



**SCOTTISH
LESBIANS**



Lesbian Survey 2025

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Summary

The Lesbian Survey 2025 was open for participation between January and May 2025, and was promoted through Scottish Lesbians' social media accounts as well as in lesbian groups. 692 lesbians responded to the survey, in which questions were asked about the impact of certain issues on lesbians as well as lesbians' priorities for future campaigning. The survey generated both quantitative data and a large body of qualitative comments.

The main findings of the survey were as follows:

- A large majority of participants reported the following issues as impacting lesbians 'to a great extent': loss of lesbian spaces (85.3%); organisations being captured by gender ideology (83.5%) and the inclusion of men in ostensibly lesbian spaces (82.1%).
- The main campaigning priorities identified in the survey were for lesbian-only, single-sex spaces (86.6%); support for younger lesbians (82.5%) and ending the promotion of gender ideology in schools, colleges and workplaces (81.1%).

Based on the findings of the survey, we make the following recommendations:

1. The UK and devolved Governments, and our public bodies and services, must implement and adhere to the Equality Act 2010 as recently clarified by the UK Supreme Court in a case brought by For Women Scotland.
2. There must be provision for lesbian-only (single-sex) services and spaces, addressing issues around funding, resources and safety.
3. Further research and consultation is needed involving young lesbians and there must be provision of support to address the needs of this cohort.



Contents

Introduction	4
Demographics	8
Results: Section 1: Issues affecting lesbians	10
Results: Section 2: Campaign priorities for lesbians	17
Other issues highlighted by participants	20
Discussion and conclusions	23
Hope and resilience	26
References	28



Introduction

Research into lesbian lives is diminishing (The Lesbian Project, 2023). Research which is claimed to be about lesbians is often so compromised that it is difficult to reach any conclusions about lesbians. There are many studies in which it is not possible to disaggregate lesbian data from wider groups such as LGBTQ+. Some studies have used ‘inclusive’ definitions of lesbian to include males who wish to be perceived as lesbians (for example, ILGA Europe, 2022).

There has in recent years been a proliferation of published, peer-reviewed papers written from the perspective that lesbian *should* be an inclusive category: authors of these studies often openly use inflammatory terms such as ‘TERF’, ‘transphobic’ and indeed, ‘anti-trans mouthpieces’ to refer to lesbians who would describe themselves as same-sex attracted (Connell, 2024; Rogers, 2023; Worthen, 2022).

One recent survey (YouGov, 2023) has been cited widely to demonstrate high levels of support by lesbians for transgender people. There are, however, issues with some of the unsupported claims that are being made about this research. In the survey, lesbians were defined as ‘cisgender lesbians’. ‘Cisgender’ is of course not a neutral way to describe lesbians; it signals adherence to gender identity theory, and we have heard anecdotally from lesbians who would self-exclude from any study that required them to agree that they were ‘cisgender’. Further, the question asked in the YouGov survey was, ‘How positively or negatively would you say [you personally] view transgender people?’. This is a rather personal, value-based question which is markedly different from rights-related questions that could have been asked (for example, ‘Do you think that lesbians should be allowed to have single-sex groups?’). Despite this, data from this survey are widely misapplied to support an assertion that lesbians are not in favour of having specific lesbian rights.

One reason for undertaking the current survey was to ask lesbians directly about issues affecting them. We wanted to move away from vague questions asking how lesbians ‘feel’ about other groups, and focus more on our needs as lesbians.

An alternative body of lesbian research is beginning to emerge, mainly from outside of academia and commercial research companies. For example, Woman is This Collective (2025) reported that a large majority of lesbian survey participants were concerned about loss of lesbian spaces and redefinition of the word 'lesbian'. Sex Matters (2023) reported on issues affecting lesbians, including lack of lesbian groups and lesbians having to meet in secret.

Our own previous, qualitative research from 2023 identified barriers faced by lesbians in coming out, including impacts of gender ideology and lack of role models and representation. Other studies have reported on the phenomenon of the 'cotton ceiling', which is the pressure on lesbians to have sexual relationships with males (Wild, 2019) and on the impact on lesbians (as well as gay men and bisexual people) of being included in wider LGBTQ+ groupings (LGB Alliance, 2023). The Lesbian Project (Gosling and Stoianov, 2024) produced a series of review papers, building a picture of what is known about lesbian wellbeing from existing research.

These studies and reports are different to the ones emerging from universities and broader LGBTQ+ organisations, both in approach (recognising lesbians as same-sex attracted women and not conflating lesbians with other groups) and in outcomes.

