

LGBTQ+ PEOPLE'S EXPERIENCES OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

A/Prof Bianca Fileborn
School of Social & Political Sciences, University of Melbourne
E: biancaf@unimelb.edu.au





BACKGROUND CONTEXT

- Sexual violence predominantly framed in heteronormative terms
 - Intersectional and queer critiques (e.g., Crenshaw, 1991; Erbaugh, 2007)
- LGBTQ+ people rarely included in mainstream data collection & methodological limitations (Hindes, Ison & Fileborn, under review)
- LGBTQ+ communities face high levels of sexual violence (Hindes, Ison & Fileborn, under review):
 - Bisexual women consistently encounter highest rates of sexual violence
 - Women consistently experience higher rates of sexual violence than men
 - Transgender & gender non-conforming people experience higher rates of sexual violence
- Limited information on perpetrators – overwhelmingly still men
- Unique myths/misperceptions & barriers to disclosure (e.g., Braun et al, 2009; Mortimer, Powell & Sandy, 2019)



PROJECT TEAM

- Collaborative project between ACON, University of Tasmania & University of Melbourne
- Project team:
 - Professor Nicole Asquith
 - A/Prof Angela Dwyer
 - Dr Ash Barnes
 - Eloise Layard
 - Jade Parker
 - Teddy Cook
 - Joël Murray
 - Dr Shaez Mortimer
 - Dr Ron Mason



OUR PROJECT

- Online survey with 330 NSW LGBTQA+ survivors
- We asked participants about:
 - Experiences of SV across their lives & 'most impactful' experience
 - Impacts
 - Disclosure & Reporting
 - Help-seeking & pathways to healing

