

## Facing the Violence at Home

*Brooklyn forum explores the closet of same-sex domestic abuse*

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Domestic violence in same-sex relationships might be “the last thing in the closet” — and it’s time to open the door, LGBT advocates said at a recent panel discussion at Brooklyn Borough Hall.

The March 24 event, billed “It’s Not Just Drama,” brought together the [Brooklyn Community Pride Center](#) and the [NYC LGBTQ Intimate Partner Violence Taskforce](#) — a coalition effort of queer service and anti-violence programs — to discuss barriers to “coming out” about domestic violence in same-sex relationships.

“It’s about talking about violence within your community,” Andrew Sta. Ana, an attorney for the LGBT Initiative at [Sanctuary for Families](#) — the state’s largest nonprofit tackling domestic violence issues — told the audience of about 15.

Statistics from the National Domestic Violence Resource Center show that one in four women have been victims of intimate-partner violence in their lifetime. While the numbers of people in same-sex relationships who experience domestic violence is comparable, said Sta. Ana, the LGBT community is less likely to report abuse.

Everything from guilt to physical danger to fear of being outed or left alone keeps people from coming forward, advocates said.

“The compounding of all these isolations is the biggest threat facing the queer community,” said Mariam Habib, a social worker at the Mount Sinai Medical Center’s [Sexual Assault and Violence Intervention Program](#), which offers services in eight hospital emergency rooms in Manhattan and Queens.

It is common for abusers to prevent a partner from seeking help by threatening to expose their sexual orientation or gender identity to the public, employers, or family members, the panelists agreed.

If a person is HIV-positive and a caretaker is the abuser, the victim faces the challenge of figuring out how to get by independently, said Ivana Chapcakova, domestic violence program coordinator at the New York City [Gay and Lesbian Anti-Violence Project](#).

Abusers may threaten to have a foreign-born partner deported.

Many LGBTQ people do not come forward because they feel they are equally responsible for the violence, said Ted Farley, a staff attorney at the [Urban Justice Center](#).

Catherine Hodes, a program director in the Safe Homes Project of Good Shepard Services, a

family and youth advocacy organization that works primarily in Brooklyn and the Bronx, said LGBT clients often tell her, "I was abusive too, because I fought back." Hodes reminds them that violence in one context can be self-defense in another.

A victim might also be worried about betraying one of his or her own community members by reporting the violence, said attorney Ian Harris, who works for [Day One](#), a nonprofit dedicated to ending teen violence in New York.

"This is not just an issue of sexuality, but an issue of community," he said.

Helping a client understand options and the risks or sacrifices they will face in leaving a violent situation is crucial, the advocates said. When victims are considering filing a court order of protection, Farley said he always asks, "Are we putting you in a less safe situation by issuing this order of protection?"

It can be very isolating to uproot someone, Hodes said, adding that turning to a shelter for safety should be a last resort.

The most effective solutions to reducing intimate partner violence in the LGBT community, advocates agreed, must be based on making services more accessible and educating people of all ages about domestic violence.

"As a community, we need to address this issue with the same vigor we approach other violent acts," said Karalyn Shimmyo of Brooklyn Pride Community Center.