

# Abuse in Lesbian Relationships & Lesbian Friendly Service: A Saskatchewan Survey (2001–2002)

## Executive Summary

These surveys were intended to measure the level of awareness in Saskatchewan's 'lesbian community' about abuse in female same-sex relationships, and the availability of and need for 'lesbian friendly' services for women abused in same-sex relationships.

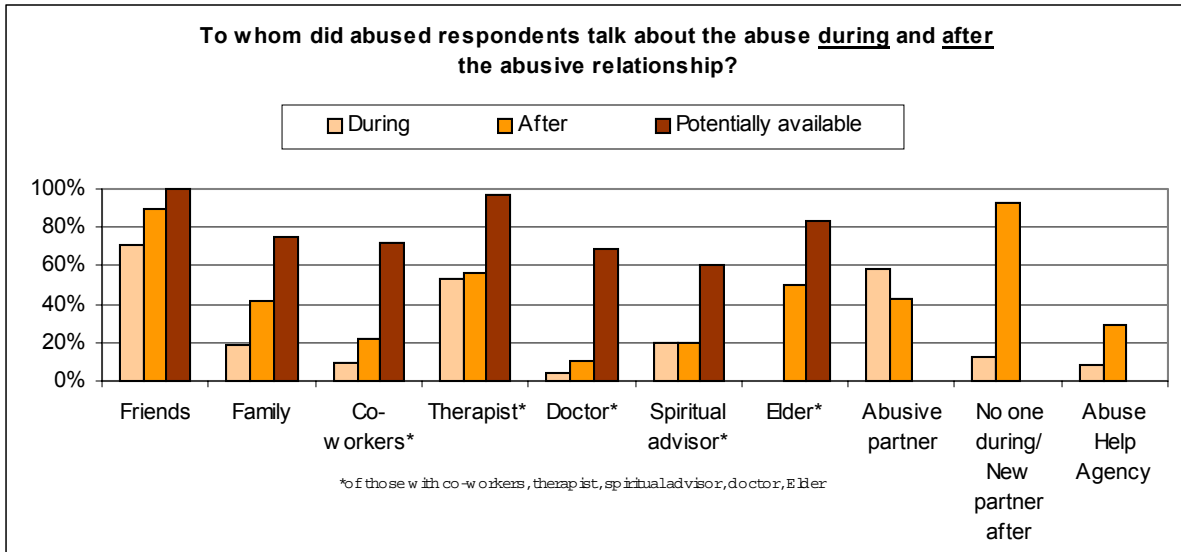
## A. From the Survey of Individuals:

(46 self-selected respondents, 34 from Saskatoon, 6 from Regina; 24 abused/22 never abused)

