

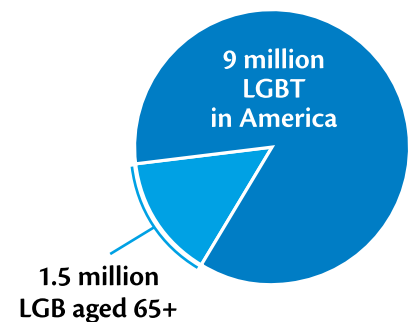
Mistreatment of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Elders

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ▶ Many LGBT older adults are at high risk for elder abuse, neglect and exploitation.
- ▶ A pressing need for LGBT elders is dealing with social isolation as isolation is a risk factor for elder abuse.
- ▶ Fear of homophobia or transphobia keep LGBT elders from seeking help and services.
- ▶ Internalized homophobia or transphobia may affect an LGBT elder's willingness to seek help and put them at risk of self-neglect.
- ▶ Some LGBT elders choose to hide their LGBT identity and disclosure of that identity against their wishes can cause problems.
- ▶ Elder gay men and lesbians place high value on self-sufficiency and may be reluctant to accept help.
- ▶ Be sensitive to an LGBT elder's lack of legal protections, desires, relationships, and potential need to be connected to the LGBT community.

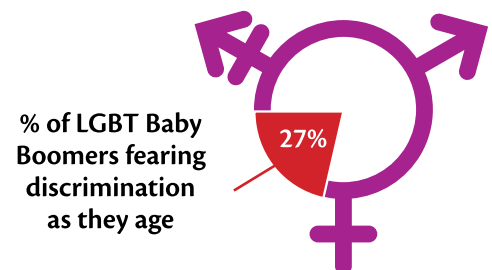
Population Estimates of LGBT Elders

It has been estimated that **9 million Americans identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT)** (Gates, 2011). It has also been approximated that **1.5 million adults, aged 65 or older, are LGB** (no transgender estimate provided) (Movement Advancement Project (MAP), Services & Advocacy for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, & Transgender Elders (SAGE), & Center for American Progress (CAP), *LGBT Older Adults: Facts At A Glance*, 2010). It should be noted, however, that estimates of the LGBT population may vary depending upon measurement methods and consideration of those who may not self-identify as LGBT due to societal stigma.



LGBT Elders Face Multiple Challenges

LGBT elders face the typical challenges of aging, including the possibility of elder abuse or domestic violence, in combination with the **threat of discrimination and abuse due to their sexual orientation or gender identity** (Cook-Daniels, 1998). In a 2006 study by Metlife Mature Market Institute, 27% of LGBT Baby Boomers reported that they had great concern about discrimination as they age.

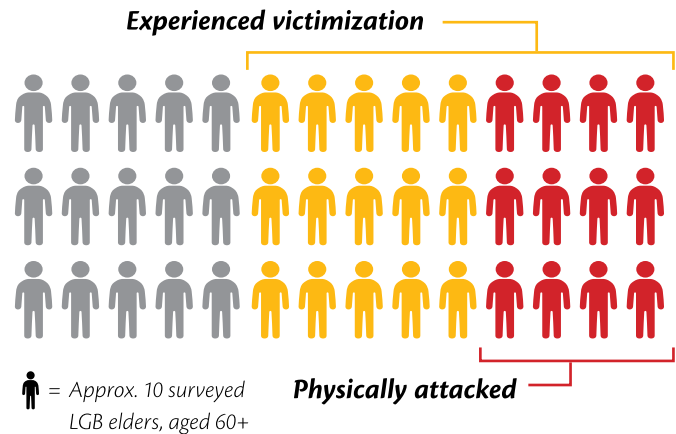


! This **RESEARCH BRIEF** synthesizes the latest available information and research relating to the mistreatment of LGBT elders. Information is provided on the **occurrence of abuse, isolation as a risk factor, issues affecting help seeking, and tips for working with LGBT elders.**

RESEARCH FINDINGS ON *Occurrence of Abuse*

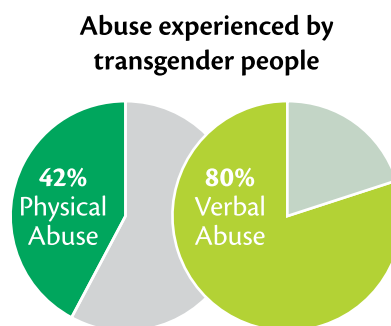
Unfortunately, prevalence and incidence studies regarding the abuse and neglect of LGBT elders are sorely lacking. Available data and information relating to the occurrence of abuse includes:

- In a survey of 416 LGB elders, aged 60 or older, **65% of respondents reported experiencing victimization due to sexual orientation** (e.g. verbal abuse, threat of violence, physical assault, sexual assault, threat of orientation disclosure, discrimination) and **29% had been physically attacked**. Men were physically attacked nearly three times more often. Those who had been physically attacked reported poorer current mental health. Many in the study were still closeted from others. Serious family or personal problems can result from disclosure of an older adult's LGB identity. (D'Augelli & Grossman, 2001)



- Caregivers may not be accepting of LGBT elders. In a survey of 3,500 LGBT elders, 55 and older, **8.3% of the elders reported being abused or neglected by a caretaker because of homophobia** and **8.9% experienced blackmail or financial exploitation**. (Frazer, 2009)
- Prejudice and hostility encountered by LGBT elder persons in institutional care facilities create difficult environments.** Staff may deny an LGBT elder's visitors, refuse to allow same-sex couples to share rooms, refuse to place a transgender elder in a ward that matches their gender identity, or keep partners from participation in medical decision making. (MAP, SAGE, & CAP, *LGBT Older Adults and Inhospitable Health Care Environments*, 2010)
- Transphobia, or social prejudice against transgendered persons, may be more intense than that of homophobia with a **very high rate of violent victimization**. (Cook-Daniels, 1998)

- Cross study investigation reveals that transgender people, in general, are at high risk of abuse and violence. Initial data reported by MAP state that an average of **42% of transgender people have experienced some form of physical violence or abuse**. Further, an average **80% of transgender people have experienced verbal abuse or harassment** (MAP, 2009). Therefore, it is a reasonable assumption that transgender elders may have experienced some form of abuse.



