



IMPROVING THE AVAILABILITY AND IMPACT OF VICTIM SUPPORT SERVICES

The training needs of professionals working with LGBTI victims of gender-based violence

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Summary

The aim of the project *Look Wide: Developing a working method to support LGBTI victims of gender-based violence by integrating gender and sexual diversity* is to develop working methods for social services to make services focusing on victims of GBV more accessible for LGBTI people by integrating sexual and gender diversity into existing working methods and approaches. Project partners have been working on local and joint **needs assessment** to find out how this can be achieved and explore the specific needs of LGBTI people who have been exposed to violence.

Major results of partners' studies are:

- **violence is present in many LGBTI people's lives:** in public and community spaces (schools, workplace, housing and streets) as well as in their families and intimate partnerships, and even public institutions;
- European and national **legislative provisions** confer protection against each type of violence, and **victim support services** operate in each partner country;
- there is, however, much work **to secure immediate, comprehensive, real and effective protection** for LGBTI victims of violence, as well as to secure their **right to information** regarding support services;
- although traditionally linked to violence against women, **GBV also affects those perceived as not conforming to prevailing sexual and gender norms**, and the spectrum of specialized services for victims of GBV needs to be broadened;
- **counsellors must learn more** about structural violence and minority stress, as well as about particularly vulnerable groups like LGBTI youth and transgender and/or nonbinary people, and find new ways to reach out to people who are more difficult to access.

Introduction

The project *Look Wide: Developing a working method to support LGBTI victims of gender-based violence by integrating gender and sexual diversity* focuses on enhancing the capacity of victim support service providers operating services for victims of GBV to work in a more inclusive way with LGBTI victims. Thus partners performed a needs assessment analysis based on research and interviews in their respective countries.

Results show that violence is present in all spheres of the lives of LGBTI people:

- in public and community spaces (schools, workplaces and the labour market, in the streets as well as housing settings);
- in intimate relationships and family (domestic violence, intimate partner violence);
- and also at institutions (healthcare, administration).

Certain groups of the LGBTI spectrum (e.g. trans people and/or youth) are especially vulnerable because of an intersection of several elements like social and economic status.

Legislation usually offers defense against each type of violence (domestic violence against same-sex partners, hate crimes, discrimination and harassment in public institutions and at work), and there are also victim support services. However, most LGBTI victims of violence do not report incidents.

According to research, the reasons for this may be:

- limited knowledge of victims about their rights and the legal framework,
- the fear of being discriminated against,
- being afraid to come out in a not LGBTI-affirmative environment,
- and lack of trust in the legal system and service providers.

How can victim support service providers ensure LGBTI clients' right to immediate, comprehensive, real and effective protection, as well as the right to information about these?

The results of partners' research showed that victim support service providers need specific training on LGBTI issues as well as the development of their skills when working with LGBTI people. Enhancing the quality of their services would probably also enhance reporting and decrease the invisibility of violence against LGBTI people.

The following training needs of victim support service providers were identified:

- providers of psychological and legal support need practical focused trainings, also focusing on specific groups such as trans people, intersex people, non-binary people and youth;
- staff working at the public sector and authorities (in the areas of health, education and law enforcement) need intersectional approaches to reflect upon their own privilege and prejudices and avoid secondary victimisation;
- trainings must include considering ways to increase the accessibility of services;
- trainings should enable service providers to recognize structural violence (that is, when social structures perpetuate inequality): counsellors must know how GBV (including discrimination, violence, troubled family connections, unemployment, all causing mental health problems, minority stress, etc.) often affects LGBTI people and how these interact if more than one type of violence is present (e.g. bias-motivated bullying by schoolmates, domestic violence and intimate partner violence);
- counselling must focus on self-empowerment, as it is particularly important for people who have experienced violence (which generally results in a restriction of people's ability to act and can lead them to feel helpless); supporting people in feeling empowered and noticing their own potential is one of the main aims of counselling;
- counsellors need to know that LGBTI victims of GBV may come for a specific reason, but they

may also carry the burden of past traumas which also needs to be treated.

Stakeholders managing victim support services must realize that

- the visibility of victim support services needs to be greatly improved;
- youth are particularly vulnerable, and there are even less services accessible to them, so specific measures targeting youth are necessary;
- the digital realm of victim support needs to be improved for better accessibility, so that more people can be reached via digital practices, e.g. live chat or emails; development in this area would necessitate further training specifically for this kind of counseling;
- improved data collection e.g. on the prevalence of bullying, hate speech and hate crimes is important to know more about GBV;
- prevention is of primary importance in the treatment of GBV.

Civil society organizations

Because of deficiencies of the available public support services, CSOs often try to fill the gap. Indeed, in many places voluntary-based CSOs appear to be the main delegated institutions in charge of service provision, with limited capabilities in terms of time and resources.

- CSO-maintained services also need specialised employee training on the special needs of LGBTI victims of GBV as well as on especially vulnerable and often multiple-discriminated subgroups under the LGBTI umbrella;
- given the lack of resources, coordination and cooperation, networking and referral systems are also of primary importance;
- the visibility of GBV directed at LGBTI people should be enhanced by CSO-maintained services, too;
- the very concept and manifestation of violence and structural violence has to be more systematically communicated for the LGBTI community.

Project partners:

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