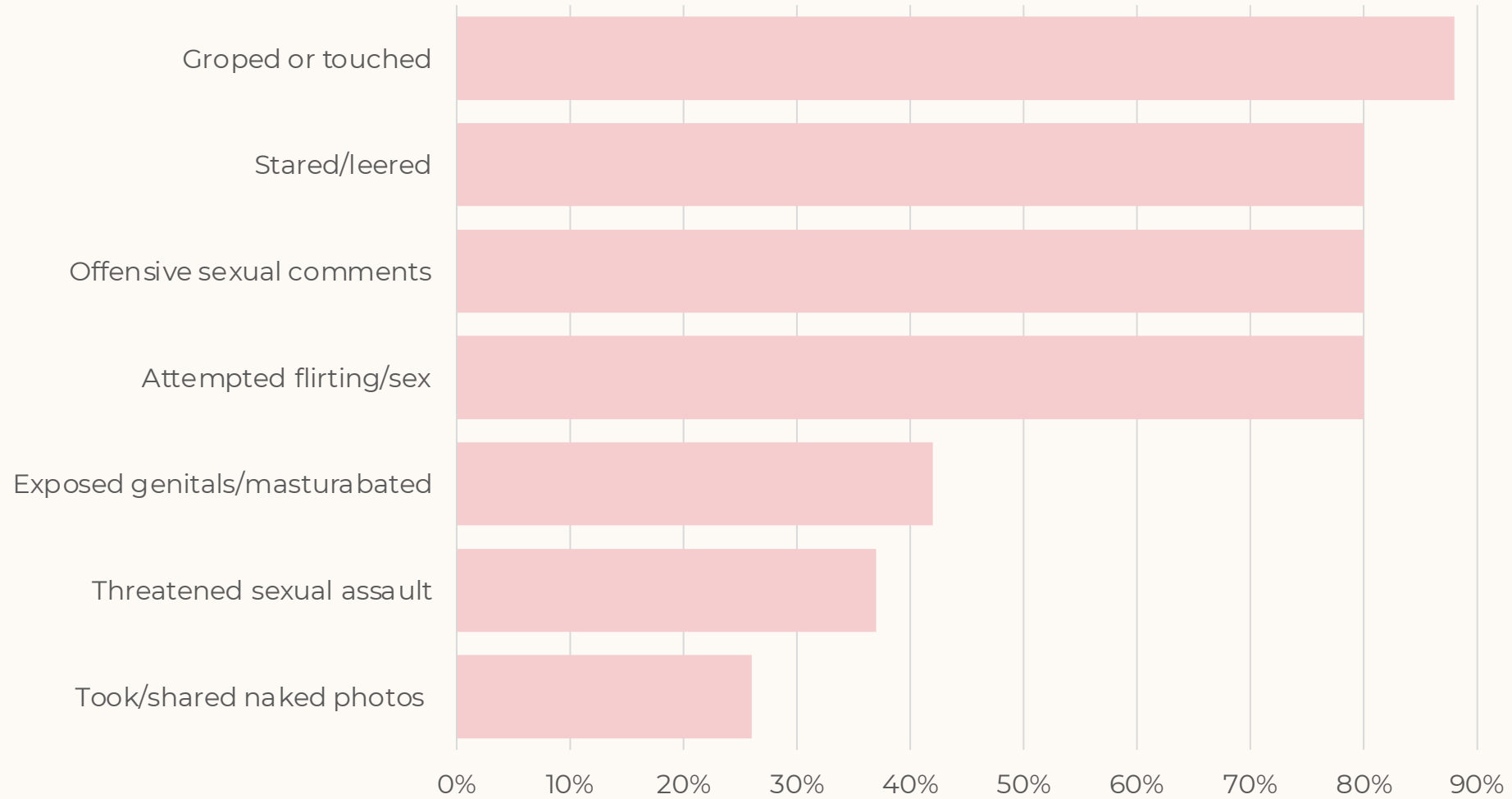


PARTICIPANTS – KEY DEMOGRAPHICS

- **Key demographics**
 - 78% under the age of 40 years
 - 32% identified as bi+; 26% gay; queer 24%; or lesbian 14%
 - 63% identified as cisgender; 28% non-binary; 9% transgender
 - 79% identified as Australian, with 80% speaking only English at home
 - 8% identified as Aboriginal, Torres Strait and/or South Sea Islander
 - 80% have either TAFE or university qualifications
 - 54% identified as disabled or person with disability

