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Statistics on LGBTQ+ Victims of Crime

Hate/Bias

While public attitudes towards LGBTQ+ people have grown more positive in recent decades (Tankard & Paluck, 2017), LGBTQ+ Marylanders still face alarming rates of identity-based victimization. In 2022 alone, 17.2% of hate crime and bias motivations were related to one's sexual orientation (13.6%) or gender identity (3.6%) (Department of Justice, 2023). The data also suggests that these incidents are on the rise, with an unsettling 120% increase in anti-LGBTQ+ incidents between 2021 and 2022 (Department of Justice, 2023). Even more distressing is that these data may be less representative of the actual amount of hate crimes LGBTQ+ Marylanders experience a year. Research shows that LGBTQ+ people fear contacting the police to report a crime (Bernstein & Kostelac, 2002) or seek out public services (Coolhart & Brown, 2017) because they anticipate being further victimized or discriminated against.

Violent Crime

LGBTQ+ people experience violent victimization (i.e., rape or sexual assault, robbery, aggravated assault, and simple assault) at alarming rates in America (Truman & Morgan, 2022). One report conducted by the Department of Justice between 2017 and 2020 (Truman & Morgan, 2022) found that lesbian and gay people experienced violent victimization at twice the rate of as straight people. Trans people, compared to cisgender people, experienced violent victimization 2.5 times as much. Bisexual people were most likely to experience domestic violence, with bisexual women experiencing violent victimization at eight times the rate of straight women, and over twice the rate as lesbian or gay people. Despite these common experiences with violent victimization, a little more than half (58%) of these incidents were reported to the police by lesbian and gay people, and only 31% of bisexual persons reported the incident.

Sexual Assault/Sexual Violence

When examining data on sexual violence victimization and intimate partner violence specifically, it is also clear that LGBTQ+ people are disproportionately victimized. In a recent report published by the Centers for Disease Control

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FreeState Justice, Inc. is a social justice organization that works through direct legal services, legislative and policy advocacy, and community engagement to enable Marylanders across the spectrum of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer identities to be free to live authentically, with safety and dignity, in all communities throughout our state.

and Prevention (CDC; Chen et al., 2023), it was found that lesbian (59.9%) and bisexual (79.3%) women had a higher lifetime prevalence of contact sexual violence than heterosexual women (53.3%). Gay (59.8%) and bisexual (56.4%) men also reported a higher lifetime prevalence of contact sexual violence than heterosexual men (29.3%). Rates of intimate partner violence were higher among lesbian (56.3%) and bisexual (69.3%) women than heterosexual women (46.3%), whereas they were relatively equal among gay (47.7%), bisexual (46.1%), and heterosexual (44.1%), men.

Child Abuse/Youth

According to 2019 data from the CDC (Tran et al., 2022), LGBTQ+ people were more likely to experience adverse childhood events (ACEs; e.g., sexual or emotional abuse, household substance misuse, etc.) than their straight and cisgender peers. The survey found that 83% of LGBTQ+ adults reported at least one ACE as compared to 64% of straight adults, and 52% of LGBTQ+ adults reported three or more ACEs as compared to 26% of straight adults. LGBTQ+ adults were also more likely to experience each of the eight ACEs, with disparities being greatest for sexual abuse (2.94 times more likely to experience), household mental illness (2.43 times more likely to experience), and emotional abuse (2.30 times more likely to experience).

A recent national study conducted by the Human Rights Campaign (2023), suggested that LGBTQ+ youth are frequently victimized in school. Nearly 1 in 4 LGBTQ+ youth reported being physically harassed at least once 30 days prior to being surveyed, 48.2% had been made fun of, and 39.6% were called names or picked on. For trans and gender expansive youth specifically, over half (55.6%) felt victimized (i.e., bullied, teased, or treated badly at school) due to their sexual identity, gender identity, or gender expression. Another report from GLSEN suggested that of the 86.3% of LGBTQ+ students experienced harassment or assault based on their identities, and 58.3% of these students reported being sexually harassed (Kosciw et al., 2020). It is no surprise, then, that LGBTQ+ students report feeling more unsafe in school than their straight and cisgender peers (Kosciw et al., 2021)

Poverty

Despite only representing 5% of the population in America, LGBTQ+ young people make-up 40% of the youth who are experiencing homelessness (Polaris Project, 2019). Youth who experience homelessness are at an increased risk of sexual or financial exploitation, as they often rely on survival economies to meet their basic needs. One national study of youth in the sex trade found that LGBTQ+ youth represented almost half of the sample, with 70% of these youth identifying as Black or African American (Swaner et al., 2016). LGBTQ+ youth are also unlikely to be helped by child welfare services, with one study suggesting 63% of youth involved in sex trafficking also had a history of child welfare involvement (Keuroghlian et al., 2014). The same study found that 50% of LGBTQ+ youth felt safer on the street than in their foster home due to anti-LGBTQ+ victimization. The need for culturally competent and affordable public

services is dire for LGBTQ+ youth considering they often report being further victimized or discriminated against at these sites (Keuroghian et al., 2014).

Legal protections for LGBTQ+ Marylanders do exist. Maryland ranks as one of the most LGBTQ+-affirming states, recognizing both sexual orientation and gender identity as protected classes. However, not all LGBTQ+ Marylanders can afford this protection. Compared to straight and cisgender individuals, LGBTQ+ people are more likely to experience poverty (Romero et al., 2020) or economic insecurity (Medina & Mahowald, 2023). As a consequence, those LGBTQ+ individuals who need legal services the most cannot access them due to their high cost. Additionally, legal providers may lack the cultural sensitivity required to assist LGBTQ+ people who are victims of a crime. These barriers, cost and cultural competency, can easily be addressed to provide LGBTQ+ Marylanders of the justice they are entitled to.

To address the problems stated above, FreeState Justice provides direct legal services, provides supportive services, resource navigation, in-court advocacy, trains state agencies, the Maryland judiciary, private and public organizations, and other service providers. FreeState Justice has made changes to its victim services, by adding staff with social service backgrounds to assist the legal staff. With full support of this application, FreeState Justice will add group support services. FreeState Justice has made every effort to fulfill our commitment to serving the LGBTQ+ community in new and innovative ways, with the goal of creating a society where all LGBTQ+ Marylanders are free to live, with safety and dignity, in all communities throughout our state. We are an organization that believes the authenticity we hope to engender begins with transparency and a commitment to using our resources wisely, creatively, and effectively.

FreeState Justice Target Populations:

LGBTQ+ community across Maryland most at risk for victimization

LGBTQ+ people and families with low- and limited-incomes

LGBTQ+ people of color - primarily African American and Latino

LGBTQ+ people in geographic areas with limited LGBTQ+-specific resources, including the Eastern Shore, Western Maryland and Southern Maryland

LGBTQ+ youth

LGBTQ+ elders, especially those in senior care/housing

Transgender, nonbinary, and gender non-conforming people

Geographical area served: Statewide in Maryland.

Additionally, our community reports experiencing perceived and real discrimination when attempting to avail themselves of these services. This makes the need for organizations like ours to engage in victim advocacy efforts and directly provide these services with the care and sensitivity to our client base's unique needs, which they may not receive from other organizations.

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