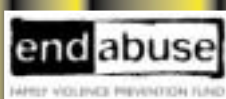


Raising Our Voices:

Queer Asian Women's Response
to Relationship Violence



Produced by Family Violence Prevention Fund
with a grant from the Violence Against Women Grants Office,
Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice.



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FAMILY VIOLENCE PREVENTION FUND

Sponsored by Family Violence Prevention Fund in collaboration with the Asian Women's Shelter

Funding from the Violence Against Women Grants Office, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice made this important gathering possible.



This project was supported by Grant No. 98-MU-VX-K019 awarded by the Violence Against Women Office, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. Points of view in the document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.

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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
The Local Discussion Group.....	2
The National Focus Group.....	3
Voices From the Focus Group.....	4
What Does it Mean for Queer Asian Women to Feel Safe?	9
Helping One of Our Own.....	13
Conclusion.....	17
Recommendations.....	18
QAWS Community Intervention Strategies.....	22
Appendix.....	25



Acknowledgements

The authors and editor would like to especially thank all the focus group participants. To respect their privacy, we are not listing their names. We would also like to thank the following individuals: Joy Cañeda, Hedian Utartí and Lori Lee of the Asian Women's Shelter for their valuable contributions; Monica Arenas of the Family Violence Prevention Fund for arranging participants' travel and logistical needs; Manipon Manivanh of the Asian Women's Shelter for her assistance; Carolyn Hubbard for technical editorial help, and John A. Hoffman of ZesTop for his design and layout.

We are also very thankful to Catherine Pierce, Deputy Director for Program Development and Amit Sen, Program Administrator, of the Violence Against Women Office, Office of Justice Programs. Their commitment to improve the lives of Asian immigrant women made this project possible.

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Design and Layout: ZesTop



Introduction



The Asian Women's Shelter (AWS), in San Francisco, has a long history of addressing the needs of queer Asian women's communities. As a domestic violence agency with a mission to serve underserved communities, AWS made a commitment to provide queer services and has been a strong advocate for increasing services for this community. Despite this commitment, few queer Asian women were using the services. Even after Queer Asian Women's Services (QAWS) launched a year-long visibility campaign, the growing communities of queer Asian women in the Bay Area still did not use the crisis line or shelter. Something was not working, and AWS needed to find a "new" strategy.

In response, QAWS held local focus groups and conducted survivor interviews to better capture the unique needs of queer Asian women's communities. Because of the success of these groups the Asian Women's Shelter was asked by the Family Violence Prevention Fund (FVPPF) to organize a national focus group.

Sponsored by FVPPF, in collaboration with AWS, the National Queer Asian Women's Focus Group brought together for the first time queer Asian women from diverse areas of the nation to address relationship violence. This monumental event allowed survivors, social workers, and community members the opportunity to share their experiences, expertise, and hopes for improved services.

This report is based on information derived from both the local and national groups. For purposes of the report all are referred to as focus groups. The goal of this report is to encourage all domestic violence programs to provide services to not only the queer Asian women's community, but to all under- served communities.

The term "queer" is controversial even within the lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender community, but has been reclaimed as a positive term by this community. The Asian Women's Shelter uses the term in a positive way to encompass the diversity of the lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender community.

Relationship violence better names the experience of violence in queer relationships. Survivors and community members frequently expressed a discomfort with the label of domestic violence.



The Local Discussion Groups

Queer Asian Women's Services began conducting local discussion groups in March 1998. However, convening a group of self-identified queer Asian survivors became difficult due to safety and confidentiality issues. In response, QAWS conducted phone interviews and from the nine local discussion groups QAWS has completed, in which 58 women participated:

- 1 group: mixed-heritage queer Asian women
- 1 group: queer Asian women who participated in the local Singaporean and Malaysian group
- 1 group: women 35 and older
- 2 groups: ethnically mixed Asian women
- 2 groups: Mandarin and Vietnamese speaking communities
- 2 groups: queer South Asian women's community

The discussion groups began in formal gatherings around a meal, and were usually hosted by one person. In most cases, the group members already knew each other. For each group, specific questions and agendas were created based on the group's individual needs. The structure of the groups was kept flexible to maintain a comfortable informality. The gatherings began with a simple conversation about relationship violence in the community and ended with discussions on how they or the shelter can support survivors in the community. These groups provided valuable insight about how the queer Asian women's community understands and deals with relationship violence. In addition, the groups have become an invaluable community support, providing a safe space for members to talk openly with one another about the struggle to live with relationship violence in the community.

Local focus groups and survivor interviews will be an ongoing component of QAWS. A sample of questions used in the groups is included at the end of this report.

The National Focus Group

The goal of the National Focus Group was to compile information to illustrate the community's needs and the barriers to accessing services.

In order to gather a diverse group of queer Asian women to represent as much of the community as possible, QAWS sent announcements to queer Asian women's groups throughout the United States. QAWS then interviewed interested candidates and selected 11 participants. All of the participants had experience working with domestic violence and same gender domestic violence. The following table shows the group demographics.

The focus group had a loose agenda to allow the participants to determine the content of the discussions. The first half of the discussion focused on issues of safety for queer Asian women.

The second half focuses on support- community support and services, individual support, and creating a community response.

Participants left the group with a growing sense of urgency to address the unique needs of their communities. All of the participants gathered afterwards to organize a national response.

