

Fact Sheet:

AAPI LGBTQ+

Experiences of GBV

Updated February 2024



This factsheet summarizes the layered needs and experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and more (LGBTQ+^a) Asian, Asian American, and Pacific Islander (AAPI) survivors and communities in the U.S.,^b based on the current literature available. Although limited research has been conducted on this topic, we present findings that capture the range of experiences, track current trends and prevalence rates regarding gender-based violence (GBV), and bring to attention areas of need.

Queer and transgender Asian, Asian American, and Pacific Islander (QTAPI)^c survivors might identify in ways beyond those encompassed by the LGBTQ+ umbrella identities. We recognize that not all communities will identify with the LGBTQ+ umbrella, or with the modern connotation of some LGBTQ+ identities. For the purposes of this factsheet, we will use LGBTQ+ to include non-heterosexual and non-binary identities.

“Terms for LGBTQ communities in Asia and the Pacific include *fa’afafine* in Samoa and American Samoa, *fakafefine* (also *fakaleiti*) in Tonga, *Māhū* in contemporary Hawai’ian culture, ‘tomboy’ and *bakla* in the Philippines, and *kathoeyes* or ‘ladyboys’ in Thailand. In South Asia, India’s 4,000-year-old transgender and intersex community use *hijra* — as do those in Nepal, Bangladesh and Pakistan (where *khwaja sira* is also used).”^d

^aFor a glossary of more terms that are encompassed by the + in LGBTQ+, as well as related terms, see <https://pflag.org/glossary/>

^bFor a roundtable report that includes advocate and expert perspectives on gender and oppression among LGBTQ+ AAPI communities, see: <https://www.api-gbv.org/resources/api-lgbtq-roundtable/>

^cFor an analysis of how QTAPI survivors and advocates navigate and find healing beyond interlocking systems of oppression to prevent IPV-related homicides, see <https://www.api-gbv.org/resources/qtapiareport/>

^d<https://www.api-gbv.org/about-gbv/types-of-gbv/lgbtq-intimate-partner-violence/>

Prevalence Rates of GBV against LGBTQ+ AAPIs

According to a study¹ that analyzed Asian American-specific data from the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey:

Over half (52.4%) of transgender Asian Americans, including non-binary, gender-queer Asian Americans, experienced abuse or violence from a romantic or sexual partner.

Non-binary and gender-queer Asian Americans were significantly more likely than cisgender lesbian and gay Asian American peers to experience any abuse or violence.

57.5% of non-binary and other gender-queer Asian Americans, 59% of transgender Asian women, and 62.8% of transgender Asian American men experienced partner abuse or partner violence.

In another study² that drew data from the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey, it was found that **Middle Eastern and Northern African** participants reported significantly higher rates of:

- **Psychological intimate partner violence (IPV)** (OR: 2.0, 95% CI = [1.3, 3.1])
- **Stalking** (OR: 1.8, 95% CI = [1.1, 3.0])
- And **forced sex** (OR: 1.8, 95% CI = [1.1, 2.9]) compared to their peers².

20% of ANHPI lesbian individuals experienced **sexual abuse**, according to a pilot study³ in California that explored the experiences of lesbian and sexual minority women.

South Asian LGB+ respondents were slightly more likely (62.4%) to have experienced contact-based sexual violence compared to their heterosexual counterparts (59.6%), according to a community survey⁴ in New York.

The same community survey⁴ found that **LGB+ South Asians were almost twice as likely (17.2% vs. 9.6%) to experience multiple instances of rape** compared to their heterosexual counterparts.

A community-driven research project⁵ that surveyed **queer and transgender Koreans** (N = 87) in the US found that two-thirds of respondents “occasionally to frequently experienced one or more forms of abuse from an intimate partner” (p. 18). The most common forms of violence they reported were:

75% Experienced Emotional Abuse



57% Experienced Verbal Abuse



48% Experienced Stalking



In that same study⁵, Korean participants experienced at least one incident of threats, physical abuse, and sexual abuse by an intimate partner:

35% reported experiencing at least one incident of physical IPV.



40% reported experiencing at least one incident of an intimate partner threatening to self-harm or commit suicide.



38% reported experiencing at least one incident of sexual IPV.



According to the **2020 ALOHA (Assessing Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Violence in Hawai'i) Study**⁶ (N = 477), 61.6% of LGBT Native Hawai'ians and Pacific Islanders experience sexual IPV. This is a considerably higher rate compared to the 4% of the general Hawai'ian population and 16% of the general US population⁶.

