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## 0 THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING OF MANUAL

### 0.3.1 Empiric

The theoretical underpinning of this manual is based on experiences of counsellors, psychotherapist and volunteers working with lesbian women who have experienced violence and abuse in their partnerships.

National research conducted by lesbian counselling services in Germany in 2002-2004 indicates that about 8-10% of all counselling cases are about experience of discrimination of grounds of sexual orientation, violence and abuse (Broken Rainbow 2006). This number may be different in other European countries according to a) legal and social status of gay, lesbians, transgender and bisexual people, b) number of lesbian, gay and transsexual counselling services and c) their networking. It seems as lesbian, gay and transgender rights in Germany are more restricted than in Northern European countries but broader than in some Southern and Eastern European countries. Nevertheless, even broad legal rights do not guarantee social acceptance, meaning they do not reflect social status of lesbian, gay, transgender and bisexual people. According to legal status and social climate toward homosexuals and transgender people, Germany seems to be somewhere average within Europe.

Since we could not find any data about extend of domestic violence and experiences from counselling/social services in other European countries we will subsequently refer to those of Germany. Further, we assume Germany to be European mean value concerning social and legal situation of lesbian women. National research of lesbian counselling services in German shows that about 50% of cases which were tagged as discrimination, violence and abuse are indeed about domestic violence. Broken Rainbow defines “domestic violence” as systematic, repeated assaults as well as single incidences of abuse and/or physical violence exerted by present or former male of female partner as well as family of origin. Largest group of attackers seem to be present and former female partners, followed by family of origin and male ex-partner (Broken Rainbow, 2006).

In cases of domestic violence in present partnership most women contacting LGBT counselling services are asking for counselling sessions. Second service requested is couple counselling and third one is counselling via telephone. In couple counselling partners are looking for support solving “interpersonal problems”. Violent/abusive experiences are usually mentioned later during counselling process. This means, that none of the partners defines her experiences as “abuse” or violence” and thus are not aware of either being victimized or perpetrating those acts. So, counsellors are confronted with three kinds of clients: those who experience violence/abuse, those who exert violence/abuse and third, those who do not name their experiences.

When contacting a counselling service violence already has increased in severity: clients show up mainly in cases of physical and sexual attacks. Non-physical forms of violence usu-

ally go along with physical forms, only few cases are about solely psychological forms of violence. Only rarely clients are looking for support in phase of separation or want to get separated; in most of the documented cases violence/abuse is constituent part of present relationship.

Counsellors are confronted with three main problems:

- Identifying abusive/violent dynamic and involvement of partners
- Identifying victims and perpetrators
- Ambivalences of victims

Analysis of counselling experiences show that very often both partners are actively involved into violent dynamics. In some cases no victim can be defined as such while in other cases victims act aggressively themselves. Further, most women regard themselves as “victims”, i.e. suffering from violent acts from her partner. Others again feel provoked by their partners. Own aggressions are denied and responsibilities are not taken over. If domestic violence/abuse is constituent part of present partnership the urgent intention of contacting counselling is to keep up partnership. In cases of verbal and psychological abuse (force, derogation, etc.), partners may not be aware of what is going on since they view violence as such only in cases of physical attacks. Further, even those women who can be defined as victims show a high degree of ambivalence, i.e. repeated dropouts of counselling and resuming of counselling; victims may return to their abusive/violent partner or cannot let her go. Reasons may be internalised homophobia (“I do not deserve better”), isolation (“I will not find any other partner”), community values (“female aggression is desired and positive connotated behaviour) or self-fulfilment, i.e. the victim may feel superior to her partner because she is not acting aggressively, she is getting attention and care she desires etc.

The experiences of counsellors, psychotherapists and volunteers has been structured and developed further by head of project, Constance Ohms in her thesis about violent dynamics in lesbian partnerships (2008). Main results of her thesis will be outlined following pages.