

# New York Blade

Friday, March 18, 2005

## ***Gay domestic violence: the hidden epidemic – One reason why it is so hard to find out how many gay men are battered by their mates is that we'd rather not know about it.***

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### ***EDITORIAL***

According to a one study, domestic violence occurs just as often among gay couples as it does among heterosexuals. In fact, according to the research funded in part by the National Institutes of Health in 2004, more than a fifth of the 2,881 men surveyed in New York, Chicago, San Francisco, and Los Angeles had been physically abused by an intimate partner during the previous five years.

This study demonstrates that intimate partner abuse among urban MSM (men who have sex with men) is a very serious public health problem, wrote the researchers in the December issue of the American Journal of Public Health. It sheds light on a subject that has long been taboo - that is, men are also victims of battering and not solely perpetrators.

In March 2004, there was a meeting in Calgary, Canada, of the Alberta Roundtable on Family Violence and Bullying. One of the speakers of over 200 representatives of service agencies, government, police, health care providers, and survivors of abuse, was psychologist Jane Oxenbury.

She said that at least 33 percent of people in homosexual relationships are, in fact, abused - a rate comparable to heterosexual relationships.

Oxenbury also said that she was encouraged with the progress that's being made in the area of domestic violence, but is hoping the cause of gay and lesbian victims won't be lost in translation.

The problem for us is that it is still hard to report a problem to the traditional authorities. We are often worried that the person would not believe us, and for those who are still in the closet, we are concerned that we cannot talk about this without coming out about who we are.

Some of us may even fear that our own community may disown us. After domestic violence has occurred, victims may be afraid they may lose their community or that their friends will choose the abuser.

The abuser may threaten to tell friends or family that the victim is gay. A victim's partner may be the only link in the victim's life that is associated with the gay community. That's where the problem starts.

Some people in abusive relationships will not report abuse because cops often will not know whom to arrest in a situation such as this. Victims are often left by police or arrested, thus creating more trauma. It's traumatizing as a victim when you are trying to get assistance from an officer.

Outside of the gay and lesbian anti-violence groups, there aren't many organizations out there that provide services to gay and lesbian people, specifically in dealing with domestic abuse.

The issue here isn't whether domestic abuse occurs in our community, but what we are going to do about it. Though help may seem so far away when you are a gay or lesbian victim of domestic abuse, there is help there.

It is imperative that you find it before it is too late. There have been a few cases here in the states and in Canada where gay and lesbian couples have been to court regarding domestic abuse.

Though the courts in Canada are far more sensitive to the issue of abuse in alternative homes, here in the states there is still a sense of hope and faith in a judicial system.

Plenty of places do exist where you can find help. The most notable organization is the local Gay and Lesbian Anti-Violence Organization.

It is important to know that you are not alone and that there is never any reason good enough for a partner to physically abuse you. We know that gay male domestic violence exists.

We know it shares similarities with heterosexual domestic violence and also has unique issues and qualities. We know gay victims want and need help.

As individuals, we can open our eyes and our hearts to our neighbors and friends experiencing this very real tragedy. Our efforts also must have the foundation of our community, appreciating that once we have the understanding and support of the gay community we will have a network of resources second to none and most importantly, the silence will be broken.

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