You recently ended a live-in relationship with your boyfriend. You moved to a new apartment and even started a new job in a different town. A few weeks later, you got a letter saying that he loves you and won’t let you go. Your answering machine starts blinking frantically, and your new e-mail account fills up with warnings that if he can’t have you, then no one can. One morning, tucked under the windshield wiper of your car, you find a picture of yourself with your face scratched out. You are scared. You want to tell your family but fear their reaction. You hesitate to call the police because you don’t trust them. You think you have nowhere to turn – you are a gay man being stalked by another man.

Stalking occurs in both heterosexual and same-sex relationships and affects both genders. The power-and-control dynamic displayed by stalkers – the need to dominate and control – appears in traditional and nontraditional relationships. Yet not much is known about the prevalence of same-sex intimate partner stalking. Some studies suggest that one percent of all stalking cases involve the same sex, while others indicate that the number might be higher.\(^1\) The most comprehensive study on stalking found that “stalking prevalence [was] significantly greater among men who had ever lived with a man as a couple compared with men who had never lived with a man as a couple.”\(^2\) Urban gay men are as likely to be battered as heterosexual women, another recent study concluded,\(^3\) and some of those men may be stalked once they leave the relationship.

Victims of same-sex intimate partner stalking are often afraid to come forward and seek assistance. They may fear that they will be “outed,” that their homosexual orientation will be disclosed. Victims have to tell the police about their relationship with the offender; for closeted victims, such disclosure may endanger their relationships with family members, friends, landlords, coworkers, or employers. Outed homosexuals sometimes lose their jobs and homes, as well as custody of their children simply because they are gay. Abusers can also use the threat of outing the victim as a tool of manipulation and control.\(^4\)

Another reason gay and lesbian victims fear coming forward is that they are reluctant to admit that their relationships might be unhealthy and abusive. Such admissions might provide ammunition for those who denigrate and persecute gays.\(^5\) Gay and lesbian domestic violence and stalking victims also fear that publicly disclosing their victimization suggests that their communities condone abuse. They fear that such misconceptions jeopardize their community’s recent progress toward attaining their civil rights. This conflict presents real challenges to gay and lesbian victims. Matt Markon, a program attorney of the Stalking Resource Center, and a former police officer, recalled, “I remember a case where the victim was a lesbian. She was a politically active feminist and was ashamed about being a victim. She felt she had worked so hard to show lesbian relationships as an ideal that was free from what we traditionally think of as male power dynamics. In her mind, coming forward would betray the lesbian community, so she was caught between her ideals and her safety. It was a tough choice for her.”

A third reason some same-sex stalking victims hesitate to come forward is their belief that public authorities are biased against gays. Victims may remember that before the Stonewall riots of 1969, when gays challenged police harassment at a gay bar, police routinely raided gays’ and lesbians’ businesses. The long history of police harassment, aimed at entrapping and arresting people for publicly displaying affection, still colors gays’ perception of public authorities.\(^6\) Gays also know that the police response to hate crime against them is sometimes negative or even abusive.\(^7\) These experiences explain why many gays and lesbians still mistrust authorities despite recent efforts of some police departments across the country to improve their relationships with the gay community.

A few victim services projects are starting to address these issues. In New York City, for example, two key organizations joined forces to provide specialized services for gay and lesbian victims of intimate partner abuse. Safe Horizon, the largest victim service provider in the city, and the Anti-Violence Project (AVP), which serves sexual minority victims of partner abuse and hate crime, recently opened a shelter for gay male victims of domestic violence. The facility, an apartment in a domestic violence shelter, has housed four men since it opened.
in February 2003, says Allegra Perhaes, Safe Horizon’s associate vice president. Stalking victims housed by the shelter have access to the extensive network of services offered through Safe Horizon’s antistalking unit.

Another promising program is the Gay Men’s Domestic Violence Project in Cambridge, Massachusetts, founded in 1994 by Curt Rogers, a gay survivor of domestic violence. Rogers launched his program after mainstream domestic violence programs denied him services. In addition to providing emotional support, crisis counseling, and safety planning, the Project offers a network of safe homes in private residences, made available by the owners as emergency housing for up to two weeks. The Project has reciprocal relationships with several mainstream domestic violence organizations in the state, as well as a partnership grant with the Boston Police Department to conduct cultural awareness training at the city’s police academy. Gay victims of intimate partner stalking can take advantage of safety planning, as well as court and legal advocacy provided by the Project’s staff.

Although most communities don’t have specialized services for gay and lesbian victims, most providers will encounter gay and lesbian victims of intimate abuse at some point. Victim service programs can take several steps to welcome and improve their response to this population:

- Do not presuppose that the victim is female or the offender male or that the relationship is heterosexual—use gender-neutral intake language.
- Reassure victims that you will do your best to protect their confidentiality.
- Coordinate with other victim service providers in the area to maximize the efficiency of the response and spare the victims from repeated requests to recount their stories.
- When preparing safety plans for gay and lesbian victims, service providers should remember that family members, friends, or coworkers who don’t know about or accept the victim’s sexual orientation may not be suitable helpers.
- Find out if protection order laws in your state cover same-sex partnerships; if not, you should seek other types of legal redress.

To respond successfully to this population, victim service providers need to seek resources from currently effective programs, develop policies, and train their staffs.

Same-sex stalking victims fear both the stalker and the discrimination they may face in seeking help. Programs that seek sound approaches for serving this population reduce the barriers between these victims and the help they need. They also make their communities safer for everyone.

The Stalking Resource Center would like to hear from providers who have established programs that offer services (e.g., support group, shelter, counseling, court advocacy) for same-sex intimate partner victims or have discovered ways to provide services to these victims. We are eager to learn of the good work you do. E-mail us src@ncvc.org or call 202-467-8700.


7 Ibid.