

**Respect  
Victoria**

**Preventing  
Family  
Violence**

# **COVID-19 LGBTIQ+ Family Violence Prevention Project Prevention in the Pandemic**

## COVID-19 LGBTIQ+ Family Violence Prevention Project: Prevention in the Pandemic

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic is having a significant impact on people's lives and wellbeing around the world.

The pandemic has exacerbated social and economic inequalities and globally, rates of family violence have surged.

For people who are LGBTIQ+ in Victoria, especially those who experience multiple forms of discrimination and health and wellbeing inequalities, COVID-19 has also exacerbated the drivers of family violence.

**This research seeks to explore the ways in which disasters and emergency situations like COVID-19 affect LGBTIQ+ communities, and to assist in the development of family violence prevention policies, programs and resources.**

It is concerned with the ways the pandemic has impacted LGBTIQ+ people, with a focus on intimate, family, caring and domestic relationships. The research prioritised consultation with LGBTIQ+ people with intersecting experiences and identities, including gender, sexuality, race, disability, health vulnerabilities, age and experience of sex work.

Responding to a gap in knowledge on the impact of disasters on marginalised communities, Respect Victoria funded drummond street services' **Centre for Family Research and Evaluation** in partnership with **The Gender and Disaster Pod** to deliver this primary prevention research. Research was conducted between June and September 2020. The project comprised a desktop review, nine focus groups and ten interviews with 42 participants, including 29 LGBTIQ+ community members and 13 sector professionals with family violence and LGBTIQ+ expertise.

### **A note on LGBTIQ+ family violence**

Family violence can occur in all relationships, including in LGBTIQ+ relationships and in families where one or more LGBTIQ+ person is present. This research contends that society is built on patriarchal systems including heteronormativity and cisnormativity, and practices and beliefs that are rooted in hierarchies of power. It is these structural inequalities that generate different forms of discrimination including homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, racism, ableism and ageism. These varying forms of structural discrimination set a context in which LGBTIQ+ family violence occurs.

### **Key findings**

The COVID-19 pandemic and its related restrictions has impacted the everyday lives of LGBTIQ+ people. This research found that the experiences of LGBTIQ+ people have been influenced by the intersection of personal, relational, community and structural factors. The result is multiple and compounding forms of discrimination experienced by LGBTIQ+ people, particularly for those who identify with other marginalised communities.

Why is this important for understanding family violence? Social inequality and discrimination provide the context in which LGBTIQ+ family violence exists. The pandemic has amplified existing inequalities like homophobia, transphobia, racism, ageism, ableism and gender inequality. This means dismantling the power imbalances that create these inequalities is critical to preventing LGBTIQ+ family violence.

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### Impacts at a structural level

The research found that multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination mean some LGBTIQ+ people are at heightened risk of family violence under the COVID-19 pandemic, including:

- › **Young people.** Many have needed to return to homes where family members are unsupportive of their gender or sexual identity.

“**Lots of young people living at home with parents are really struggling at the moment... Not only have you lost your job or your social life, but now you have to be slapped with your homophobic parent also.**

- › **Trans and gender diverse people.** Including increased community surveillance, restrictions on access to medical services, isolation and job losses amongst those who already face extensive workplace discrimination.

- › **People who have lost their jobs.** Many are coping with poor mental health and new power dynamics in their homes, including dependence on family, partners and other domestic relationships.

- › **Temporary migrants, international students and sex workers.** Unable to access government supports, they are financially vulnerable.

“**There's the people from Middle Eastern backgrounds with an LGBT community already facing a stigma... This was before the pandemic, and now it's adding another chunk, and for being bisexual, it's a third chunk, and you're living in a country with a lot of restrictions (sic), who've got a lot of limitation for internationals (sic).**

**They pretend that everything is available and supportive, but it's not.**

- › **People with immunocompromised health or disability.** Heightened levels of isolation due to increased risks associated with leaving the home and reduced access to formal supports. This has increased strain or dependence on family, partners and other domestic relationships

“**Being a wheelchair user, it's doubly complicated because I need support to do a lot of things. I've cut down a lot on support to try and cut down my risk, which then puts pressure on my parents and my mental health and everything else.**

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### Impacts of at the individual and relationship level

LGBTIQ+ people are experiencing isolation from friends, family and the LGBTIQ+ community. Some have the added isolation of living alone or being a new migrant, without family or support networks.