### I. What abusive behaviours do abused lesbians experience?

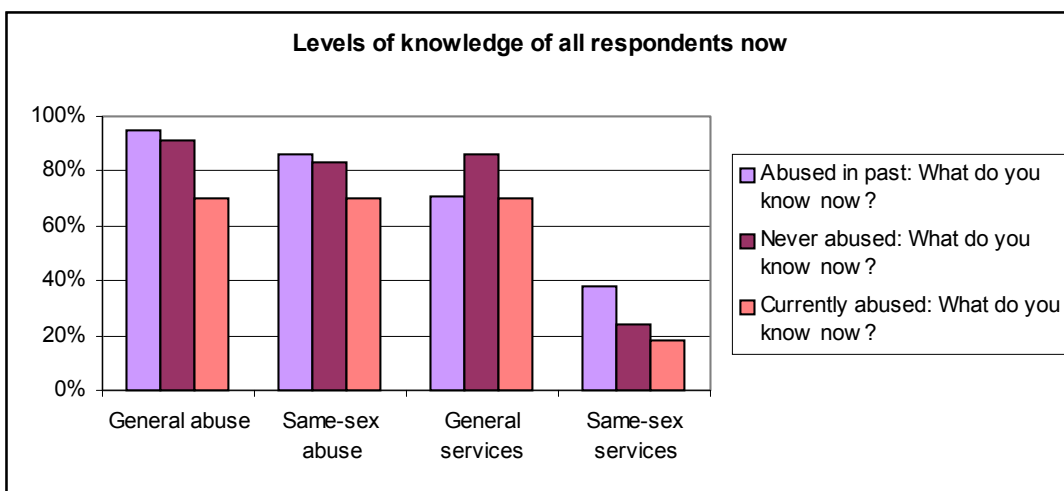
Behaviour Experienced	Max 24	%
Putting you down	19	79%
Yelling	17	71%
Swearing at you; humiliating you in front of other people	15	63%
Making you feel like nothing you do is ever good enough; making you the 'bad guy'	14	58%
Cornering you; blaming you for almost everything	13	54%
Violence to doors, walls, furniture, possessions; threatening to leave you	12	50%
Shoving; threatening with looks; putting down friends; calling you names; controlling who you see	11	46%
Controlling where you go; what you do	10	42%
Threatening suicide; putting your kids down; putting your family down	9	38%
Hitting; verbal threats to hurt you; forcing you to have sex; making you responsible for all the money and blaming you when there is not enough; refusing to let you leave the relationship; controlling who you talk to	8	33%
Slapping; punching; grabbing; controlling what you say	7	29%
Threatening you with gestures; controlling all the money; outing you against your wishes; refusing to let you be out	6	25%
Biting; forcing you to have rough sex; controlling money you earn; blaming your kids for almost everything	5	21%
Choking; hair pulling; abusing your kids; verbal threats to hurt your friends; controlling what you wear	4	17%
Kicking; verbal threats to hurt your pets; insisting that you work; treating you like a servant or slave	3	13%
Abusing your pets; verbal threats to hurt your kids; verbal threats to hurt your family; threatening to out you	2	8%
Scratching; threatening you with weapons	1	4%
Not allowing you to work	0	0%

