

# **Domestic Violence against Lesbian and Bisexual Women in China**

## **Report Abstract**

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Common Language

For full report in Chinese, please contact [tongyulala@gmail.com](mailto:tongyulala@gmail.com).

### **1. Research Background**

There is no national law against domestic violence in Mainland China. Although some serious cases have been reported by public media, the society in general has not paid enough attention. Anti-Domestic Violence Network of China Law Society has been trying to push for the domestic violence legislation since 2005, and some local protection ordinances have been enacted in recent years.

Due to huge social pressure and lack of family support, lesbian and bisexual women are more vulnerable to domestic violence. Funded by Anti-Domestic Violence Network of China Law Society, Common Language conducted a national survey about the domestic violence against lesbian and bisexual women in China, aiming to draw attention to the more marginalized women being harmed by domestic violence, and calling for a broader coverage of the future domestic violence legislation. The research was started in 2007 and finished in 2009.

### **2. Data Source and Sampling**

We adopted “coming-across” and “snow-balling” methods to distribute and collect questionnaires. A total of 428 valid questionnaires were collected from field work in eight cities in different parts of China: Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Zhuhai, Nanning, Kunming, Chengdu and Anshan. 472 valid questionnaires were collected from our internet survey. Among the 428 field work questionnaires, 202 were filled in Beijing, while 226 were completed in other seven cities.

### **3. Key Findings**

#### **1) Rate**

Our research found that domestic violence is a serious problem for lesbian and bisexual women in China. In average about 70% of the samples experienced either mental abuse or physical violence, about 40% of the samples has been harmed physically.

#### **2) Factors**

As daughters, partners or even wives in a heterosexual marriage in daily life, lesbian and bisexual women could face domestic violence from their parents, partners and/or husbands. From our survey we found that the violence from parents is of the highest rate among all sources of domestic violence. Almost half of the samples have been abused by their parents, and 1/4 of them

experienced malignant bodily harm. Sexual orientation and experience of coming out (or being found out) played a key role in many family related violence cases. 70% of the violence victims in our survey experienced domestic violence from their parents after they were out. Young lesbian and bisexual women (under the age of 20) are more often to experience abuses from their parents, and butch looking women or women of unconventional gender expression are more often to experience violence from their male partners.

### **3) Seeking Help**

Only 55% of people who experienced domestic violence in our research have sought for help, while for women in general who are violence victims, the rate of seeking help is 84%<sup>1</sup>.

Among the people who have sought for help in our research, more than half sought help from lesbian community, such as lesbian friends or lesbian support groups. 21% of them sought help from family members. Only 3% of them sought help from Women's Federation, which is the most influential organization supported by Chinese government that deal with women's issues. None have sought help from their work place. For women in general, 14% of the victims have sought help from Women's Federation, and 5% have sought help from work place (such as labor union).<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, among the people who have sought for help in our research, more than half of them (52%) thought that help and intervene have only solved a small part of the domestic violence problem.

### **4. Recommendations**

To protect lesbian and bisexual women from becoming the victims of domestic violence, we would like to make the following recommendations based on the findings of our research:

- 1) To strengthen the capacity and increase the resource for community based support groups for lesbian and bisexual women, who can provide education, immediate help and service to violence victims.
- 2) To sensitize the professional service providers and women's groups in general to issues of sexual orientation and gender identity, so that they can include lesbian and bisexual women in the target population of their service and support.
- 3) To sensitive government officers to related issues, such as police force, judges and legislators.
- 4) To establish national domestic violence legislation that also protects LGBT people from domestic violence and abuses.

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<sup>1</sup> From Survey of the Need of the Battered Women, Shi Tong, 2009

<sup>2</sup> Same as above.