relationship and those people who were perpetrating abuse within their relationships. Therefore, the survey was described as aiming to look at 'when things go wrong' in same sex relationships and the term domestic violence was deliberately not used in the survey until the last page.

4.13 The BCS design involves grouping together domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking, which echoes the US NWAV survey. However this refers to both intimate partner and non-partner violence (Walby and Allen, 2004), while we wanted to focus only on intimate partner violence. Three types of domestic violence are identified in the BCS covering emotional, physical and sexual behaviours. Where relevant to intimate partner violence we reflected this typology in our questionnaire.

4.14 To explore whether respondents had experienced a range of abuse the questionnaire included three subsections on emotional behaviour, physical behaviour and sexual behaviour, asking whether individuals had experienced any of these. In order to differentiate between the one-off incidents and ongoing patterns of behaviour responses were broken down into *Never*, *Sometimes* or *Often*. In addition, to be comparable with the BCS our questionnaire asked if these behaviours had been experienced in the *Last 12 Months* and *Before the Last 12 Months*.

4.15 Respondents were asked to affirm whether they had experienced any of the following emotional behaviours:

EMOTIONAL BEHAVIOUR

- Being isolated from friends and relatives
- Accused of not being a real gay man/ lesbian

- Being regularly insulted/put down
- Threatened with being 'outed'
- Your spending controlled
- Your property damaged/burnt
- Your pet abused
- Threats to harm someone close to you
- Made to do most of the housework
- Told what to do/who to see
- Malicious/pestering phone calls
- Blamed for partner's self-harm
- Your age/ class/ race / education/ religion/ disability/ sexuality used against you
- Being frightened by things your partner says/does
- Blamed for your partner's misuse of alcohol/drugs
- Your medicines withheld
- Threats to hurt your children
- Your children actually hurt
- Threats to 'out' you to lose your children

4.16 Many of the questions on emotional behaviour in our questionnaire reflected those used in the BCS including questions about being isolated and financial control. However, a distinction between the BCS and our survey was the inclusion of questions that were directly targeted towards the same sex community about being 'outed' and having sexuality used as forms of abuse. We also included questions from surveys with gay men that particularly related to HIV related abuse, e.g. withdrawing medicines, whilst recognising that this kind of abusive behaviour could be used in relation to any health condition where medication is used. These questions were designed to reflect the particular experiences of individuals identifying as LGBT&Q, and thus took the questionnaire beyond the heteronormative.

4.17 Respondents were asked to affirm whether they had experienced any of the following physical behaviours:

PHYSICAL BEHAVIOUR

- Slapped
- Punched
- Restrained
- Strangled
- Physically threatened
- Pushed
- Beaten Up
- Held Down
- Suffocated
- Prevented from getting help for injuries
- Shoved
- Burned
- Tied Up
- Stalked
- Threatened with an object / weapon
- Kicked
- Bitten
- Choked
- Locked In House
- Hit with an object / weapon

These were similar to behaviours asked about in the BCS.

4.18 Respondents were asked to affirm whether they had experienced any of the following sexual behaviours:

SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR

- Touched in a way that caused fear / alarm / distress
- Had sex for the sake of a quiet life
- Forced into sexual activity
- Sexually assaulted / abused in any way
- Your request for safer sex refused
- Threats to sexually assault / abuse you
- Had 'safe' words / boundaries disrespected
- Raped

4.19 The BCS questions on rape and sexual assault accommodate the new 2003 *Sexual Offences Act* definitions of rape. According to the Act, whilst both a woman and a man can be a victim of rape, it remains that only a man can commit rape. To incorporate the experiences of women who felt they had been raped in a lesbian relationship, our questions needed to be open enough so that women could define their own experiences and not be excluded because of proscribed gendered definitions. Also, while both heterosexual and LGBT&Q individuals may participate in sado-masochistic sexual activities, there has been much more debate about issues of consensual and non-consensual behaviour in this regard and in relation to sexual experiences more widely within the LGBT&Q community. Questions about breach of safer sex and safe words were thus included (both in relation to this and to sexual experiences more widely), and were deemed important in discussions with the LGBT&Q community during the pilot phase. This is a key area that differentiates our questionnaire from the BCS and again, moves beyond the heteronormative.

4.20 In order to check whether respondents who had answered affirmatively to experiencing any of the abusive behaviours might also consider that their experiences constituted 'domestic violence', we included a further question towards the end of the questionnaire that explicitly asked if the respondent had ever experienced domestic violence in a same sex relationship.