## II. To whom did abused respondents talk about the abuse during and after the abusive relationship?

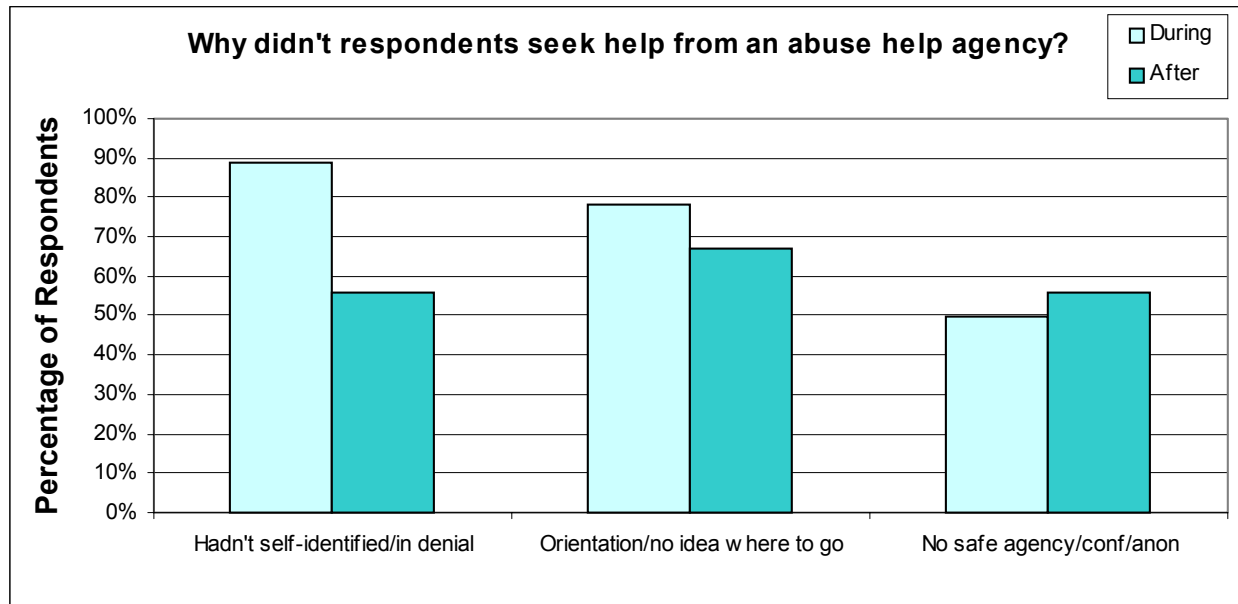


only 5 abused respondents had spiritual advisors and only 3 consulted with Elders

## III. Respondents' reported knowledge of abuse and of Abuse Help Agencies



#### **IV. Why didn't respondents seek help from an Abuse Help Agency?**



Note: Orientation = feel sexual orientation is a barrier; conf/anon = worried about confidentiality/anonymity

So, if the goal is to encourage lesbians in abusive same-sex relationships to seek help from Abuse Help Agencies, they need:

1. to know that they are being abused (accomplished perhaps by listing abusive behaviours);
2. assurance that there are abuse help agencies that are well aware that abuse occurs in lesbian relationships, and that are lesbian friendly; and
3. a list of specific safe agencies.

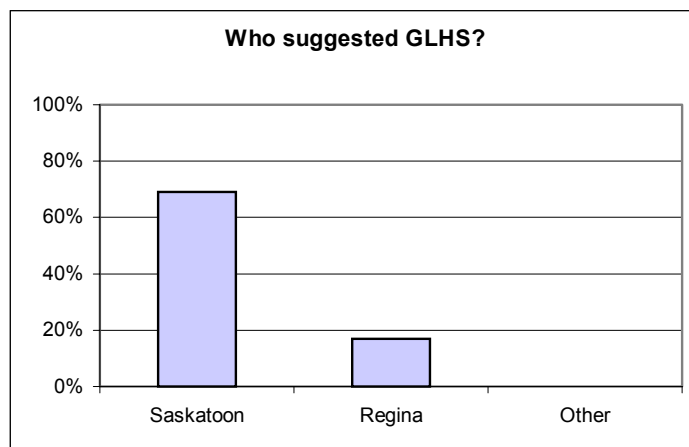
#### **V. Why did respondents seek help from an Abuse Help Agency?**

The two who went to an agency for help during the abusive relationship went specifically to agencies where they knew there were either gay-positive counsellors or lesbian counsellors. All 6 who've gone to an agency for help since leaving the abusive relationship went to a non-same-sex specific-agency, but only one would now suggest the non-same-sex specific agencies she went to if a lesbian friend needed help—all but two of the others would suggest a same-sex-specific agency (of the other two, one lives in Regina\*, and one did not know what to suggest, even though she said the non-same-sex-specific agency she went to "was helpful"). Of the 8 who ever went to an agency, 6 would now suggest either [Gay & Lesbian Health Services in Saskatoon](#) (GLHS), a lesbian counsellor she knows, or PFLAG/Pink Triangle (in Regina) i.e. all same-sex-specific help, and, as above, of the other two, one lives in Regina\* and the other doesn't know what to suggest.

\* Regina has no obvious, visible 'dedicated' same-sex agency like Saskatoon's GLHS