**It's just been harder to have a healthy relationship with people.**

Job losses, financial pressures and mental health distress increase the pressure and strain on domestic relationships. The impact of employment loss can include a reversion to traditional heteronormative gender roles, or for young people, the need to move back in with their family of origin – in many cases increasing the risk of family violence.

**There's been stresses around boundaries and things like that, more arguing definitely.**

These experiences are exacerbated as LGBTIQ+ people have notably higher rates of pre-existing mental health issues, experiences of stigma, limited social networks and higher workforce participation in industries significantly impacted by the pandemic.

**Although I'm very grateful that I'm still working, there are stresses around that. I find that there's at least two extra hours that I'm doing that I would have been doing face to face, and that brings its own stresses into the house, yeah.**

The research also demonstrates the resilience of LGBTIQ+ people, with some reporting that the pandemic has created new opportunities for their relationships to thrive.

**I also volunteer for an LGBT organization, and not being able to volunteer has made me feel quite isolated. So, being stuck at home, yeah, it's been challenging because I live with my family and I'm not out to all of my family members, and it feels like I'm kind of back in the closet.**

**If we can survive this, I think we could probably survive a lot of things. It's been very challenging, but then I guess quite rewarding as well. That's a positive.**

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### Impacts at the community level

Throughout the pandemic LGBTIQ+ people have been impacted by pervasive patriarchal norms including heteronormativity, cisnormativity and racism. These provide the context in which family violence and other forms of violence and discrimination occur.

### Resilience

Despite the isolation, online platforms have helped LGBTIQ+ people connect with friends, family and community. Participants highlighted increased opportunities to connect with LGBTIQ+, disability and neuro-diverse groups and communities.

### Impacts on services

Under the COVID-19 pandemic and associated restrictions, LGBTIQ+ services are responding to a variety of increased risk factors for family violence. These include financial distress, mental health distress, use of alcohol and other drugs, social isolation, and relationship conflict (including for at risk youth). LGBTIQ+ people at risk of family violence face barriers to accessing services. Many LGBTIQ+ services are under-resourced and have long waitlists. Mainstream family violence services are often not inclusive of LGBTIQ+ identities and experiences.

Responding to the question about what types of support services they would recommend, one participant shared:

**I became more connected with the LGBTIQ community, because a lot more stuff moved online. So, I've never felt more connected as what I have now with my people, also in the autism community and in the disability community...**

**I don't feel so alone now living in a rural town away from a lot of people.**

**[W]here you don't have to explain your queerness... I don't find it helpful... I don't want to have to educate the person I'm talking to.**

**I'm part of the LGBTIQ community, I'm part of the disability community, I'm Aboriginal ... I live in a rural and remote area ... It's like COVID-19 has exacerbated racism, misogyny, transphobia, all of that stuff. It's like it's just hit in this one big social media space ... people are not responding in the best of ways ... I've had to really mind my self-care when it comes to social media.**

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Despite the challenges, service providers are adapting to COVID-19 restrictions. Telehealth has proved helpful, particularly improving accessibility for people from regional areas and people with a disability.

Service providers spoke about the lessons mainstream family violence prevention can take from the experience of LGBTIQ+ community. Less rigid gender roles and shared labour in the home were cited as strengths within LGBTIQ+ relationships.

**I normally see a psychologist who I travel for three hours return drive to see, because that's the closest one I can access. A bonus was I didn't have to drive to see them, so that saved on travel time and energy to do that, which I thought was absolutely great, because they've never offered the Zoom option before.**

**We are getting anecdotal reports of, say, same-sex couples who have, saying, 'We've always shared the labour and it's not an issue.' There might be more labour, but it's shared equally. There is much more capacity to share labour already in the relationships, and so that's a prevention message for mainstream.**

The research report has produced recommendations to inform the development of Respect Victoria resources for primary prevention of family violence. It will assist in the ongoing development of primary prevention policies, programs and resources to address LGBTIQ+ family violence in disaster and emergency situations.

You can read the full research report on the [Respect Victoria website](#).

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