<i>Group Demographics</i>	
Sexual Orientation	
Bisexual	4
Lesbian	6
Queer	1
Ethnicity	
Chinese	1
Japanese Hawaiian	1
Korean American/Anglo (bi-racial)	1
Filipina	4
South Asian Indian	2
South Asian Malaysian	1
Vietnamese	1
Age Range	
24 and under	1
25-29	4
30-39	2
40-49	3
50 and above	1
Current Occupation	
Video activist	2
University faculty/professor	2
Teacher, counselor	1
DV advocates	2
Social service providers	4
Immigrant/Refugee/US Born	
Immigrant	3
Refugee	1
US born	7
Domestic Violence Survivors	
Female batterer	2
Male batterer	4
Mother	1
Geographic Locations	
California	3
Washington, D. C.	2
Illinois	1
Georgia	2
Hawaii	1
Washington	1
Maryland	1
Languages Spoken	
English, Tagalog, Gujarati, Spanish, Vietnamese, Punjabi, Chinese, Tamil, and Malay	



Voices from the Focus Groups

Queer Asian women in our focus groups reported they are in need of services but felt there is no one to turn to. They felt that domestic violence is couched in terms that do not apply to the Asian queer community and that those terms were a deterrent to recognizing abuse in their community and reaching out for help. Importantly, Asian queer community members felt that both agencies and the community were generally unsafe to go to. Safety for the queer Asian community, they expressed, is different than the safety provided by mainstream domestic violence agencies. Safety encompasses support for their sexual and cultural backgrounds and experiences, confidentiality, community confidentiality and trust. Participants expressed how racism, homophobia, anti-immigrant sentiments, gossip, and community judgment violate their safety. In general, participants pointed to the community as the forum for education, support and addressing violence in same-gender relationships. Participants reported that it is critical to the survival of battered individuals that we create many points of access to services and that all domestic violence agencies commit to addressing the unique needs of every community.

Redefining Violence in Same-Gender Relationships

“(Abuse) is hard to name, hard to recognize. When it came to my relationship with an Asian/ Pacific Islander lesbian, I had no words or framework to help me. Having some sort of framework would have helped.”

“Domestic violence is framed as something about male/female relationships, derived from sexism, not from a larger framework of oppressions. I hear all the time, maybe queer relationship violence is there, but it can’t be as bad or frequent as in abusive straight relationships. Even if it is named, it is minimized.”

Women participating in the focus groups felt that the images of domestic violence put forth by the mainstream domestic violence movement are not applicable to queer relationships and have a negative impact on survivors. Survivors in the groups struggled to define what was happening in their relationships as domestic violence, since the terms and categories used to name the experience are based on a heterosexual domestic violence model. For example, words like “batterer”, “survivor”, and “domestic violence” have assumed certain gender roles that need to



be redefined. Historically, most domestic violence models identify batterers as men who abuse women, the survivors. As a result, false assumptions emerge from this model – women don't batter; men aren't victims, and domestic violence doesn't happen in same-gender relationships or in the queer community. The power that is abused and the control used in queer relationships are rarely based on the gender attributes of the women involved. It is not the case that the more masculine, or "butch," woman tends to be the perpetrator. Services based on inappropriate assumptions are useless, if not harmful, to the queer community.

Throughout the focus groups, naming a community member or friend a batterer was difficult for queer Asian women. Not only is a "batterer" most often assumed to be male, but community members were reluctant to exile or incriminate someone they identify with as facing the same hardships of homophobia, racism, and anti-immigrant sentiments. Because women were reluctant to label batterers, they were resistant to intervening and holding an abusive person accountable for her behavior. While there is power in labeling abusive behavior as battering, queer Asian communities are pointing to the goal of helping a fellow community member stop the abuse, not ostracizing them to another community, and another potential domestic violence relationship.

Most survivors in the focus groups and interviews did not identify with the current image of a "survivor" because they did not identify with powerless, weakened, heterosexual females. Some survivors struggled to name themselves "survivors" of domestic violence because they did not feel powerless and felt they could have left if they had wanted. Also, physically strong or assertive women did not fit the image of a domestic violence survivor, leaving queer Asian women reluctant to identify as a survivor, and therefore hesitant to access services.

Every public media campaign, every community education effort, and every conference that does not include queer relationship violence perpetuates the assumption that domestic violence does not happen in queer relationships. Because of the long practice of excluding the experience of queer survivors and queer relationship violence, the term "domestic violence" does not seem applicable to queer experience and therefore is not used by queer Asian women to describe their experience of relationship violence.

Different Characteristics of Abuse

What does same-gender abuse in queer Asian relationships look like? There are no easy answers, nor can it be compared to an existing list or used to create a new list of "typical" abusive behaviors. Focus group participants feel that no relationship or survivor are the same, particularly for queer Asian women who have a different social real-




ity than heterosexual men and women. A list of typical behaviors creates a standard that excludes those that don't fit. Every community has its own cultural norms, which can be a power source for a potential abuse, and can play out differently from one relationship to another. The diversity of our community does not allow the creation of a new standard of characteristics, but instead demands attention to the uniqueness of every individual case.

Queer Asian women disregard the mainstream theory of domestic violence for its inability to account for a larger framework of oppression. Domestic violence theories need to recognize other ways power and control can be asserted and maintained, besides through sexism and patriarchy. The failure to use a larger framework of interrelated oppressions of sexism, racism, homophobia, and anti-immigrant sentiments leaves women feeling like the domestic violence movement does not understand their experience of oppression or domestic violence. Queer Asian women assume that if services do not acknowledge oppression in the community, the service providers must not within their own agency. If an agency does not acknowledge acts of oppression (i.e. homophobic statements, assumptions that client is heterosexual, lack of language access, etc) among their staff or shelter residents, the agency is not a safe place for a queer Asian woman to go for help.

At QAWS, we are still trying to understand and name some of the common characteristics of abuse in queer relationships. The first step is to empower community members to acknowledge and define for themselves how relationship violence manifests itself in their community, taking into account the unique cultural and social reality of each community. We have had great success in merely asking community members to identify how abuse is playing out in their friends' relationships and among their social circles. Community members, then, become agents for awareness in their community and can commit to not condone relationship violence. While common themes may occur we must be careful not to fall into the trap of creating generalized lists of behaviors. The second step is to begin looking at the specific dynamics of each relationship. What power is being used to control the partner? Is there a pattern? Does the partner feel they are being hurt regardless of the abusive partner's intentions? Who is being accountable for their behavior?

Identifying The Batterer From The Survivor

Women from the focus groups identified the difficulty of differentiating a survivor from an abuser — survivors can exhibit abusive self-defense behavior towards their partners and batterers can misconstrue the dynamics of the relationship. Identifying the batterer is



also difficult when the violence is less physical or lethal and therefore less visible. If community members could not definitively assess one partner as a batterer, they did not feel comfortable intervening or providing support. Agencies also are reluctant to provide services when it is not clear who the survivor is.

Women from the focus groups reported how agency screening as to whether a client is a survivor or a batterer is a deterrent to them accessing services. Special screening for queer clients makes them feel doubted or unsafe to share information. Ideally, agencies would be able to provide safety and support to an individual who needs it.

