Disregard for abuse victims

I write in response to the article *Dealing with domestic violence* (Vital autumn 07 pages 26–28). I am concerned by the sexist nature of the article, and the complete disregard for those in lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender relationships (LGBT).

Domestic abuse is not limited to male on female in heterosexual relationships. In a social article Jasper Hamill¹ comments that the policy group SIGMA estimates that one in three LGBT relationships are abusive in nature, while the helpline Broken Rainbow puts the figure at one in four. He also notes that there are only 20 refuge beds in the UK available for gay men suffering abuse, and these are always occupied. Stonewall Housing recognises that domestic abuse has the same devastating effects and is just as prevalent for LGBT people as for heterosexual people, and is quoted that one in three LGB people asked had experienced violence in the home, 62% of which was characterised as domestic abuse. Stonewall also comment that there is little or no suitable accommodation for gay, bisexual and transgender men fleeing domestic abuse.

The bias starts with the statement that ‘as the great majority ... of domestic violence is carried out by men against women, the victim in this paper is referred to as “she” for ease of writing’. This can be dismissed out of hand as it is perfectly easy in most cases to substitute the gender neutral ‘they’ for ‘she’. Moreover, the paper reports that ‘23% of women and 15% of men report having been physically assaulted...’ This is hardly a great majority.

The sexist and potentially homophobic trend of the article continues with (my italics) ‘female patient tries to hide...’, ‘female patient is submissive...’, ‘talks for a woman...’, and ‘... is to ask all female patients...’ Why is it necessary to have the sex of the victim in these statements? This completely alienates GBT men. This trend continues with ‘was *he* responsible for your injuries’, ‘DCPs may wish to contact other agencies on behalf of the *woman*’ and ‘help an abused *woman* obtain protection...’

The statement ‘was he responsible...’ is not only sexist but also heterosexually presumptive. The woman could be in a lesbian relationship, and is being abused by her female partner. If she is uncertain about revealing the nature of her relationship she may well feel that she cannot reveal it to such biased questioning, but may have revealed it to an open and gender-neutral question. Thus this question could be detrimental to lesbian women, and actually leave them in an abusive relationship instead of helping them to escape from it. The statements ‘DCPs ... on behalf of the woman’ and ‘help an abused woman’ are also sexist and possibly homophobic in that they ignore the needs of gay and bisexual men.

Finally, the National Helplines box appears only to list those for women. Why not, for example, also list Broken Rainbow (www.broken-rainbow.org.uk) 08452 60 44 60 and Galop (www.galop.org.uk) for GBT men? In Wales there is also the Dyn Project (www.dynproject.org) which caters for GBT and heterosexual men.

Abuse can happen to anyone.

Dr Kenneth I. Wilson
Sheffield

1. Hamill J. Violence in LGBT relations – where is the support? 2 November 2006. <http://www.skinnymag.co.uk/content/view/3356/>

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The Editor,
Vital, BDJ Editorial,
Nature Publishing Group,
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