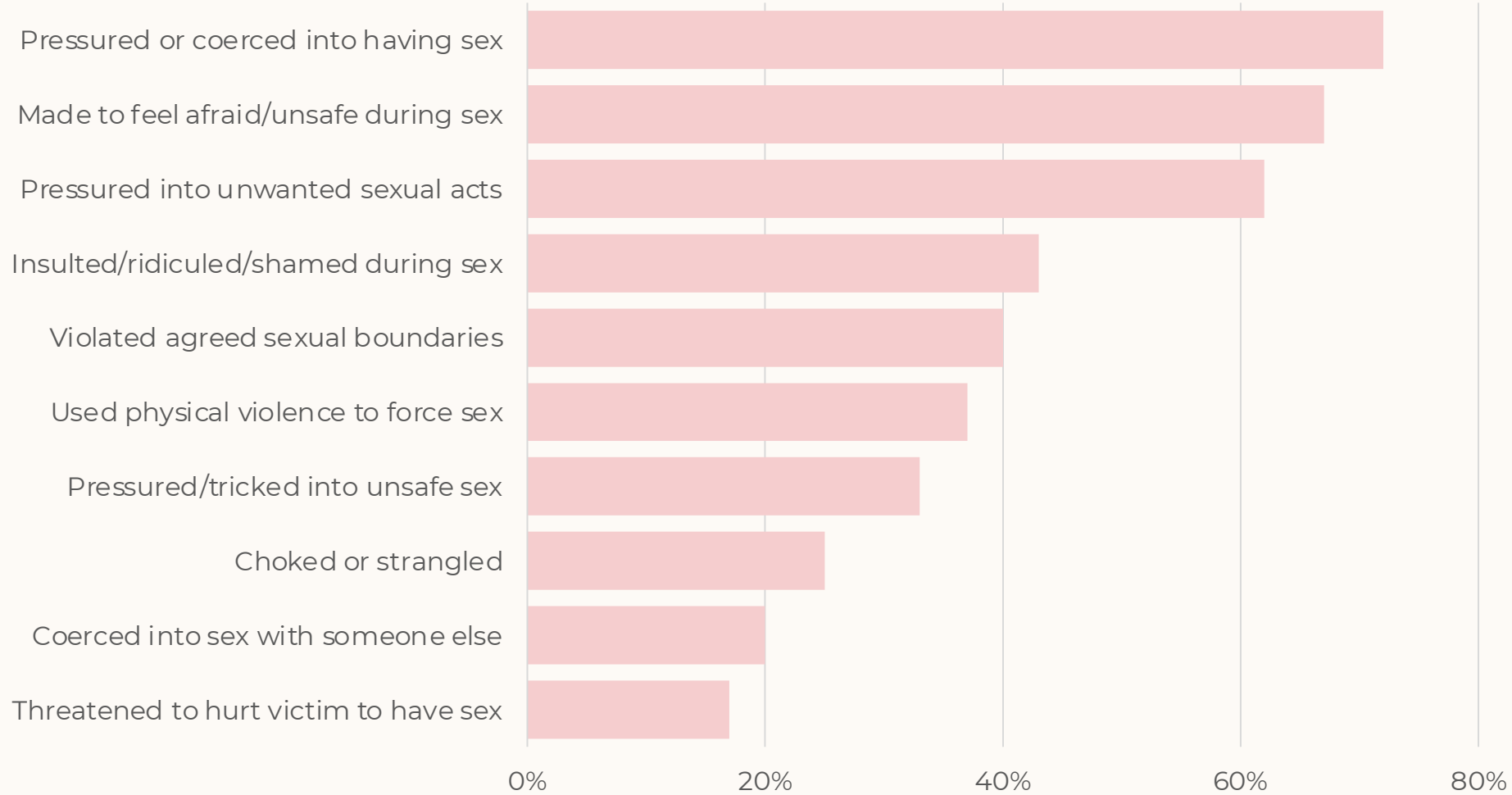
Experiences of SV

Unwanted sexualised behaviours (N=293) (ACON 2023)