At QAWS, we have provided services to individual women, based on her needs, even if there is not a clear community consensus that she is a survivor. Those services included helping her to remain safe and away from the relationship, which would have benefited the other party regardless if she was a batterer or survivor. QAWS uses the guiding questions from the above section to help community members identify abuse among their social circles, but do not currently feel comfortable screening. We understand, however, this to be a complex issue and continue to explore alternatives, such as building community members' capacity for intervention for queer Asian communities.

The Need To Respond To Emotional Safety

The group also identified that the emphasis on physical abuse may prevent queer Asian women from seeking services.

Queer Asian survivors have felt that if they don't hurt enough there is no reason to ask others for help. Many times they say "my experience is not as bad as her experience", "she only hit me once", or "she never really hit me." In their stories, however, is a long history of emotional abuse, economic abuse, and clear pattern of power and control. In some cases, contact with their abusive partner may not present them with a fear for their physical safety, but instead, for their emotional safety. A restraining order will not protect them from this. The survivors in our focus groups describe emotional abuse as a prevalent form of abuse. Survivors echoed the sentiment that a great proportion of the damage caused by physical or sexual abuse is emotional. In order to improve access to services, the domestic violence movement needs to also emphasize and further validate emotional abuse, and develop responses that promote emotional safety.



Creating Models for Healthy Relationships


“We need to create models and norms for healthy relationships. We don’t have role models, frameworks for what healthy relationships should be.”

“We expand and challenge the notions of intimacy and relationships with others. I am not someone who practices traditional coupling. The most radical act I engage in is to ensure my safety because jealousy and control is what intimacy is supposed to be.”

Queer women are struggling not only with defining what abuse and domestic violence is, but also what constitutes a healthy queer relationship because same gender relationships exist outside “acceptable” societal behavior. Many focus group participants reported that because there are few models for healthy relationships, abusive behavior is tolerated and explained away as normal in queer relationships.

Conceptualizing what makes a relationship healthy is difficult for the women in our focus groups. The lack of positive role models for healthy, same-gender Asian relationships leaves women to decide for themselves what is healthy and unhealthy. Some members of the queer community (as well as members of heterosexual communities) are involved in non-traditional relationships, such as non-monogamy or short-term relationships. Because mainstream society might falsely assume these relationships to be unhealthy, these community members have no external guidance for building healthy relationships. Agencies’ lists of abuses assume a long-term monogamous relationship, thereby not appropriately capturing the abuse that can occur in these relationships. Constant homophobic attacks on their relationship from mainstream society and lack of access to family support also challenge queer Asian women’s sense of a healthy relationship and access to support and guidance.

The women wanted the issues of communication, anger management, defining boundaries, and how to contribute evenly to relationship addressed without imposing a definition of “healthy.” While relationship violence is not an issue of losing control, but rather a choice of the perpetrator, community members wanted anger management tools to help define unhealthy expression of anger and identify when anger becomes a tool in a pattern of gaining power and control over another. Community members also felt that a clear understanding of boundaries would create unwavering community support for an individual who needs safety or asserts her autonomy. They identified the role of an agency as one of building the capacity of communities and facilitating individuals to address these issues themselves.



What Does it Mean for Queer Asian Women to Feel Safe?

“Finding an individual I can be safe with is one of the factors that lead to the amount of time my abusive relationship went on. If you found safety in your relationship and she was abusive then it was a trade off for the other kinds of safety- a trade for having your identity validated.”

“Calling a hotline is difficult if there is not a trusted person on the other end. The American culture has an easier time talking about deep dark secrets.”

Safety for a queer Asian woman is about feeling safe to be herself, to feel she will be believed and supported, to feel understood culturally, being able to speak the language in which she is most comfortable, and to feel unafraid of homophobic, heterosexist, anti-immigrant and racist responses of service providers. In all of the focus groups, the women explained that they rarely, if ever, feel safe. Domestic violence agencies are not trusted and are perceived as being unable to meet the needs of queer Asian women.

Making Your Agency a Safe Place

If agencies allow for tokenizing, racism, homophobia, exclusion of immigrants or non-English speaking clients, or any other kind of oppression to occur within its walls, they are mirroring the dynamics that contribute to their client's need for help. Focus group participants repeatedly asserted that racism, homophobia and anti-immigrant sentiments all constitute violence. Those agencies exhibiting any form of oppression are not going to be a safe place for a woman to get help after leaving a violent situation. The Recommendations Section of this report suggests some tools for preparing an agency to support same-gender survivors of relationship violence.

Community members identified that they would rather depend on trustworthy friends for support and advice than reach out to agencies. Queer Asian women fear they will not be believed by domestic violence workers or by community members. Agencies are generally not trusted, but individuals within agencies may become trusted. Focus group participants believed in the importance of being able to reach out to some-



body who would understand them. Some felt that such a person did not have to be from their background. In some cases, survivors felt safer going to someone who was more anonymous and not a part of their community.

In addition, they discussed how violent relationships affect the entire community and how community efforts to create safety sometimes disintegrate and leave them with feelings of disappointment, betrayal, and mistrust. For community members, choosing who to serve by what is more simple, namely who is English speaking, heterosexual, able-bodied, mentally healthy, documented clients, is creating unsafe and inaccessible services. For many of the queer Asian women in our focus groups, the issue of safety did not revolve around physical safety, but rather the safety violated by racism, homophobia, and anti-immigrant sentiments. It is therefore important for domestic violence agencies to expand their definitions of safety, and create services accordingly.


Addressing Safety in the Community

The vast majority of survivors in our focus group sought help from friends and community members rather than agencies. Even though many queer Asian women turned to their friends and community members, they experienced many barriers to getting their support. Trusting that friends would believe their experience, keep information confidential and not make judgements is critical to women who seek support from friends. Many fear repercussions not only from their abusive partner but also from other community members and their friends. Many survivors reported that unconditional confidentiality had to be ensured before reaching out for services.

Participants claimed it was difficult to tell anyone in their community about abuse because of the gossip, which can spread quickly in the small, tightly knit communities. Women in some of the groups made a commitment to end their participation in the cycle of gossip and felt they could hold others in the community accountable.