The ALOHA study⁶ also found that transgender and gender non-conforming participants reported the lowest percentages of IPV (sexual: 21.9%, physical: 40.6%) compared to other groups in the study, such as the rates of IPV (sexual: 49.3%, physical: 54.1%) among the LGBT population in Hawai'i. This finding differs from rates given in national literature, where typically transgender and gender non-conforming individuals report higher rates of experiencing IPV.

- Researchers in this study⁶ attribute this difference to a difference in cultural contexts, since māhū and transgender communities are celebrated and respected status as a third gender in traditional Hawai'ian culture⁷.
- However, IPV might be underreported by Native Hawai'ians and Pacific Islanders due to distrust of and mistreatment by the justice, legal, and/or religious systems, especially when reporting fatal or near fatal cases of IPV to the police⁸. Patriarchy, colonialism, and imperialism all play a role in IPV experienced by Native Hawai'ians and Pacific Islanders in diasporas located across the United States and affiliated islands^{7,8}.

Risk Factors for GBV and Intersecting Areas of Need

For some LGBTQ+ AAPIs, having multiple identities (such as being lesbian and AAPI and surviving partner violence) means navigating intersecting layers of stigma. Additionally, outing an LGBTQ+ survivor can be a strategy to assert control in a relationship. Outing, or disclosing a survivor's LGBTQ+ identity without permission, threatens a survivor's safety, housing, and network of social support^{5,9}.

QTAPI-Driven Participatory Research

Projects that are for and by QTAPIs uncover rich stories and lessons from survivors and advocates working with QTAPI survivors. While national and state-level research is limited, several community-based participatory research (CBPR) projects indicate heightened risk factors but also cultural protective factors among queer and transgender AAPI communities, who live at the intersections of their LGBTQ+ and AAPI identities in conjunction with lifetime experiences of domestic violence (DV)^{5,9,10,13,16}.

- One potential and final outcome of IPV and DV is **intimate partner homicide (IPH)** or **domestic violence-related homicide**. A recent CBPR study¹⁰ explored how QTAPI communities are rich with cultural practices that shift social norms and can mediate conflicts alongside trusted community leaders, family members, and elders to prevent DV from escalating. These practices have potential to provide closure and/or justice in ways that are meaningful and culturally relevant to QTAPI survivors. Social support for QTAPIs also extends beyond formal support systems with practices and concepts such as “found family,” which are deep relationship ties that provide protective support and a safety net for survivors¹⁰.

CBPR projects, which involve an equal partnership between researchers and community stakeholders, have the potential to provide nuanced analysis of risk factors and current needs, since community members have expert knowledge about their contexts, advocacy work, and lived experiences. CBPR can help to acknowledge the multiple, interlocking systems of oppression faced by QTAPIs and build trust and community capacity.

Furthermore, participatory methods not only ensure that research is more culturally responsive and equitable, but also fosters a sense of ownership and empowerment within the community, ultimately contributing to the development of more effective and sustainable solutions that address the unique challenges faced by the community.

Mental health

A study¹ that analyzed Asian American data from the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey found that among transgender and non-binary Asian Americans, those who experienced partner violence compared to those who did not reported **higher rates of suicidal thoughts** (88.3% vs. 76.5%), **suicidal actions** (53.2% vs. 33.3%), and **serious psychological distress** (45.3% vs. 25.5%).

Immigration status

According to a national study¹¹, more than one in ten (13.6%) undocumented LGBT adults are Asian or Pacific Islander— similar to the proportion of all Asian or Pacific Islander (14.0%) out of all undocumented adults in the US.

An estimated

35,500

undocumented LGBT adults are from five Asian countries: **India, China, Philippines, Korea, and Vietnam**

LGBTQ+ Asian Americans' safety and health across the lifespan

An estimated 2.8% of Asian Americans identify as LGBT and 26% of Asian LGBT are 40 years or older¹². Older LGBT Asians had a higher psychological distress score compared to non-LGBT Asians¹². Among Asian LGBT older adult respondents of the California Health Interview Survey, experiencing discrimination in medical care and intimate violence were associated with higher levels of psychological stress¹².