Incorporating context

4.21 Much of the research on heterosexual domestic violence and the surveys on same sex domestic violence, especially in the US, has been based on the Conflict Tactics Scale, relying on a hierarchy of behaviours without context or anticipated effect of a particular violent act (Straus, 1999; Greenwood et al., 2002). In an attempt to provide replicable data on the incidence and prevalence of interpersonal violence, Straus, Gelles and Steinmetz (1979) developed the Conflict Tactics Scales (CTS) as a measure to quantify the amount and type of violence used in interpersonal relationships. In its original format the CTS monitored how many times a man or woman had been violent towards their partner in the previous twelve months and how often the partner had been violent towards them in the same time period. Only one half of the couple were asked to fill in the scale and the total sample was split equally between female and male. The measurements on the scale ranged from 'verbal reasoning' to 'verbal aggression' and 'physical aggression' (Johnson, 1998: 27). The outcome of using this methodology led the researchers to conclude that heterosexual women and men were equally violent and that this type of interpersonal violence could be conceptualised as 'mutual combat' (Straus, 1999).

4.22 There were many criticisms of the CTS including that it initially addressed only physical violence without including emotional abuse (Dobash and Dobash, 1992). There was no consideration of the impact of the violence on the victim/survivor, for instance no differentiation between a push and severe physical violence leading to hospitalisation. In response to this, Straus and colleagues developed the CTS2, in which they added questions relating to sexual violence and created differential 'levels' of violence, particularly in

relation to any injuries sustained (Straus, 1999).

4.23 However, despite the modifications there are still many criticisms of the CTS and of methods derived from the CTS framework (see Kurz, 1993; Nazroo, 1995; Dobash and Dobash, 2000; Kimmel, 2002). The CTS questions, although extended to include sexual abuse, have continued to focus largely on physical forms of abuse. Also, using this type of survey approach leads to a somewhat 'positivist' outcome where the ways in which people respond to surveys, the meanings attached to particular questions, and the impacts of abuse, are still omitted. Evidence from qualitative research, for instance, suggests that women and men in heterosexual relationships answer questions about abuse in different ways, with women tending to over state their violence against their partners and men tending to under estimate (Hearn, 1996). While it is not clear that there are similar gender differences in our survey data, the in-depth semi-structured interviews with a sub-sample of the survey population indicate that some respondents were minimising or underreporting some of their abusive experiences. For example, some of the men in the survey disclosed that they had been subject to 'forced sexual activity' but did not identify this as rape, however, in the in-depth interview the men named their experience as rape.

4.24 The Sigma research in the UK (Henderson, 2003), mentioned above, used a CTS type approach and did not ask about the impact or intentions related to the abuse. While questions are asked about wider forms of violence and abuse in relation to controlling behaviour, the focus is on closed ('yes / no') responses that are devoid of context. As a result it is not possible to differentiate between hitting someone as part of wider controlling behaviours, that is as a part of ongoing domestic violence, or hitting as a means to prevent being assaulted, that is as an act of self-defence.

4.25 In the UK the CTS approach has also been used in the BCS to assess frequency of domestic violence, although with increasing recognition that 'the CTS concentrates on the perpetrator's actions to the exclusion of the impact and consequences' and 'tends to generate a spurious gender symmetry that vanishes if and when the impact of the act is brought into focus' (Walby and Allen, 2004: 37). By taking such 'contextual' factors into consideration, the BCS concludes that prevalence data provides a very partial picture of experience of domestic violence. (Heterosexual) men and women actually experience very different levels of severity and of impact of domestic violence, with women experiencing both the greater severity and impact (Walby and Allen, 2004).

4.26 In our questionnaire, to explore the impact that abusive behaviours may have had on the respondent, the three sub-sections on abusive behaviours (physical, emotional and sexual) also included questions about the effects of the different behaviours. The BCS also considers impacts but focuses primarily on physical injuries, although does include the percentage of men and women who have reported suffering mental or emotional problems. Our questions with regard to impact were as follows:

IMPACT

- Didn't have an impact
- Made you feel loved / wanted
- Lost respect for your partner
- Made you want to leave your partner
- Emotional / sleeping problems / depression
- Stopped trusting people
- Stopped trusting partner
- Felt unable to cope
- Felt worthless / lost confidence
- Felt sadness
- Felt anxious / panic / lost concentration
- Felt embarrassed / stupid
- Felt isolated / stopped going out
- Felt angry / shocked

- Self-harmed / felt suicidal
- Worried partner might leave you
- Defended yourself / children / property / pets
- Feared for your life
- Retaliated by shouting at partner
- Retaliated by hitting your partner
- Affected sexual side of your relationship
- Worked harder to make partner happy
- Worked harder to stop making mistakes
- Felt had to watch what you say / do
- Lost contact with your children
- Negatively affected your children
- Negatively affected your relationship with children

Echoing the BCS, respondents were also asked if they would define their experiences as 'a crime', as 'wrong but not a crime', as 'just something that happens' or 'none of these'.

