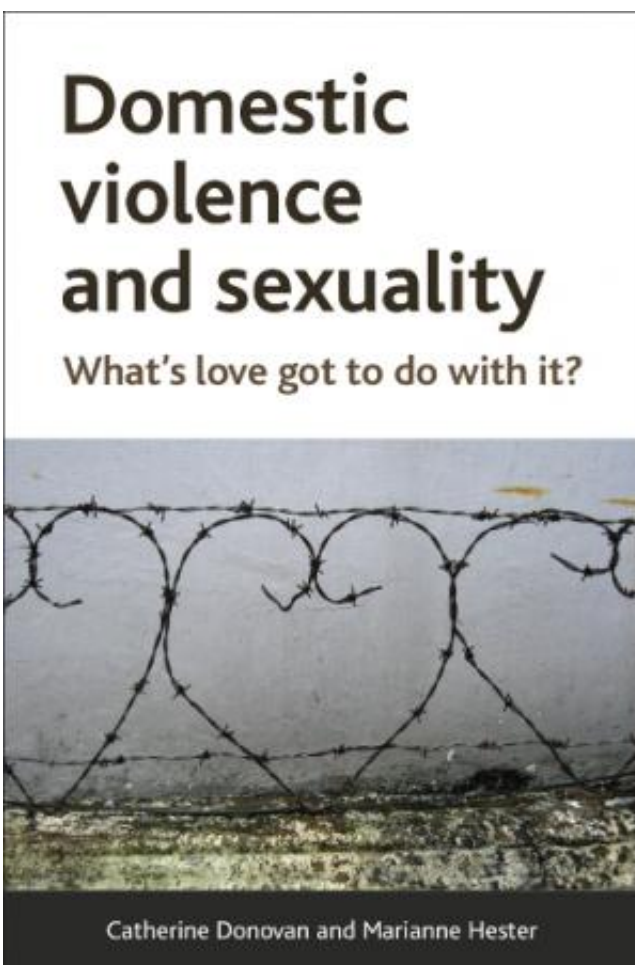


Agencies should do more to support and build trust with victims of domestic violence in same sex relationships

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Mainstream agencies dealing with heterosexual victims of Domestic Violence and Abuse (DVA) must do more to support and build trust with victims in same sex relationships, researchers of a new book recommend.

DVA is widely viewed in society as a problem affecting [heterosexual relationships](#), but for the first time 'Domestic Violence and Sexuality – What's Love got To Do With It?' presents comparisons with victims in same sex relationships, based on a large scale national survey with LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender) and heterosexual men and women.

Research authors - Catherine Donovan, Professor of Social Relations at the University of Sunderland, and Marianne Hester, Professor of Gender, Violence and International Policy at the University of Bristol - examine in their book how experiences of DVA may be shaped by gender, sexuality and age, including whether and how victims seek help.

Their research recommends mainstream agencies need to address the gap of trust and be more inclusive to those in same sex relationships, as it's estimated that one in four LGBT people have experienced DVA in their relationship.

The book reveals similarities and differences in experiences of DVA across sexuality and gender, however, both are characterised as the exertion of power and control.

The key findings include: recognition of DVA in same sex relationships is difficult because society sees it as a problem of [heterosexual men](#), physical violence and of gender; there is a gap of trust of mainstream agencies as LGBT victims fear they will not get a sympathetic response and face discrimination; love confuses victims about what they are experiencing and sexuality can be used as a way of controlling someone,

e.g. threatening to 'out' somebody to their family, employers, social services etc.

Their research also reveals that love can be abusive in both same sex and heterosexual relationships in complex ways: an [abusive partner](#) can be needy to elicit care, forgiveness, loyalty and protection from their victim; the victim might feel 'emotionally stronger' than the abusive partner and feel responsible for them; the abuser might tell their partner they love them and this acts as a glue that keeps the victims in the relationship.

The research also found there are differences by gender in same sex DVA relationships.

Professor Hester, from the School for Policy Studies, said: "Gay men were significantly more likely than lesbian women to experience sexual violence and have their spending controlled. Young age, low income and low education predict particular vulnerabilities to DVA in same sex relationships, and being newly 'out' can position somebody as younger and more vulnerable to abuse regardless of biological age."

A pioneering methodology, using both quantitative and qualitative research, was used to provide a reliable and valid approach that challenges the stereotypes of [domestic violence](#) research, policy and practice. The authors developed a new framework of analysis – practices of love – to explore empirical data.

The book is published by *Policy Press*, a leading social science publisher based at the University of Bristol which is committed to publishing books that make a difference.

Provided by University of Bristol

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