Another reason women are hesitant to tell someone in the community is community judgement and the potential for losing a community that is the only support for other facets of their cultural and sexual identity. Instead, survivors often blame themselves, worry about betraying their community, and struggle with self-doubt. Some community members, on the other hand, questioned why anyone would stay with an abusive girlfriend and claimed they would never allow someone to hurt them.

Both the participants' and QAWS' experience shows that survivors often believe that staying silent ensures that she will not be criticized or doubted by the community and the abuser will not be triggered. However, silence allows batterers to continue their abuse to either that



person or to another, and prevents people from getting help. Repeatedly, women expressed feeling afraid and unable to talk about relationship violence, did not know where to turn for help, and lacked the tools to break the silence in a way that felt safe.

Batterer Services Are a Service to the Survivor

“It’s easy to see the batterer as the enemy, but it’s not that easy when she is more than a batterer, but an immigrant, who does work in our community.”

“I won’t report (a batterer) because it’s a small community- especially another Vietnamese who has shared our hard life... her partner may be the only family she has.”

“I have been protecting the identity of my batterer. First of all, I’m protecting myself. I don’t know who will believe me. Second of all, we should punish the problem, not the individual. Who can tell whom the abuser is. After we broke up, she found another girlfriend, and is it my responsibility to tell her new girlfriend?”

Throughout the focus groups, the women expressed their overwhelming concern for batterers and their frustration of not knowing how to respond to batterers. They were disappointed with the lack of agencies that provide services to abusive community members and would like to see the issues surrounding batterers and batterer services addressed. Focus group participants perceived the majority of domestic violence agencies to be survivor-focused, therefore incompatible with providing services to batterers. They also perceived a basic tenet of the domestic violence community to be that all batterers must be incriminated or ostracized from the community. Survivors and community members alike believe in zero tolerance for relationship violence, but also want to provide support and rehabilitation to batterers knowing that it is impossible to extricate an abuser from small queer Asian communities.

Therefore, agencies and advocates need to recognize that the survivors’ and the batterers’ needs are inextricably linked within the context of small communities, and that survivor-oriented models need to be developed into ones that also address the needs of abusers. Developing culturally competent services for batterers enhances the safety for survivors, not only by promoting the reporting of abuse, but also by giving community members other alternatives besides incriminating and ostracizing a batterer.




Is the Criminal Justice System an Option?

The participants identified that women from small, queer Asian communities are reluctant to use traditional enforcement systems (the police, District Attorney, restraining orders, etc.) to hold an abuser accountable. It should be noted that batterers exhibit behavior anywhere on a continuum of being more or less dangerous and more or less cooperative. Women who experienced very violent and dangerous abuse reported they usually had success in using the criminal justice system to hold their batterer accountable and ensure their safety.

Queer Asian women have a deep-seated fear of homophobic responses from traditional enforcement systems. Battered queer Asian women may face further abuse from police officers after disclosing that her batterer is a woman, and therefore will not seek help. Community members cite numerous examples of police minimizing relationship violence between two “friends”, assuming that women are not dangerous. Furthermore, women don’t trust that police are able to clearly identify the survivor from the batterer. Police intervention becomes even more suspect when language barriers exist and the person with better English skills is regarded as the “believable” informant.

Most of the women in the focus groups stated that they do not want to subject their abusive partner to a homophobic, racist legal system. While seen as an option, it is not one most queer women feel comfortable choosing. There are no clear benefits (i.e., rehabilitation, restoration, or accountability) except that of potentially stopping a violent incident. Finally, the abuse that the women in the focus groups have experienced or witnessed does not fall under the legal definition of a domestic violence crime or are hard to prove, such as emotional abuse, economic abuse, or manipulation.

The sentiments of focus group participants point to the need for more training for law enforcement to increase sensitive, culturally-competent responses to the queer community as well as the need for building alternatives when law enforcement is not appropriate.



Helping One of Our Own

“The abuser needs support. There must be a reason for the abusiveness- something happened.”

“If you were the batterer, I would help your partner. The reality is I don’t know if I would sever our relationship just like that. I would try to help you figure things out and work on what you need to work on.”

Women in all of the focus groups understood that while the abuser chooses to be violent, they still saw her as one of their own community members. They strongly expressed that they did not want to further marginalize an abuser by ostracizing her from the community that struggles together against anti-immigrant sentiments, racism, and homophobia. Queer Asian women feel they rely on each other for survival and without alternatives to ostracizing an abuser, will overlook abuse to survive in other ways. Consequently, survivors and other community members do not want to involve an agency, whose typical response is to ostracize the abuser. Many women in the community feel a responsibility to help batterers, as they are seen first as friends, community members and family members and second as abusers. They want to understand what might have brought a community member to become abusive, and believe abusers can be “rehabilitated.” Again, developing culturally competent services for batterers enhances the safety for survivors, not only by promoting the reporting of abuse, but also by giving community members other alternatives besides incriminating and ostracizing a fellow community member.

Considering the Impact on the Survivor

“(At the time of the abuse) I would have said that my partner needs help, and not necessarily put blame on her. I would have been protective of her. I would see it more about getting help for her, for both of us.”

Concerns were raised in focus groups about the potential for community and abuser retaliation against a survivor if services for abusers were inadequate. For example, if the abuser and community do not receive the proper intervention, support and education, the abuser may retaliate against the survivor when she seeks help.



Participants felt that because most domestic violence agencies focus on the survivor leaving her batterer, they would not help women who want to stay with her batterer. Should a survivor want to stay with her abusive partner there seemed no hope for change in the relationship if few or no resources are available for the abuser.

When there is no assistance or support for the abuser, the community's support is split — some members will remain close to the abuser while others support the survivor. In several instances the survivor feels forced to leave her community. Services that competently address the abuser, regardless if the survivor wants to leave the relationship, help the survivor break her silence, find safety and support, and hopefully remain a part of her community.

Breaking the Cycle of Violence in the Community

Examples of multiple survivors of the same abuser were prevalent in the focus groups. Survivors questioned whether it was their responsibility to intervene in the ensuing relationships, or warn the next girlfriend about the abuse. Community members wanted to address the batterer for the sake of their community. However, all were at a loss as to what kinds of interventions agencies offer and how the community could respond. Some communities already intervene on behalf of a survivor and hold the batterers accountable in the best way they can, but hit a wall when there is nowhere to get help for the abuser and are faced with limited resources to support community members trying to hold batterers accountable.