4.27 In order to allow analysis of 'mutual' as distinct from uni-directional 'situational terrorism' (Johnson, 1995; 2006) the penultimate section of the questionnaire asked questions to elicit if any of our respondents were perpetrators of domestic violence. Respondents were again asked about emotional behaviour, physical behaviour and sexual behaviour, and in relation to the *Last 12 Months* and also *Before the Last 12 Months*. Qualitative evidence from heterosexual relationships also suggests that women are rarely the initiators of violence and are more likely to be acting in self-defence (Dobash and Dobash, 2000; Kimmel, 2002). These critiques raise questions about whether individuals from LGBT&Q sexualities may answer questions in different ways, or whether self-defence is a gender or sexuality-related issue. To distinguish possibly retaliatory or self-defensive behaviours from those used to more directly control a partner, in our survey respondents were asked why they did these things via a list where they could tick as many options that applied:

WHY DID YOU DO IT?

- Because you loved / cared for them
- Made you feel in control
- Because they were laughing at you
- Because they betrayed / rejected you
- Because they hit you first
- To protect yourself from them
- To retaliate against them
- To protect your children / family / pets / friends / property
- To prevent them harming themselves
- Because of your emotional problems
- Because you didn't trust them
- Because of your alcohol / drug use
- Because of previous experience of abuse
- You were unhappy in the relationship
- You were unhappy in work / life
- To stop them leaving you
- Didn't feel good enough / felt insecure
- Because you were jealous / possessive
- Because you didn't know what else to do
- Because that's how things are in our relationship

Gender, power and dependency

4.28 Frameworks linking gender and power have been seen as especially important in understanding heterosexual domestic violence, especially in feminist approaches, and in the UK and elsewhere a whole raft of policy and agency practices have developed from this approach (Hester, 2004; Hague and Malos, 2006). While some studies have argued that the feminist gender and power models may be applied to lesbian domestically abusive relationships (Renzetti, 1992), there have also been wider critiques regarding the relevance of this explanatory model for same sex relationships (e.g. Island and Lettelier, 1991; Ristock, 2002).

4.29 Renzetti's (1992) study on violence and abuse within lesbian relationships, was one of the first to explore issues regarding gender and power in a same sex context. Renzetti concluded that despite a lack of pre-existing gender power roles to constrain them, power and power relations were still an extremely significant aspect of the relationships of the lesbians she interviewed, in terms of who perpetrated the violence and abuse. Not only did she find a link between power imbalances and propensity to be the abusive partner, but also that the greater the disparity of power, the more severe the physical and psychological abuse (Renzetti, 1992). Moreover, 'the factor that in this study was most strongly associated with abuse was partners' relative dependency on one another' (Renzetti, 1992: 116). This is an issue that has also been explored by others using qualitative approaches with lesbian samples (Lockhart et al., 1994). However, it has not similarly been explored in relation to gay men, nor incorporated in survey approaches.

4.30 With regard to the notion of dependency we were interested in exploring the decision making processes which occur in relationships and how conflicts or disagreements are resolved, and incorporated a set of questions to this effect. Drawing on the work of Turrell (2000) and Renzetti (1992), we attempted to explore how relationships operate and whether one partner has or takes on more decision making responsibilities. This led to 23 closed questions about decision-making, where the respondent was asked whether it was usually them that made decisions, their partner, or whether decisions were made equally between them. We had questions relating to living arrangements; domestic tasks; socialising; leisure time; employment; pets; clothing and hair styles; finances; sex; and children. Respondent were asked whether any of these decision-making roles caused resentment or disagreement. In order to contextualise this decision-making section we further explored how often the respondent disagreed with their partner over certain issues relating to employment; jealousy; children; sex; friends; relatives; socialising and being out, again presented as a set of closed questions. Questions were also asked about how these disagreements might be resolved to ascertain the nature of the relationship – whether mutual agreements were made or whether there was a more unequal decision-making process. Thus, we asked how the respondent resolved a range of issues, choosing between: Avoid the topic/change the subject; Talk it through together; Seek support from family/friends; End up agreeing with partner; Reach a compromise; Give in to keep the peace; Argue until one of you wins; and lastly there was a 'not applicable' option if they believed that they never had disagreements.

Lack of representative samples

5.1 One area where a survey approach to same sex domestic violence poses particular, and unique problems is with regard to sampling. Much of the previous literature on same sex domestic violence talks about 'prevalence' of abuse. However, given the 'hidden' nature of this population it is not possible to obtain representative samples of individuals who are in same sex relationships or otherwise define as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer (Heaphy et al, 1998; Turrell, 2000). Also, domestic violence is a sensitive topic and one that is only very recently becoming identified as an issue within LGBT&Q communities in Britain. Moreover, identifying a geographical area in which to survey LGBT&Q communities may well compromise respondents' confidentiality.