## VI. What suggestions would respondents make if a friend needed help?

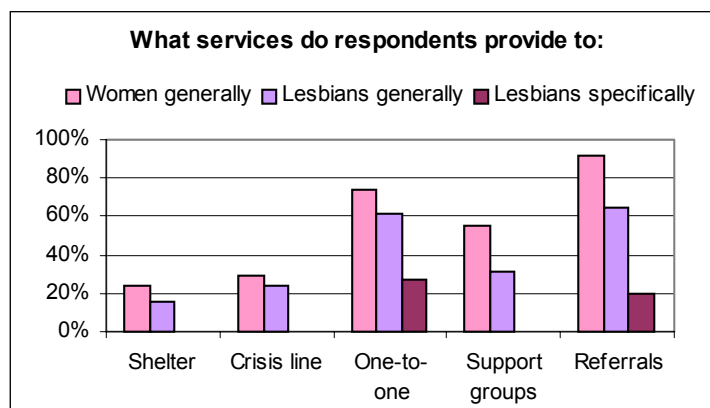
50% of the entire cohort suggested Gay & Lesbian Health Services (GLHS) (69% of those residing in Saskatoon). (The next most suggested agency was the sexual assault centre (24% of Saskatoon respondents and 33% of Regina respondents).) Unfortunately, while it is true that GLHS has a province-wide toll-free number, that fact is not widely known province-wide, and GLHS has no offices or staff outside of Saskatoon. Because of the much higher percentage who suggested GLHS in Saskatoon, we feel confident in assuming that whether or not a respondent suggested GLHS is largely a function of knowing about its existence (and at least a little about its programs). (Residents of Saskatoon are simply more likely to know about GLHS.) We can then also assume that if more lesbians residing outside of Saskatoon knew about GLHS (and its toll-free number), they, too, would suggest it. The following graphic illustration makes these assumptions difficult to dispute, given the location of GLHS's office.



## **B. From the Survey of Service Providers:**

(53 respondents, 12 from Saskatoon, 6 from Regina)

### I. What services are provided to women abused in same-sex relationships?



## **II. Are the available services lesbian friendly?**

76% of respondents said their agency is lesbian friendly and 86% of those believe (in one way or another) that what makes their services lesbian friendly is one or more of the following:

1. We treat everyone the same
2. Our door is open to everyone
3. Our staff are friendly, knowledgeable and non-judgemental.

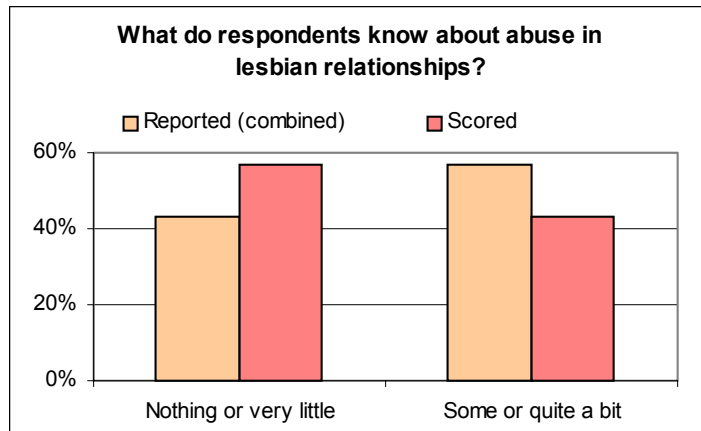
However, there are many real barriers specific to lesbians that keep them from accessing the services of abuse help agencies. (See [Appendices C](#) (Understanding Heterosexual Privilege), [D](#) (A Question of Perspective), and [E & F](#) (re the experiences of lesbian staff members of a Saskatchewan non-sheltering agency and of a shelter).) In order to help lesbians overcome those barriers, agencies must do more than just 'open their doors' and 'treat everyone the same'. Here are some examples of **strategies** that can improve an agency's accessibility specifically for lesbians:

- Display posters, pictures and art work that depict positive lesbian relationships
- Display posters and provide pamphlets that invite lesbians to use your services
- Display posters and provide pamphlets on same-sex abuse.
- Distribute information re services so that it will reach lesbians (see [Appendix G](#) for relevant publications, for example)
- Maintain an up-to-date referral list specifically for lesbians
- Include information on lesbian abuse when making presentations, applying for funding, collecting statistics
- Conduct ongoing employee training (including support staff) and workshops on heterosexism, homophobia, and diversity.
- Assess agency intake and assessment forms for inclusiveness.
- Provide books for children with same-sex parents (e.g. Heather has Two Mommies)
- Ensure it is safe for staff to be 'out' at work.
- Adopt affirmative action plans to ensure diverse representation.
- Use inclusive language comfortably. (It is also important to remember to use the language the client uses. She may not want to be labelled as lesbian or bisexual.)
- Inform interventions with a consideration of the very real stigmatization and discrimination faced by lesbians
- Sensitize the Board of Directors to the need for accessible services for ALL people.
- Do not assume the abuser is a he. Use gender-neutral language (e.g. partner, abuser, they, etc).

### **Adapted from Women Hurting Women Workshop and Assisting Abused Lesbians**

Of the 39 respondents that said their agency's services are lesbian friendly, only 18 (46%) make any efforts to inform the 'lesbian community' that their services are lesbian friendly, and only 14 (36%) openly display sexual minority material. 13% of rural respondents openly display sexual minority material in comparison with 61% of urban respondents, even though 77% of rural agencies said their services are lesbian friendly, as opposed to 72% of urban. (To conduct a comprehensive evaluation of your agency's services re accessibility, see [Appendix H](#), 'Evaluating Your Service for Accessibility for Lesbians'.)

As for knowledgeable staff: the survey asked respondents to report on their level of knowledge and we also independently scored them on their level of knowledge re abuse in lesbian relationships and re services for abused lesbians. Fewer respondents scored knowing 'Quite a bit/Some' than reported same, and conversely, more scored knowing 'Very little/Nothing' than reported, i.e. many agencies in Saskatchewan know less about lesbian abuse than they think. We can see this nicely illustrated in the following graph:



Further analysis of the data indicates that:

- *Some agencies that reported knowing quite a bit actually know very little and even nothing according to their score.*
- *Some of the training re providing lesbian friendly services that respondents have already received was not valuable.*
- *Agencies that apparently need it the most are least willing to take training in providing 'lesbian friendly' services.*
- *Many agencies that actually provide services to lesbians abused in same-sex relationships know nothing or very little about the issues and services.*

### **III. Is there a need for lesbian friendly services, and if so, is it being met?**

From the Individual Analysis, we know that lesbians in Saskatchewan are abused in same-sex relationships, that there are significant barriers in the way of those lesbians seeking help from Abuse Help Agencies, and that barriers would be significantly lowered if lesbians had assurance that Abuse Help Agencies were lesbian friendly. That is, there is definitely a need in Saskatchewan for lesbian friendly services. It seems, from both the Individual Analysis and the Service Providers Analysis, that this need is not being met. Few agencies in Saskatchewan currently meet minimum standards of accessibility required to achieve 'lesbian friendliness'. Worse, it is mostly the more lesbian friendly agencies that already realize this—many of those that are minimally accessible believe they are doing fine.

## **IV. What next?**

### **A. For Saskatchewan agencies:**

1. Immediately review the list of [strategies](#) to improve your accessibility for lesbians (on page 5 of this Executive Summary).
2. Distribute this Executive Summary and [Appendices C, D, E, F, G & H](#) to each and every staff and board member, make all documents from the survey available to them as well, and discuss the findings at staff and board meetings.
3. Display the posters enclosed with the Executive Summary.

### **B. For the Ad Hoc Committee:**

1. Distribution of these findings.
2. Development and distribution of a poster to all agencies to establish [Gay & Lesbian Health Services](#) (GLHS) as the immediate central clearing agency to be contacted by service providers and recommended to clients in cases of same-sex abuse.
3. Development and distribution of a training package that is so user friendly it can optionally be delivered by knowledgeable facilitators or in-house. (The latter option would address the very real logistical and practical difficulties of training entire staffs of disparate (geographically and otherwise), and very busy, agencies.)