A study¹³ that analyzed API-specific data from the 2012 National Transgender Discrimination Survey found:

- 14% of API respondents reported experiencing homelessness at some point in their lives, almost twice the rate of the general U.S. population (7.4%).
- 21% of API transgender and gender non-conforming people reported having been refused a home or apartment due to bias.
- API transgender and gender non-conforming people experience unemployment at a higher rate (12% vs. 7%) than the general US population.
- API transgender and gender non-conforming people are experiencing violence in the workplace: 49% of respondents were harassed, 8% were physically assaulted, and 10% were sexually assaulted (SA) at work.

According to a local needs assessment¹⁴ surveying transgender, non-binary, and gender-nonconforming AAPIs living in the Bay Area of California:

- **Respondents who were living with disabilities were more likely to experience SA (77%) and DV (57%)** compared to their non-disabled peers.
- **Respondents who experienced homelessness in their lifetime were also more likely to experience sexual violence (76%) and domestic violence (76.7%)** compared to participants who never experienced homelessness.

The same needs assessment¹⁴ reported **priority areas of need** for transgender, non-binary, and gender-nonconforming AAPI adults living in the Bay Area of California. The following were priorities among the respondents overall and by AAPI region:



AAPI LGBTQ+ Students

A national study¹⁵ surveyed 1,480 AAPI LGBTQ students in grades 6 through 12. The majority (87.7%) of these students attended public school, and more than half (56.5%) attended predominantly White schools.

Safety and LGBTQ+ Identity

Transgender and gender-nonconforming AAPI students experienced **greater levels of victimization** based on sexual orientation and gender expression than cisgender LGBTQ AAPI students¹⁵.

- **82.3% of AAPI LGBTQ students reported hearing negative remarks about transgender people;** over a third (35.5%) heard these remarks often or frequently.
- Many **AAPI students** experienced **harassment or assault at school** based on personal characteristics, including **sexual orientation (60.5%), gender expression (54.7%), and race/ethnicity (53.8%)¹⁵.**



More than half of AAPI LGBTQ+ students felt unsafe at their schools because of their sexual orientation.



About 4 out of every 10 AAPI LGBTQ+ students felt unsafe in school due to their gender expression.

More than half of AAPI LGBTQ students (56.5%)

who experienced harassment or assault in the past year **never reported victimization to staff**



- Of those who did not report, most (67.4%) did not report because they did not think that staff would do anything about it

Conversely, **43.5% of AAPI LGBTQ students do report their experiences to staff.**

Who are LGBTQ+ AAPI students disclosing to?

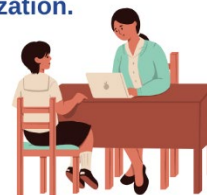
42.3%

reported that staff responded effectively when students reported victimization.



43.5%

told a family member about the victimization they faced at school.



There is a need to disaggregate data by AAPI ethnicities and regions, as well as by LGBTQ+ identities. According to a study that analyzed Asian American-specific data from The California Healthy Kids Survey¹⁶, which explored the experiences of LGBTQ+ students from 7th, 9th, and 11th grade in California public schools:

41.1% of Cambodian transgender students were beaten up compared to 27.1% of white transgender students¹⁶.

This study¹⁶ also explored the experiences of 9+ Asian American ethnicities:

Among transgender Asian American students:	Among lesbian and gay Asian American students:	Among bisexual Asian American students:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rates of suicidal ideation ranged from 39% of transgender Asian Indian students to 55.7% of transgender Hmong students. In comparison, 44.7% of white transgender students experienced suicidal ideation. • Rates of experiencing depression ranged from 44.9% of transgender Vietnamese students to 55.6% of transgender Filipino students, compared to 56.6% of their white transgender peers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rates of suicidal ideation ranged from 37.6% of lesbian and gay Vietnamese students to 55.2% of Laotian lesbian and gay students. Among white gay and lesbian students, 49.7% had contemplated suicide. • Rates of depression among gay and lesbian students ranged from 45.1% of Korean students to 55.1% of Filipino students. Of the white lesbian and gay students, 54.4% experienced depression. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rates of suicidal ideation ranged from 42% of bisexual Cambodian students to 53% of Japanese bisexual students, compared to 46% of bisexual white students. • Rates of depression ranged from 51.8% of bisexual Hmong students to 65.4% of bisexual Filipino students. Among bisexual white students, 62.9% experienced depression.