5.2 We decided to carry out a large UK-wide 'community' survey as the most ethical alternative to a representative sample. To maximise the sample we developed an extensive network of contacts (over 220) with LGBT&Q and domestic violence organisations across Scotland, Northern Ireland, Wales, North-East England, North-West England, Central England, South-West England and South-East England including London, using internet searches, LGBT&Q literature, national helplines, the media and personal contacts.

5.3 Dissemination involved distribution of hard copies of the questionnaire, and a web-based version. A thousand initial copies of the questionnaire with self-addressed envelopes were distributed via supportive organisations, and 208 completed questionnaires returned within a period of four months (20% return rate). Additionally we distributed an identical web-based questionnaire, designed using ACCESS (Couper et al., 2001; Moon, 2005), via supportive websites and emailing lists. While we initially developed the web-based version as a 'back-up', we were surprised to find that this approach proved the most effective method of obtaining a large sample in a short period of time. It is not possible to calculate a response rate with this method, however, it resulted in 592 responses within three to four months (compared with the 208 received in hard copy). No significant differences were found between the 'hard copy' and 'web-based' sub-samples. The web-based survey was identical to the hard copy and enabled respondents to complete the questionnaire using the internet. The link for the online survey together with an advert for the research was sent to numerous organisations for them to display on their websites, as well as distributing via e-mail lists. The online survey could also be found by using the Google search engine.

5.4 A total sample of 800 responses was obtained, from which 54 cases were removed because: their sexuality was unknown; or they had not had a same sex relationship; or they identified as heterosexual and that they had never had a same sex relationship. This resulted in a final data set of 746 individuals.

Concluding comments

6.1 Finally, while this article does not discuss the findings from the survey, it is useful here to say a little more about the nature of the sample that resulted (Donovan et al., 2006).

6.2 We were concerned that it would be difficult to obtain a representative sample, and concerned in any case that it is not possible to know with any accuracy what a LGBT&Q representative sample might look like. Even so, the resulting sample in some respects echoes the general population norms of the UK and can perhaps therefore be considered 'representative', although with some serious caveats. Women were the largest group of respondents, and constituted nearly two-thirds of the sample (60.5%, n=451 women and 37.5%, n=280 men). Others have also found that it is easier to engage women in such surveys (Turrell, 2000). Women were most likely to identify as 'lesbian', and men as 'gay man'. Four transgendered individuals identified as bisexual, gay woman, lesbian and queer. Our study involved a much wider range of ages than the Sigma UK surveys (Henderson, 2003), although a similar age range to the survey in the US by Turrell (2000). Ages of our respondents ranged from under 16 years to late 60s, with most in their 20s and 30s.

6.3 The survey reflected the ethnic composition of the UK population as determined through comparison with the 2001 Census from which we based our ethnic categorisations. An overwhelming proportion of respondents identified as white (94.8% compared to 92.2% in Census). The proportions identifying as mixed or Chinese were also similar. However, our survey had considerably smaller proportions of Asian or Black respondents than the Census data. As our survey did not subdivide the categories of Asian or Black, which was the case in the Census, this may account for part of the discrepancy.

6.4 The respondents declaring a disability was slightly lower than the UK figures generally (11.1% compared to 18.2% in the 2001 Census), although our question was more narrowly defined. We asked the question 'do you have a disability' while Census respondents were asked whether they had a long-term illness, health problems or disability that limited their ability to work or their daily activities.

6.5 The income level was slightly higher than the population generally and reflected the UK income inequality between men and women, with the biggest group of men earning £21-30k, and the biggest group of women earning £11-20k. One in five women parented children (21.7%) and only 7.2% of the men. Most respondents (86.5%) had been in a same sex relationship during the past 12 months, and most were currently in such a relationship (70.5%). Men predominated in shorter relationships, lasting up to one year, but also in relationships lasting two to five years or more than 20 years; women had longer relationships, between one and twenty years (Chi-square: $X^2=15.503$, $p=.03$).

6.6 Given the wide range of questions and relative complexity of the questionnaire, we were concerned about the reliability of the data but upon analysis the data appeared to be both reliable and valid. To seek the validity and reliability of the items relating to abusive experiences and impact of abuse both separate and combined scales were developed. Five scales were created; three separate scales relating to emotional, physical, and sexual abuse, a combined scale including the three items, and a scale relating to abuse by the respondent, and were found to be reliable at >.8 using Cronbach's Alpha.

6.7 Where reported levels of experience of domestic violence are concerned, 38.4% said that they had experienced domestic violence at some time in a same sex relationship. This is higher than the BCS reported prevalence for (ostensibly) heterosexual women, and much higher than the BCS reported prevalence for (ostensibly) heterosexual men, but not one of the highest levels when considered in relation to the general literature (see above). This suggests that our approach of presenting the survey as examining 'problems in relationships' rather than 'domestic violence' may have provided a sample that tended towards representation of at least the lesbian and gay male population.

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