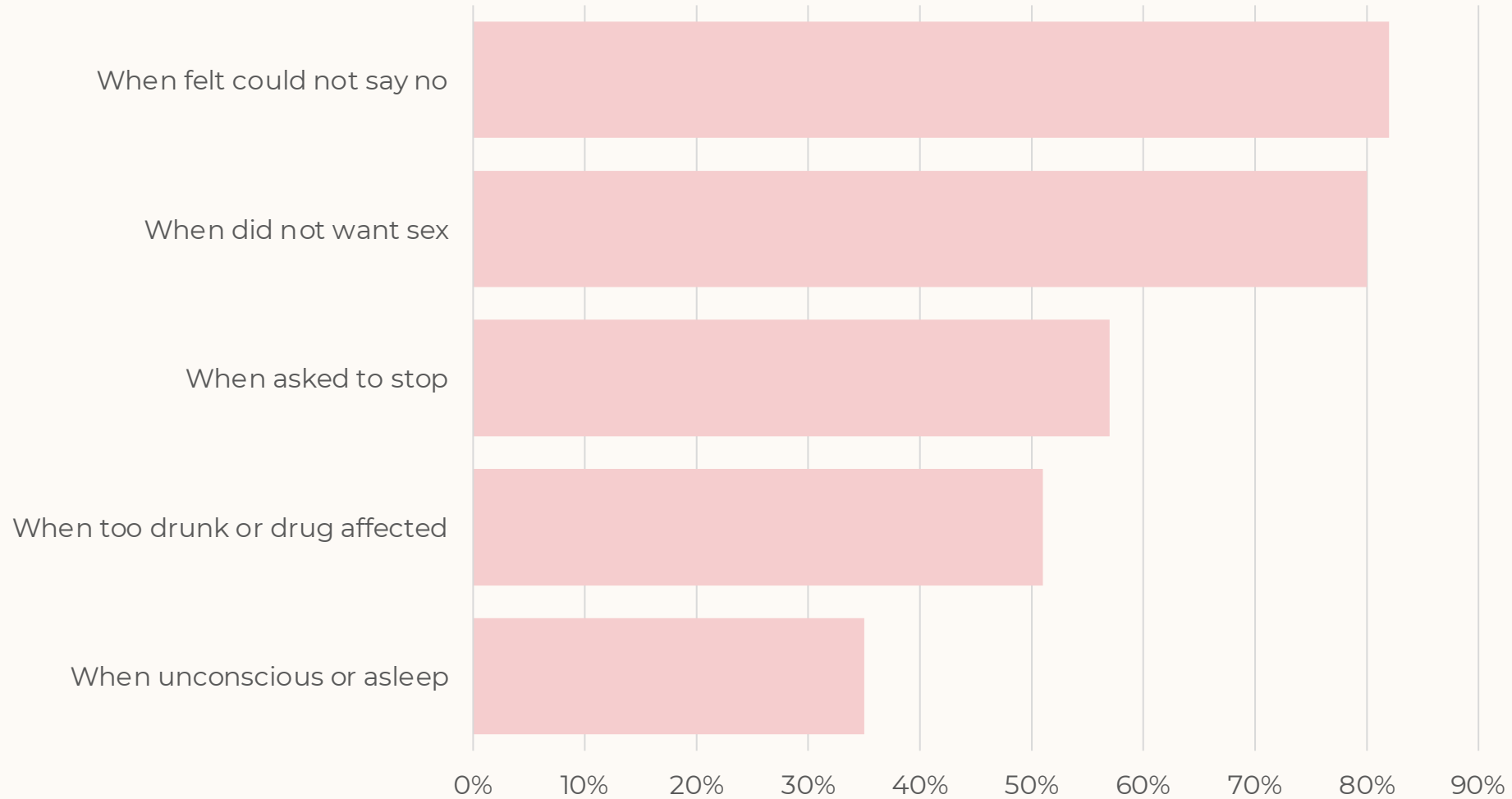
Experiences of sexual violence

Unwanted sexually violent behaviours (N=270) (ACON 2023)