Areas for Future Research:

While this factsheet provides an overview of current GBV trends and needs of LGBTQ+ AAPI communities and survivors, there are still many areas of unmet needs, and many communities who are not represented in current reports or research. The following identifies several of those areas where more research is needed:

- Basic needs (such as safe housing, gender-affirming healthcare, HIV treatment/prevention/PrEP) for transgender and non-binary AAPI survivors, communities, and young people
 - Culturally-responsive prevention, healing practices, programs, and allyship toolkits for advocates and professionals working with transgender and non-binary AAPI survivors.
- Needs of LGBTQ+ AAPI survivors who are elders, immigrants, and survivors living in rural environments
 - Work that focuses on individual identities (i.e. culturally-reflective DV and SA prevention and healing for LGBTQ+ Pacific Islander survivors and communities).
 - Community-based participatory action research: more peer-led work and community partnerships. See examples of qualitative research about needs of queer AAPI women experiencing partner violence.^{9,17}
- Culturally informed guidance and linguistically specific services
 - hijra, Fa'afafine, fakaleiti/fokeleti/fakalati/fakafefine, Māhū, trtiya-prakrati, bakla are only a few of many non-heterosexual, third gender, and/or non-binary terms used in our cultures—and language and connotations change over time.
- Data disaggregation for AAPI communities and LGBTQ+ identities
 - While this report includes national studies, some of these studies collapsed findings from Pacific Islander responses with Asian and Asian American respondents, which can hide disparate rates of GBV for subpopulations such as Pacific Islander LGBTQ+ survivors and communities. Community-driven projects can bring a nuanced analysis of priorities and current needs within local and cultural contexts. See the following exemplary projects^{5,8,9,10,13,16}.
 - There is a need for more studies that disaggregate between Pacifica communities, which also can obscure needs. For an example of how to report findings on experiences of Native Hawaiians and several Pacific Islander communities, please see Levenson (2022)⁸.
 - The LGBTQ+ umbrella also encompasses many identities and lived experiences. There is a need for data collection methods that are inclusive to non-binary and gender non-conforming people.
 - There is a concerning lack of state and national level data on QTAPI victims of IPV- and DV-related homicide and near fatal cases of IPV, due in part to lack of standardized reporting of AAPI cases, and potential underreporting of AAPI cases in general. See recent report that have deepened our understanding of QTAPI needs, barriers to seeking help, and sources of community support¹⁰.

Glossary of terms^{9,14}

Cisgender – refers to a person whose gender identity matches the sex they were assigned at birth; in other words, someone who is not trans.

Deadname – using a transgender person’s legal or former name without their consent, instead of using the name they choose.

Gender Binary – the idea that there are only two genders (male/female or man/woman) and that a person must be strictly gendered as either/or.

Gender Expression – how a person expresses their gender identities. Ways of expressing gender can include clothing, voice, body hair, posture, and more.

Gender Identity – is how a person views and identifies themselves. Gender identity does not always match the sex people are assigned at birth.

Gender Non-Conforming – refers to a person who does not follow other people’s ideas or stereotypes about how they should look or act based on the sex they were assigned at birth.

Housing Justice – refers to valuing and advocating for affordable housing, rent control, and renter power. Transgender & gender non-conforming APIs can experience transphobia, racism, and xenophobia in housing.

Intersex – a term used for a variety of experiences in which a person is born with anatomy that doesn’t match biological definitions of female or male.

Non-Binary – a spectrum of gender identities that exist beyond the man/woman gender binary.

Outing – when a partner or a third party shares a closeted person’s LGBTQ+ identity without permission.^{5,9,17}

Queer – encompasses identities such as transgender, lesbian, gay, bisexual, intersex, asexual, and other LGBTQIA+ identities. Often used to self-identity; can be used as a derogatory slur.

QTAPI – an umbrella term adopted for and by queer and transgender Asian/Asian American and Pacific Islanders that centers the experiences of queer and transgender identities¹⁰.

Sex Assigned at Birth – the category doctors assign to people when they are born. The sex assigned to individuals usually results in an assigned gender and added expectations.

Transgender – an umbrella term that refers to a person whose gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth.

Transphobia – a range of negative attitudes (e.g., fear, anger, intolerance, resentment, erasure, or discomfort) that one may have/express towards transgender individuals. Transphobia can come from within the queer community as well as cisgender/heterosexual society.

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About the Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence (API-GBV):

API-GBV is a national resource center on domestic violence, sexual violence, trafficking, and other forms of gender-based violence in Asian/Asian-American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) communities. We envision a world free of gender-based violence for communities with equal opportunities for all to thrive.

Visit our Resource Library (api-gbv.org/resource-library) for more factsheets, tip sheets, reports, training materials, and other resources.

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