- Many transgender older adults have experienced mistreatment in long term care facilities. Examples include physical abuse, denial of personal care services, psychological abuse, being involuntarily "outed", and being prevented from dressing according to their gender identity. Others are refused admission into long-term care facilities. **The fear of discrimination and its reality result in underutilization of services**. (National Academy on an Aging Society/GSA & SAGE, 2011)



SUMMARY OF WHAT'S HAPPENING INSIDE INSTITUTIONAL AND LONG TERM CARE FACILITIES:

TYPES OF DISCRIMINATION EXPERIENCED BY LGBT ELDERS

- Denial of visitors
- Refusal to allow same-sex couples to share rooms
- Refusal to place a transgender elder in a ward that matches their gender identity
- Keeping partners from participation in medical decision making

TYPES OF MISTREATMENT EXPERIENCED BY TRANSGENDER ELDERS

- Physical abuse
- Denial of personal care services
- Psychological abuse
- Being involuntarily "outed"
- Being prevented from dressing according to their gender identity
- Refused admission

RESEARCH FINDINGS ON *Isolation as a Risk Factor*

“ A focus group reported that the most pressing health and human service need for LGBT elders’ is **dealing with social isolation**. Isolation is a risk factor for elder abuse. LGBT elders are more likely to age alone than heterosexuals.” (Frazer, 2009)

“ Many LGBT older adults are at high risk for elder abuse, neglect, and various forms of exploitation because of **living in isolation and fear of the discrimination** they could encounter in mainstream aging settings.”

(National Academy on an Aging Society/GSA & SAGE, 2011)



RESEARCH FINDINGS ON *Issues Affecting Help Seeking*

- In growing up in a homophobic or transphobic environment, some LGBT elders may **go to extraordinary measures to hide their sexual orientation**. There may be such significant stigma for these elders that they will not label themselves. This may affect an abuse victims willingness to seek help, out of fear of needing to “out” themselves to authorities and face possible hostility. This may also affect their desire to enlist home care services out of fear of abuse. (Cook-Daniels, 1998)
- LGB adults from older generations lived under **severe stigmatization of their identities**. Many victims of attacks due to sexual orientation do not tell others of the attacks, out of fear that their sexual orientation will be disclosed or that authorities will act with hostility or indifference. (D’Augelli & Grossman, 2001)
- Victimization because of sexual orientation can lead to **internalized homophobia manifested as guilt or shame**. Victims may come to believe that they are not worthy people and deserve loneliness, poor living conditions, and ill health. They may not want to seek or accept help and are at risk of self-neglect. (D’Augelli & Grossman, 2001, Cook-Daniels, 1998)
- For a victim of abuse in a same-sex relationship, it may be difficult to seek help because of the **personal, familial, and societal risks in coming out as gay or lesbian** and as a victim of domestic violence. (Perilla, Frndak, Lillard, & East, 2003)
- Abusers may use victim fear of homophobia or **threaten to “out” their victims** to others as tools of control. (Cook-Daniels, 1998)
- **Legal discrimination** may discourage elder LGBT abuse victims from leaving abusive relationships because they may have no or limited legal rights to assets shared with the partner. (Cook-Daniels, 1998)

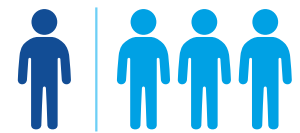
“ Gay men and lesbians tend to place high value on self-sufficiency and so may be hesitant to accept help in old age.” (Cook-Daniels, 1998)



HIDING IDENTITY



STIGMA



GUILT & SHAME



RISKS OF COMING OUT



THREATENED TO BE “OUTED”



LEGAL DISCRIMINATION

TIPS FOR WORKING WITH LGBT ELDERS (Cook-Daniels, 1998)

- ▶ Be aware of the lack of legal protections for LGBT elders and the potential impact. For example, an elder gay man with limited income has no legal right in many states to a portion of his abusive partner's income.
- ▶ It is imperative that all who interface with the LGBT elder use the name and pronoun (e.g. he, she) used by the elder, regardless of legal identification or genitalia.
- ▶ Connect and build rapport with the LGBT elder by asking about their career/profession, friends, and personal effects.
- ▶ Listen especially carefully to the LGBT elder's input and desires.
- ▶ Be aware that not all couple relationships are heterosexual. Use the same terminology used by the elder (e.g. partner, roommate, friend) when referring to the other member of the couple. Ask the elder if the partner/roommate/friend can be counted on to provide care or financial assistance to them. Keep in mind that a large age gap between partners in a gay couple doesn't necessarily imply an exploitative relationship.
- ▶ Be prepared to be able to connect the elder to community resources for LGBT elders should they so desire (e.g. if they want to talk about being gay, lesbian, or transgendered).
- ▶ Lesbian and gay elders may have close networks of friends that may serve as a protective factor.

IMPORTANT NOTE: *The information contained in this research brief is taken from pertinent research articles, policy reports, etc. available at the time of creation. While some articles are scholarly peer reviewed research articles, others have been created by the organization cited. The author or organization should be consulted regarding questions on their content, research and/or review process.*

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National Center on Elder Abuse

For more information:
www.ncea.aoa.gov

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