To meet these needs, QAWS has attempted to provide resources to the community to help community members break the cycle of violence. QAWS has trained community members to confront known batterers, when it was safe to do so, and asked known abusers to not come to community events until they have received counseling. QAWS-trained individuals have used peer-to-peer approach in asking batterers to leave bars where the survivors are known to be. QAWS sees its role as building the capacity of community members to create social circles where violence is not tolerated, and offers training, technical assistance and support to community members on an on-going basis.



Community Responses are Key in Addressing Relationship Violence

“As a community we should punish the problem not the person.”

“I need from the community acknowledgment of abuse. We’re small and we are isolated, so we don’t always know. We don’t want to admit [there’s] abuse, and we can make excuses. But if others say its abuse, because other’s say so, you might realize it, too.”

“Community education is where it starts and ends. The most significant steps are to raise awareness. We need a concerted community campaign.”

Participants in the focus groups identified the community as the critical place where relationship violence needs to be addressed and where change needs to happen. Rather than rely on an outside service to impose solutions, community members want services to support building a community response to abuse by equipping members of the communities with strategies to prevent relationship violence, support a survivor, and hold an abuser accountable. QAWS has developed community strategies to get community members to talk about abuse, define healthy relationships, make accessible traditional services, help community members address batterers, form community teams for safety plans, and help community members support survivors.

Approaching the queer Asian community informally has been a large success. The women agreed that they should continue having discussion groups amongst themselves and throughout the community about same-gender relationship violence. Some community members volunteered to facilitate discussion groups. Participants felt that the more abuse is discussed, the more people would be able to identify it and be able to reach out for help, for themselves and for their friends. The Recommendations Section of this report has information on QAWS’s community strategies and suggestion on developing community intervention.

Holistic Services: Widening Our Vision of Who We Serve and How We Provide Services to Them

“Mainstream DV agencies are not queer friendly. In small community organization, people will know about you. Queer groups have no cultural sensitivity and confidentiality. There is a fragmenta-



tion of your identity and choosing which identity to align with in getting help.”

From the focus groups, there was an overwhelming need for agencies to provide resources for all women in all situations requiring help. To deny services to a woman because she is non-English speaking or queer is to perpetuate the same dynamic of oppression that fuels domestic violence. Services that support only women of a certain race of background, or require a woman to be “Asian enough” or “queer enough” to be served, also perpetuate the same racism and homophobia that created a need for services. In the focus groups, women said they would rather stay in an abusive relationship that validates who she is culturally or sexually than place themselves in a vulnerable situation with an agency that does not validate who she is.

Agencies unequipped to serve queer Asian women will refer the women to the agency that does serve them, if one is available, thereby putting the responsibility of serving an entire population on one agency. Instead, all agencies need to create accessibility for clients who fall through the cracks of a singular, standardized service delivery model. The goal is then to realize an agency vision wide enough to help all women regardless of her language, ethnic background, mental illness, sexuality, disability, etc.



Conclusion

The voices of queer Asian women have been expressed throughout this report and clearly show the desire and need to address relationship violence in their community. The queer Asian women's community is only one example of a community that is not adequately served by the vast majority of domestic violence services. It is our hope that agencies will rise to meet the challenges of working with queer Asian women experiencing relationship violence. Redefining and renegotiating domestic violence theories and terms in an important step to understanding the complexities of queer relationship violence. An emphasis on the issues of safety and responding to batterers are essential in creating truly accessible services. Devoting resources to develop community interventions will create long-lasting, integrated solutions to addressing relationship violence in the queer Asian women's community.

Based on what we learned through the local group discussions, QAWS has changed how we handle the calls that we receive. Even though the women who call do not want to come to the shelter, they are accessing our services in a way that works for them. We now follow up each case with advocacy and counseling. Holding batterers accountable has become a necessary intervention tool that we are exploring. Support services for friends and family members have also been identified as an important component.

We hope that this report will bring about services that strive to serve all battered women. Domestic violence agencies do not have all the answers but do have resources and tools that must be shared with communities. It is critical to the survival of battered individuals that we expand to create many points of access to services and that all programs commit to addressing the unique needs of every community dealing with domestic violence. Every community has the ability to teach domestic violence agencies about relationship violence in their community and help develop creative solutions.




Recommendations

The following recommendations come from the interviews with survivors and the discussions during the focus groups. We have also added some of QAWS' strategies and lessons we have gained from them. We hope service providers will use the recommendations to improve services for battered queer Asian women. A directory of organizations that serve queer Asian women experiencing domestic violence is included in the Appendix Section.

Redefining Violence in Same-Gender Relationships

These recommendations should be seen as contributions to the ongoing dialogue of redefining same-gender relationship violence and a challenge to other agencies to expand their definitions of domestic violence. The challenge is to redefine the terms used to categorize the experiences of survivors and reconceptualize theories of domestic violence.

- Articulate new frameworks based on the experiences of queer Asian women.
- Contribute to redefining the theories of domestic violence and expand the ways you envision relationship violence.
- Don't assume the terms and categories used for heterosexual women will be useful to describe the experience of queer survivors.
- Accept that women can be abusive and queer men can be victims/survivors.
- Question labeling batterers as the enemy and look at how this may prohibit women from getting help.
- Integrate queer relationship violence into your concept of domestic violence. Make sure conferences include more discussion on the topic than just one workshop on queer domestic violence.
- Create a grassroots response with a focus on each community's unique needs.
- Develop responses to other forms of abuse and include responses that encompass emotional safety.

- 
- Do not rely on standard domestic violence tools to inform your understanding of queer relationship violence.

Creating A Safe Space

Working with the queer Asian women's community to address safety is an integral part of addressing same-gender relationship violence and helping to strengthen and expand the support systems available for survivors. While complete safety may be difficult to achieve, domestic violence agencies and the communities need to do all they can to maximize a sense of safety for everyone involved. The focus of this section is to make your agency safe and more accessible to survivors.