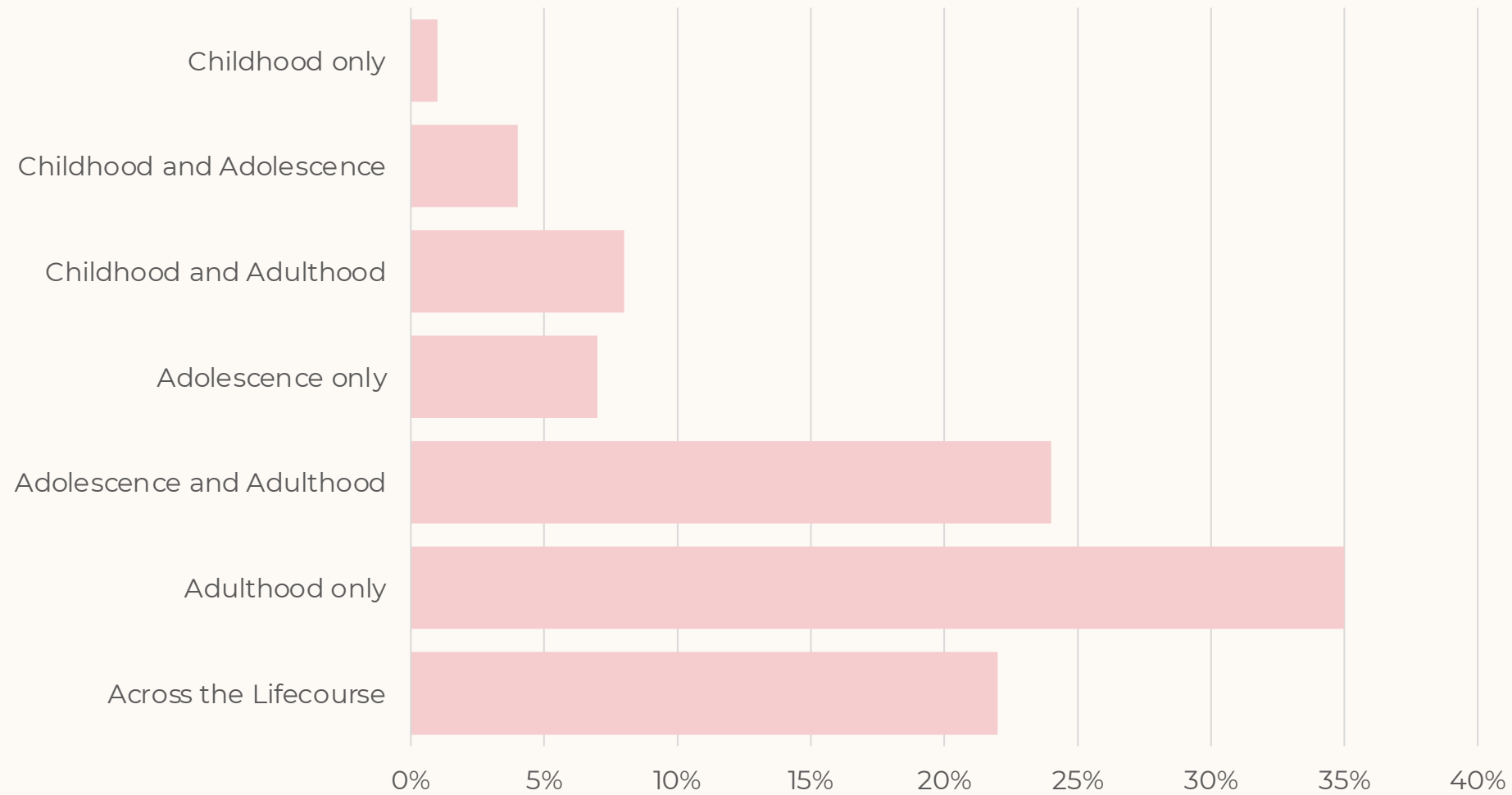
Experiences of sexual violence

Sexual assault and lack of consent (N=257) (ACON 2023)



LIFECOURSE VICTIMISATION

Lifecourse victimisation (N=292) (ACON 2023)



MOST IMPACTFUL INCIDENT OF SV

- **Perpetrators of SV against LGBTQ+ people = hook ups/casual dates, (ex-) intimate partners, or strangers**
 - But family members (other than (ex-)partner) involved in 12% of SV
- **Perpetrators of SV were most commonly cisgender men (86%) or cisgender women (13%)**
 - Trans men/women and NB folks least likely to be perpetrators (2% to 3%)
- **51% of perpetrators were thought to be members of LGBTQ+ community**
 - But varies across the rainbow: 77% of SV against cis men; 54% trans men; 31% cis women
- **Relationships between victim-survivor and perpetrator complex**
 - Did it occur prior to coming out/transitioning?
 - Childhood v adolescence v adulthood experiences of SV
 - The use of “corrective rape” by family members
- **As such, motivation is also complex; ranging from sexism to homo/bi/transphobia, ableism, racism, whorephobia**
 - Where does sexual violence end and hate crime begin (EG “corrective rape”)?



ROLE OF HETERO & CIS NORMATIVITY

“Aphobia; he thought that he could change my asexuality through assault” (25 years old, non-binary, asexual)

“A huge lesson on how cis gay men can treat trans queer men. The way I was treated felt like transphobia with sexism thrown in, they treated my body like I imagine cis men treat cis women, with complete disregard” (42, transgender man, queer).