The timing for our Lesbian Survey 2025 is relevant. In 2024, we were granted permission to submit a written intervention, together with The Lesbian Project and LGB Alliance, to the UK Supreme Court, in support of a case brought by For Women Scotland. The case concerned the meaning of 'sex' in the Equality Act 2010, and the lesbian intervention, prepared by barristers Karon Monaghan KC and Beth Grossman, is available to read on our website.

At the time of submitting the lesbian intervention, we already had access to a wealth of knowledge and evidence assembled from the work and experiences of the organisations involved. We launched the Lesbian Survey 2025 after the For Women Scotland case had been heard but before the judgement was handed down, and we continued recruiting for the survey for around six weeks following the judgement. We wanted to build on the evidence we had available to us, and to survey lesbians on a range of potential issues and priorities for campaigning, to inform future campaigns for after the Supreme Court judgement.

Limitations of our research

As we have described above, emerging research into the lives and needs of lesbians is being conducted largely outside of academia. As independent researchers, we conduct our research free of the resources, support, supervision, networks, access to literature and so on that would accompany traditional academic research. We have attempted to offset some of these disadvantages by adopting conservative approaches to our research and analysis, and by using approaches that we have used previously and understand well.

There are, of course, also benefits to being independent researchers. We are not constrained by institutional pressures to adopt incorrect definitions of 'lesbian', for example, nor are we in a position to be bullied or harassed for doing this research. We would like to see future lesbian research emerge from inside our academic institutions as well as outside of them.

The Lesbian Survey 2025

We designed the survey to be relatively quick and easy to complete. We wanted to maximise our sample size and to be able to cite meaningful results.

The survey consists of both checklist-type questions and open-ended ones. We asked participants to consider a range of potential issues (with the list being informed by our previous, qualitative research) and to respond to say whether each issue was impacting lesbians not at all, to some extent or to a great extent.

We also asked participants to select as many campaign priorities as they wanted from a pre-populated list of possible priorities. These were again informed by our previous research. This list included both specific, concrete campaign priorities (such as 'Provision of genuine, single-sex lesbian groups and spaces') and ones which could be more open to interpretation (such as 'Better cultural representation of lesbians, e.g. on the BBC'.) We followed this list with a freetype space for participants to tell us about the issue which they felt would be their main campaigning priority for lesbians, which could be any issue and not necessarily one we had listed.



We also included open questions asking participants to describe the main issues facing lesbians today, and any other issues they wished to document. All questions except for the final one ('Is there anything else you would like to tell us about the issues facing lesbians?') were made compulsory questions. This was done in order to minimise misuse of the survey and to promote genuine engagement with the topic.

Recruitment

We shared the link for the survey on our public-facing social media accounts (X and Facebook) as well as within our private Scottish Lesbians networks and other lesbian-only groups we belong to. We encouraged sharing of the survey link to try to reach as many potential participants as possible. The survey remained open for participation from January 2025 until the end of May 2025.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

The survey was open to lesbians - same-sex attracted women - in any country, and received 792 responses.

The numbers of responses excluded, and the reasons for exclusion, were:

Duplicate responses: 7

Answering 'no' to being a lesbian/giving answers indicating not being a lesbian: 4