- Ensure that people in the agency are safe and that the agency is culturally accessible.
- Avoid focusing on serving only survivors, as this may exclude some survivors and make it difficult for many communities to consider domestic violence organizations a viable resource. Establish collaborations with agencies that serve batterers.
- Support queer communities to break the silence by creating safe spaces for queer women to talk about relationship violence. Create "safe places" by filling the agencies with visible people from the community who are considered trustworthy, supporting, and confidential.
- Devote agency resources to partnering with community members and working together to create safety in both agency and their community.
- Establish relationships within the community and build a reputation of being an unbiased, trustworthy, and non-gossiping individual or friend.
- Address homophobia in your agency. Hire a consultant, look for materials through your local queer community resources and make a long-term commitment to end homophobia. Look at every way in which a queer woman might feel judged, both overtly and subtly. For example, when a crisis line worker assumes a caller's abuser is a man, the caller will know she cannot share her story, or if a staff member assumes she cannot understand or support a queer survivor because she is not queer she stops really listening. Another example is not validating the woman's experience by identifying it as an exception to the rule. Since every agency has its own unique set of issues to face when confronting homophobia, addressing the issue will be an ongoing learning process. At Asian Women's Shelter,



all heterosexually-identified staff are mandated to be on a “Homophobia Busters” team which is responsible for eradicating homophobia in the agency for staff, clients, and other constituents. The team meets regularly and they work continuously both on their own internalized homophobia and the ways the agency condones or perpetuates it.

- Address oppression in your agency. Be accountable for all the ways in which power and control play out in your organization. Eradicating oppressive dynamics from services creates safety for your clients. (See the QAWS Community strategies on page 20.)
- Unconditionally support the confidentiality needs of survivors, particularly the confidentiality of an individual’s sexual orientation.
- Avoid subjecting same-gender survivors to a more intense “questioning” in an attempt to gather evidence on survivors. This kind of screening violates a basic tenet in mainstream domestic violence intervention to never doubt a survivor. It can give a survivor the sense that she is not believed, and leaves her feeling unsafe and not understood.

Addressing Batterers

It is imperative that agencies begin to rise to the challenge of exploring strategies for holding batterers accountable and providing support to make the abuse stop. Agencies that bar individual from receiving help because they are judged as the batterer, or cannot definitively assess who the batterer is, will become useless to the community. The inability to label a survivor or batterer, however, should not deter offering competent services base on the unique needs of each individual.

- Do not ignore the issue of batterers.
- Addressing both the survivor and the batterer will make your organization more welcoming to survivors and the community. When both the survivor and abuser ask for help it is extremely important that different entities support each one and that each have a different support system.
- Recognize that both abuser and survivor need help getting support and/or leaving the violence. Therefore, focus first on the individual seeking help, rather than trying to identify whether she is the sur-



vivor or the batterer.

- Do not rely solely on law enforcement to hold batterers accountable. In collaboration with other agencies, explore strategies for holding batterers accountable and provide them with the support they need to stop the abuse.
- Help community members find solutions that allow them to responsibly intervene.

Community Interventions

Services should work with each community individually, and not apply a standardized service model. Instead, identify each community's needs, and assess how that community is already dealing with relationship violence.

- Equip members of communities with strategies to prevent relationship violence, support a survivor and hold an abuser accountable. For example, provide community members with advice on how to support a friend who comes to her for help, or guidelines on how to create a community team to be there for a survivor when she moves out of the batterer's home.
- Promote discussion on relationship violence among queer Asian community members and encourage them to continue the discussion themselves.
- Facilitate community members to decide for themselves what comprises a healthy relationship, and promote discussion and models about healthy relationships among community members.
- Create better access to traditional enforcement venues for queer Asian women in order to obtain counseling or restraining orders without being invalidated or harassed. This can be done by conducting trainings with local law enforcement and other agencies, or by seeking out culturally competent, queer-friendly counselors.
- Help the community support a survivor in the most appropriate way for her and that community. Create solutions with community members that meet the circumstances of the community and the relationship that is involved.



- Help the community support a batterer and hold her accountable in the best ways for the survivor and that community. Create solutions with community members who best know the circumstances surrounding the survivor, her abuser, and the community at large.
- Give general support to those confronting relationship violence in their community.

QAWS Community Intervention Strategies

By using discussion groups for needs-assessments, QAWS found that a community is best approached informally. Discussion groups provide opportunities for community members to voice their experiences, and to learn how community members are already dealing with abuse among their friends. In QAWS' experience, survivors came out and shared their stories or relationship violence. Friends in the group also felt safe to call each other on abusive behavior. The informal discussion group model can be used for addressing any issue in small communities where more formal forums fail.

Outreach and Education

A large part of QAWS' community strategy is outreach and education to other agencies, including shelters, to improve access and availability for queer Asian women and to equip communities to deal with abuse and support each other. Outreach strategies include:

- finding and making available resources, such as trustworthy, culturally competent and queer-friendly therapists or counselors;
- helping queer agencies equip themselves to deal effectively with same-gender relationship violence in small ethnic communities;
- networking and sharing strategies with others who are doing relationship violence work in other queer Asian communities;
- providing communities more information on how to use traditional services and create better access to traditional enforcement venues.



Helping Community Address Batterers

QAWS can assess an abusive situation, facilitate meetings with community members to hold each other accountable, encourage community members to directly talk to each other, facilitate the creation of support teams, or be a source of support for community members supporting friends in abusive relationships. In order to create applicable strategies, this complex process requires further discussion.

Helping Community Support a Survivor

QAWS has helped community members assess the safety of their friends, advised community members on how to help a survivor leave an abusive relationship, and helped friends identify what the survivor needs in terms of support. A strategy that QAWS finds extremely helpful is to form community teams, or a group of friends of a survivor or abuser, to support her in the ways where other agencies fail, such as during a stand-by. In heterosexual domestic violence cases, when a survivor needs to get her belongings from the abuser's home or vice versa (stand-by) police have been known to show up late, leave a survivor alone with the abuser, or leave too quickly. A group of friends can be at the house to make sure the abuser does not act out against the survivor, or can be there in lieu of the survivor. Another example is to have a community team support a survivor if she were to encounter her abuser in public.

Currently, QAWS has mobilized a network of Peer Resource agents who hold dinners with their friends to raise the issue of relationship violence and secure commitments from them to not condone abuse.