“He stated that the reason he was going to/was assaulting me was because of my sexuality (bisexual, questioning if I was a lesbian at the time) and the fact that I only had gay sexual experience at the time. He called me slurs beforehand as well” (31 years old, non-binary, queer/pansexual)

IMPACTS

- Significant range of impacts:
 - Mental health (83%)
 - 52% had thoughts of self-harm; 42% had self-harmed
 - 43% had thoughts of suicide; 21% had attempted suicide
 - Feelings of safety (75%)
 - Sex life (68%)
 - Relationships (61%)
 - Connection to the LGBTQ+ community (27%)

“To this day I am deeply affected by the long period of time it happened, especially during my formative years as a teenager, and he was also my first sexual partner” 26 years old, non-binary, asexual

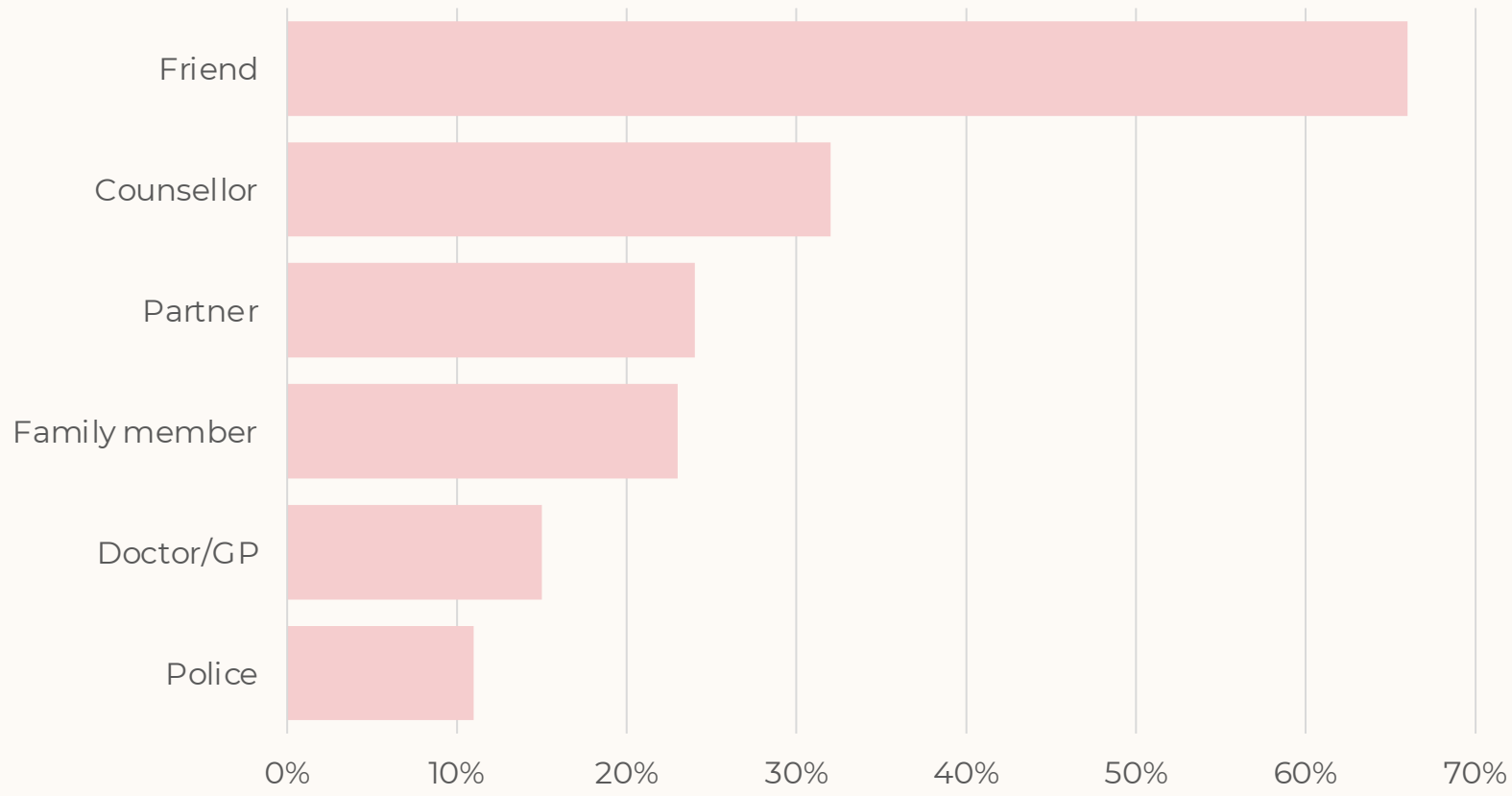
“It has made me question every aspect of my gender and sexuality and not in a healthy, exploratory way; in a hyper vigilant, self-doubtful, blaming every part of my “selfhood” as somehow a “result of the experiences. It hollowed out my sense of self. It makes me feel like a fraud, even in queer spaces where I feel loved and accepted” (39 years old, queer, non-binary)

