

Your Local Resources

Sexual violence is prevalent in our society and happens to many women including lesbian and bisexual women. Survivors of assault often have a great deal of difficulty seeking help. The myths & stereotypes that surround lesbianism and bisexuality can create silence, shame and guilt which often prevent the survivor from coming forward to seek help.

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P.O. Box 2311, Square One Post Office  
Mississauga, Ontario L5B 3C8  
905-273-9442 (24 Hour Crisis Line)  
905-273-3337 (Business line)

Copies can be ordered from:  
Metropolitan Action Committee on Violence Against Women and Children  
Phone: 416.392.3135 | Toll Free: 1.877.558.5570  
Fax: 416.392.3136  
e-mail: info@metrac.org | www.metrac.org | www.owjn.org

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assault



# Sexual Violence Against Lesbian & Bisexual Women

## FACT SHEET

Help

Call 911 or your local police immediately if you are in danger.

The Assaulted Women's Helpline (24 hours)

1-866-863-0511 (toll-free)

1-866-863-7868 (TTY)

416-863-0511 (Toronto)

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905-273-3337 (Business line)

Sexual Assault Treatment/Care Centres  
Go to [www.satontario.com/centres/centres.shtml/](http://www.satontario.com/centres/centres.shtml/) or look in your local telephone book.

Women's Shelters  
Go to [www.shelternet.ca](http://www.shelternet.ca) or look in your local telephone book.

Sexual Assault/Rape Crisis Centres  
Go to [www.sacha.on.ca/other.htm](http://www.sacha.on.ca/other.htm) or look in your local telephone book.

## Homophobia & Sexual Violence

Homophobia is the irrational fear of gay men and lesbians and the hatred, disgust and prejudice that fear brings. Homophobia can refer to individual or societal attitudes of negativity directed towards gay men, lesbians and bisexuals. Homophobia can be expressed in a number of ways; such as; through jokes, insulting language ("queers", "dykes") or derogatory/hurtful statements. Levels of homophobic behaviour range from repulsion to pity, denial, disgust and discomfort.

Sexual violence is a traumatic experience for survivors, their partners, family and friends. Survivors of a same sex assault may face greater barriers coming forward with their experience due to the prevalence of homophobia. They may have fears about disclosing the assault to friends, or family members who are not aware of their sexual orientation. In addition, there may be less support from service providers, counsellors, police officers, doctors or other people who may lack an understanding or awareness of issues facing lesbian and bisexual women.

## Common Myths

**Myth:** Lesbian relationships are never abusive.

**Fact:** Anyone can choose to be abusive.

**Myth:** Same sex relationships are always more equal and less prone to sexual violence.

**Fact:** Sexual assault occurs regardless of age, political affiliation, gender, race, ethnicity, class or sexual orientation.

**Myth:** Sexual violence in same sex relationships is caused by substance abuse, childhood violence or provocation.

**Fact:** Sexual assault is an act of power and control. There is no excuse or justification for violence. Sexual assault is a crime.

**Myth:** I am a lesbian or bisexual woman because I was sexually abused as a child.

**Fact:** Child sexual abuse does not cause lesbianism or bisexuality.

## If You Are A Survivor Of Sexual Assault

Remember that the assault is not your fault and that you did nothing to cause it. You are not alone. Sexual violence is a traumatic experience regardless of the gender and sexual orientation of the victim or the perpetrator. Sexual Assault is a crime. Get support from others, seek counselling or join a support group. Acknowledge your own strength and courage.

## Long Term Effects

Survivors of sexual violence may respond in many different ways. This varies based on an individual's experience, their personality and their support system. Lesbian and bisexual women are

often doubly impacted by the trauma because they are oppressed both as women and as members of the gay community. Some feelings and effects commonly shared by survivors are as follows:

- Feelings of guilt, shame, denial, fear, self-blame or anger.
- Fear of intimacy.
- Lack of trust.
- Low self-esteem and a negative self image.
- Depression, eating difficulties/weight preoccupation.
- Sleep problems, difficulty with concentration pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, or other internal or external injuries.

## If You Know Someone Who Is A Survivor

Remember that healing is a long and difficult process. The following are suggestions of how you can help a survivor of sexual violence:

- Believe her.
- Listen to her.
- Respect her feelings and methods of coping, remember that there is no single right way to feel.

- Do not pass judgment, the assault is not her fault.
- Do not assume that her sexual orientation changes the impact of this violent experience.
- Be patient and supportive.
- Encourage her to seek support from other people too (counsellors, friends, family).
- Get help for yourself, supporting someone through this experience can be overwhelming.