Holistic Community Support a Survivor

The underlying value of AWS and QAWS to make services more holistic is presented throughout this report. A framework of holistic services can be used to catch and help any marginalized population that historically slips through the cracks of existing services.

- ▮ Address oppressions in your agency. Be accountable for all the ways in which power and control play out with in your organization.



Eradicating oppressive dynamics from services creates safety for your clients.

- Validate, include, and support a woman who has different cultural identities and create accessibility for clients who fall through the cracks of a singular, standardized service delivery model. It is not acceptable to turn away women because they are queer or Asian- we should develop ways to serve them by improving existing services, having collaborations with queer Asian organizations, and utilizing appropriate referrals.
- Continue to attend oppression trainings and workshops for staff. Continue to invest a process to work through internal agency power dynamics and the ways staff members are oppressed by other staff. Improving how staff members treat each other will help us better serve the clients who get help from our services.
- Go to communities and give members the education, tools, and resources needed to talk about and address relationship violence. Don't wait for community members to initiate access to agency services.
- Work in collaboration to build services: make accessible to queer Asian women other services, such as drug/ alcohol treatment, financial counseling, medical and mental health services, housing, employment services, childcare, and safety planning.
- Evolve services to meet the changing environments of society and community needs: re-pivot the center of "domestic violence experience" to the realities of marginalized communities and better account for experiences outside white, male/ female relationships.



Appendix

Local Discussion Group Questions	27
(Asian Women's Shelter, QAWS)	
Queer Asian Women Questions	29
(National Focus Group)	
Survivor Interview Questionnaire	30
(Asian Women's Shelter, QAWS)	
Prejudice/Privilege/Oppression and Domestic Violence	32
National Directory for Queer Asian Resources	33



Local Discussion Group Questions

Asian Women's Shelter, Queer Asian Women's Services

General Discussion Questions

What is domestic violence in our community?

How do you respond if you think or know this is happening in someone's relationship?

what if you are friends

what if you know both parties

how do you deal with safety

what is hard in helping

what if you know the batterer

what if you know the survivor

What is needed to address this?

Do you have questions about domestic violence you want us to answer?

Mixed Heritage Group: Discussion Questions

How does culture impact abuse?

How do power dynamics impact domestic violence? How do you work out power dynamics in a relationship?

How does being biracial, bicultural, multiracial, multicultural impact domestic violence?

What would you need if you were a survivor of domestic violence?

If you were a survivor, in what situation would you go to a friend, to services (QAWS)?

What impact does domestic violence have on our community?



What if you knew the survivor? How can we be accountable, as individuals and as a community, to a survivor of domestic violence?

What if you know the batterer? How can we be accountable to the batterer? How can we hold the batterer accountable?

What is hard in helping? What do you feel you would need to help?

Over 35 Group: Discussion Questions

How would you define abuse in a queer relationship?

Have you ever witnessed abuse in a relationship of your own or friends?

What would you consider personally abusive to you?

How do family and friends respond to the problem? Are they supportive?

What kind of support happens or doesn't?

What possible barriers might someone have if they were in that situation?

Does age impact abuse?

What about if you have children? Or the integration of each others families and friends?

How does domestic violence impact our communities? (What are these communities?)

What response do you think communities should have in abusive relationships?

What if you knew a survivor, how would you be accountable, as a friend community member?

What could make it easy or hard to help? What would you need to be able to help?



Queer Asian Women Questions

National Focus Group

Safety and Safe Space

What is safe space?

For our community, when you think of a safe place, what does it mean?

What needs to be created structurally?

Support/Emotional Safety

How do you find emotional safety?

What does it look like? What are ways it can look tangibly?

What service could meet that need?

Community Support

Define what community you are talking about.

How can the community be a safe place? Unsafe?

What needs to happen to have a community response?

Grassroots or community-based, community education.

Responding to batterers.

Legal services: TRO, police, criminal, civil, custody.



Survivor Interview

Asian Women's Shelter, Queer Asian Women's Services

This information will be written down, but confidential within the organization; No names will be attached to statements unless with your permission.

Interviewee's Name: _____ Date: _____

Interviewer's Name: _____

Dynamics of abuse and relationship

1. How did you come to name, define the abuse? what was your process? How did you identify it as abusive (ie., clue)?
2. Did you recognize abuse outside the relationship or while in it? Please talk more about that.
3. How would you characterize the abuse in your relationship?
4. How did culture affect you in your relationship?
5. What were the ways you responded to the abuse?
6. In your relationship, how did you define being safe? How did you find safety?
7. What made it hard for you to get help or made it easier to stay (ie., obstacles, batterer, background, community, services)

Support

8. Did you talk to anyone about what was going on? Who and what was the response? How did you feel about the response?
9. Looking back, what kind of support did you have from your friends and family? What was helpful, not helpful? What would you have wanted?
10. How do you feel the community should respond to the issue of domestic violence? (What community are you talking about, please describe?)



11. Did you call any services for support? If not, what were the issues that came up for you? If you did, who did you call and how was it?
12. What kind of services or support systems need to be created to respond to domestic violence?

Accountability

13. How do you feel about batterer accountability? What does it bring up for you?
14. How would you want to hold a batterer accountable?

Healing

15. In what ways does the abuse you experience affect you now?
16. What have you done to heal? What would help to heal?
17. Have you been able to regain your power? If so, how?

Interview process: Ways survivors can be interviewed

1. Send interviewees questions ahead of time and do phone interview.
2. Do phone interview, but they do not get questions.
3. They fill out questionnaire and mail back in a week.

After the interview, ask interviewee what support she needs, if any.

Please tell them about the confidentiality of the interview.



Prejudice/Privilege/Oppression and Domestic Violence

How does one being:

- A Woman
- A Person of Color/An Asian
- An Immigrant
- An Undocumented Immigrant
- A Person Who Doesn't Speak English
- A Lesbian/Gay/Bi-Sexual (Queer) Person
- A Person With Disabilities
- A Poor Person
- A Transgender Person
- An Elderly Person
- A Young Person

Become used as part of the abuse...

Prevent you from knowing where to get help...

Make survival difficult or impossible if you leave the one abusing you...

Subject you to more abuse by those who are supposed to help?