BYSTANDER INTERVENTION

Bystander intervention (before, during or after incident) (n=280)	N	%
Yes	34	12
No	234	84
Unsure/don't know	11	4
Prefer not to say	1	0

DISCLOSURE

First reporter (N=215) (ACON 2023)



REASONS FOR NOT DISCLOSING

Ashamed/embarrassed (65%);

Not serious enough (41%);

Blame (35%);

Not believed (24%);

Discrimination/prejudice (13%);

Forced “outing” (9%)



DISCLOSURE

- Most (78%) did disclose to someone. But mixed responses to disclosure:

“I grew up in a religious family where my parents were still coming to terms with my sexuality. They believed that being assaulted was to be expected living that lifestyle.” (26 years old, cisgender man, gay)

“You should be glad someone is into you, that’s not everyone’s thing (the assumption being that because I’m a trans woman I should take what I can get)” (28 years old, transgender woman, lesbian)

“Several friends that I told were supportive and listened to my experiences. They never expressed any doubt that it didn’t count as assault” (28 years old, non-binary, queer)

- Non-disclosure:

“I also believed that because my abuser was a transfeminine person, I would be contributing to the transphobia trans women face in society by talking about it” (23 years old, non-binary, bisexual)

REPORTING TO POLICE

Most (86%) did not report to the police, and mixed responses for those who did:

“It was horrible! So, so traumatizing. Honestly the reporting process was more traumatizing than the assault itself” (27 years old, trans man, queer)

“I still feel distrustful of police when it comes to discussing my homosexuality” (30 years old, cis man, gay)

“The police were dismissive, rude, and minimizing of what happened. They were also extremely judgmental and ableist towards me as soon as I informed them, I had mental health issues. There was no follow-up, and I was left feeling unsafe and unheard” (32 years old, cis woman, pansexual).



HELP SEEKING & SUPPORT

- Pivotal to healing pathways:

“Therapy – both DBT & EMDR. Learning about trauma and PTSD. Talking to my friends about it. Exercising, Spending time with my loved ones” (38 years old, cis woman, bisexual)

- Barriers to accessing appropriate support:

“Services need to hire LGBTQIA+ people to support LGBTQIA+ people, particularly trans people for trans clients. It’s not good enough that services are so cis-heteronormative. I don’t want to talk to a veteran social worker called Barbara whose understanding of sexual assault is “woman attacked at night by man”, and whose only exposure to queer people is Elton John” (24 years old, non-binary, gay)

“Most people and services are hopeless at LGBTQIA+ support. They just don’t get it. Even cisgender gay people struggle with trans support”. (24 years old, transmasculine/genderqueer/female intersex physiology, gay)



WHERE TO?

- Sexual violence experienced across the life course & in multiple forms
- Significant impacts, including on mental health
- Role of cis & heteronormativity
- Need for theoretical, conceptual & policy/practice responses that are inclusive of queer experiences:
 - Training for staff
 - Development and greater access to services for LGBTQA+ communities (& appropriate funding for this!)
 - Need for trauma-informed services
 - Alternative & innovative justice responses
 - Broader efforts to address cis- and hetero-normativity
 - Community education & awareness raising

THANK YOU

Full report: Layard et al (2023). *LGBTQ+ people's experiences and perceptions of sexual violence: research report summary*. ACON.

Available on the Say It Out Loud website.

And briefing papers coming soon!