*National Directory for
Queer Asian Resources*

(Partial Listing)



National Directory for Queer Asian Resources

(Partial Listing)

National

Family Violence Prevention Fund

National Health Resource Center on Domestic Violence

383 Rhode Island St., Suite #304

San Francisco, CA 94103

415-252-8900

Fax: 415-252-8991

info@endabuse.org

National Center for Lesbian Rights

870 Market St., Suite #570

San Francisco, CA 94102

415-392-6257

(legal issues)

Rita Smith

National Coalition Against Domestic Violence

P.O. Box 18749

Denver, CO 80218

303-839-1852

Arkansas

Judy Matsuoka

Women's Project

2224 Main St.

Little Rock, AR 72206

501-372-5113

wproject@aol.com



California

Vinh Vu

Women's Program Coordinator/Health Educator

Asian & Pacific Islander Wellness Center

730 Polk St., 4th floor

San Francisco, CA 94109

415-292-3400

Carole Ching

Asian Resources, Inc.

5709 Stockton Blvd.

Sacramento, CA 95824

916-454-1892

admin@asianresources.org

Hediana Utartí

Queer Asian Women's Services

Asian Women's Shelter

3543-18th Street, #19

San Francisco, CA 94110

415-751-7110 office

877-751-0880 crisis

415-751-0806 fax

(shelter, queer-specific services, multi-lingual services, advocacy, community organizing, community education)

Reina Sandoval-Beverly

Director of Support Services

Battered Women's Alternatives

P.O. Box 6406

Concord, CA 94524

510-231-2378 office

888-215-5555 crisis

(shelter, transitional housing, batterer program, legal services)

Jim Gordon

Beverly Hills Family Counseling Int.

204 S. Beverly Dr., #116

Beverly Hills, CA 90212

310-271-3784



Heather Berberet
Relationship Violence
Treatment and Intervention Program
Lesbian and Gay Men's Community Center
3916 Normal St.
San Diego, CA 92103
619-260-6380

Susan Holt
S.T.O.P. Domestic Violence Program
Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Center
1625 N. Shrader Blvd., Suite 40
Los Angeles, CA 90028-6213
323-993-7640

M.O.V.E. (Men Overcoming Violence)
1385 Mission St., Suite 300
San Francisco, CA 94103
415-626-6683
(male batterer program)

Amy Caffrey
Program Coordinator
Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual Domestic Violence Program
Next Door
1181 n. Fourth St.
San Jose, CA 95112
408-377-2007

Crystal Jang
OASIS (Older Asian Sisters in Solidarity)
263 Flood Street
San Francisco, CA 94112
415-239-2404

**O-Moi (A Support Network for Vietnamese lesbian, female bisexual
and transgender people)**
P.O. Box 137
Culver City, CA 90232-0137
1-877-590-6700 ext. 057
omoi@hotmail.com
<http://omoi.homepage.com>



Antonio Ramirez

POCOVI

474 Valencia St., Suite #150
San Francisco, CA 94103
415-552-1361
(male batterer program)

Chris Lymbertos, Jamie Lee Evans, Rebecca Rolfe

San Francisco Women Against Rape

1841 Market St., 3rd floor
San Francisco, CA 94103
415-861-2024

Sor Juana Ines (Services for Abused Women)

135 N. San Mateo Dr.
San Mateo, CA 94401
650-340-6360 ext. 14

Support Network for Battered Lesbian and Bisexual Women

3543-18th St., #28
San Francisco, CA 94110
415-281-0276
(voicemail, peer support, support group)

Morgaine Wilder

3896 24th St.
San Francisco, CA 94114
415-648-8781
(individual therapy for batterers and survivors)

Robin Nickel

Lesbian Domestic Violence Program

W.O.M.A.N., Inc.

333 Valencia St., Suite #251
San Francisco, CA 94103
415-864-4777
(support group, crisis line, counseling)

Donna Cox, Lissa Martinez

Domestic Violence Project

YWCA-Women's Services Center

735 E. Lexington Dr.
Glendale, CA 91204
818-240-0888



Georgia

Raksha, Inc.
P.O. Box 12337
Atlanta, GA 30355
404-876-0670
raksha@mindspring.com

Women's Resource Center
404-688-9436

Hawaii

Valli Kalei Kanuha, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor
University of Hawaii
School of Social Work
2500 Campus Road
Honolulu, HI 96822
808-956-6239 office
Fax: 808-956-5964
Kanuha@hawaii.edu

Illinois

Sharmili Majmudar
c/o Metropolitan Family Services
235 E. 103rd St.
Chicago, IL 60628
773-371-3616
or
Khuli-zaban
c/o 1709 W. Ardmore #2
Chicago, IL 60660
312-409-2753



Massachusetts

Beth Leventhal

The Network for Battered Lesbian and Bisexual Women

P.O. Box 6011

Boston, MA 02114

617-695-0877

nblbw@erols.com

Minnesota

Casa de Esperanza

1821 University Ave.

Griggs Building, Suite South 155

St. Paul, MN 55014

651-646-5553

(organization serving the Latina community)

New York

Joo-Yun Kang

Audre Lourde Project

85 S. Oxford Street

Brooklyn, NY 11217

718-596-0342

j.kang@alp.org

Trishala Deb

Domestic Violence Advocate

Trx2@cs.com

Oregon

Emi Kayama

P.O. Box 40570

Portland, OR 97240

415-430-2161

emi@eminism.org



Washington

Norma Timbang & Judy Chen
Asian & Pacific Islander Women and Family Safety Center
P.O. Box 14047
Seattle, WA 98114
206-467-9976

**Northwest Network of Bisexual, Trans, &
Lesbian Survivors of Abuse**
P.O. Box 22869
Seattle, WA 98122
206-568-7777

Truc Nguyen
4413 S. Rose St.
Seattle, WA 98119
206-722-1373
Fax: 206-438-6340
stuck2rice@hotmail.com

Washington, D.C.

APIQS (Asian Pacific Islander Queer Sisters)
Contact: Lesbian Services Program Whitman Walker Clinic
1407 S Street NW
Washington DC 20009
202-939-7875



Notes:



Family Violence Prevention Fund
383 Rhode Island Street, Suite 304
San Francisco, CA 94103-5133
Phone: 415.252.8900 Fax: 415.282.8991
www.endabuse.org