Filling freetype boxes with slogans: 5

Abusive responses: 26

Responses disagreeing with the definition of lesbian: 58

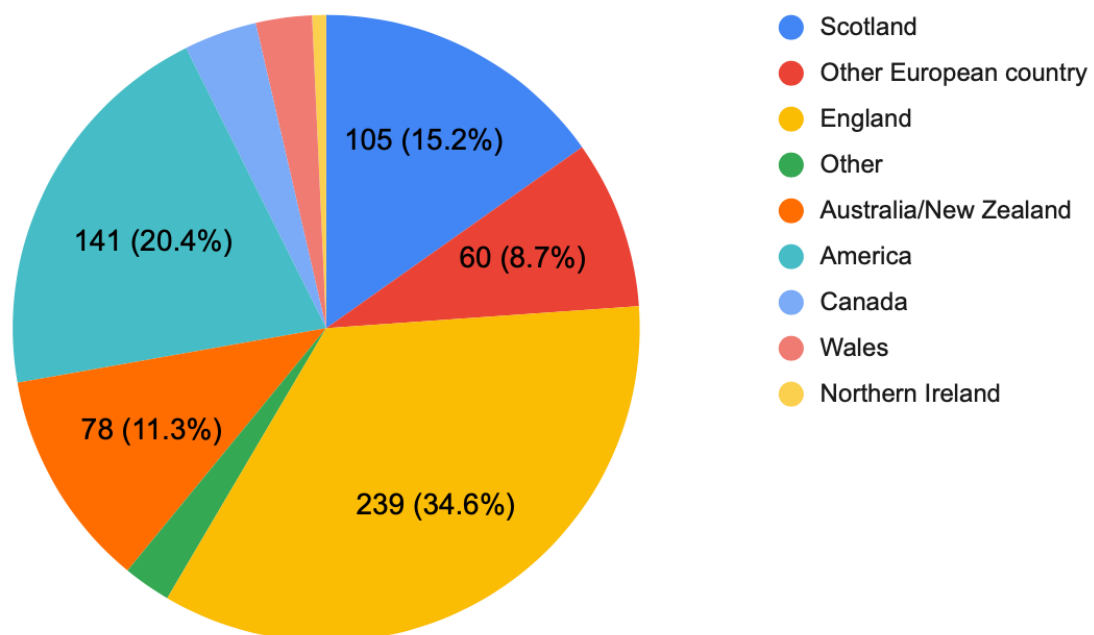
We took a conservative approach to excluding submissions, and excluded only those which we both agreed breached one or more of the exclusion criteria. It was notable that many of the excluded responses were consecutive responses in the dataset; off-topic or hostile responses tended to arrive in clusters. There were two main clusters of these inappropriate or abusive responses.

The number of responses included in the analysis was 692.

Demographics

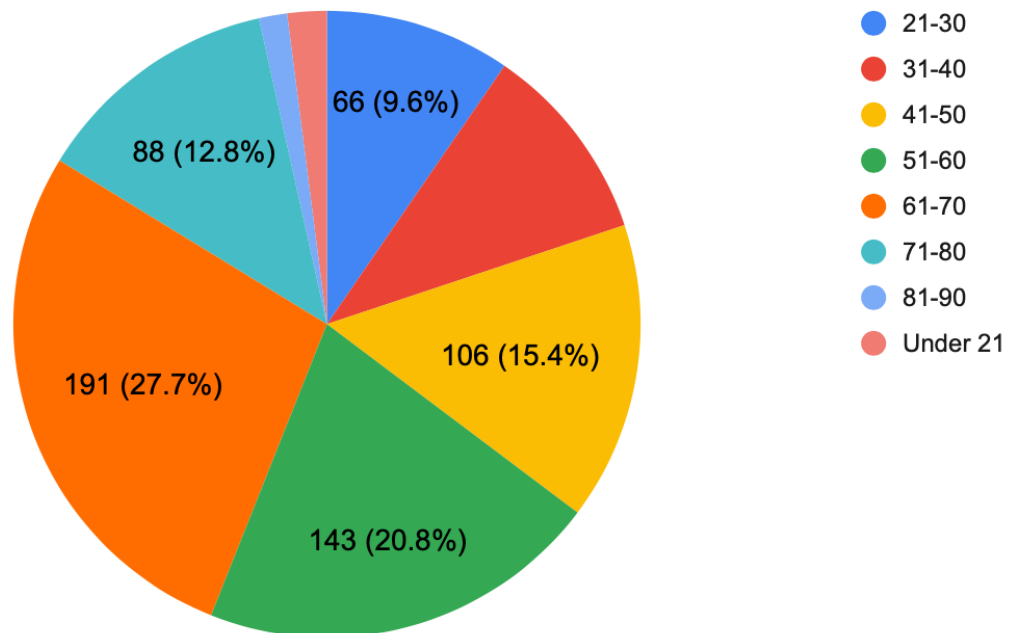
We collected two categories of demographic data in this study; age of participants, and country of residence. We focused on the two demographic questions we felt were most pertinent to helping identify meaningful trends in the data. The figures below show summaries of the demographic information collected.

Which country do you live in?



We did not restrict participation in this study to any country or group of countries. This lack of geographical inclusion/exclusion criteria, however, should not be taken to indicate that this is a global study. Almost all the responses came from lesbians in countries in which it is safe and legal to be a lesbian, albeit that there are other challenges facing lesbians in these countries. Responses were received primarily in English, with several responses submitted in other languages. These were translated into English and included in the analysis.

Age ranges



The above figure shows the distribution of participants' ages, where this information was provided. There are some missing data in this category; several participants chose to freetype messages into the 'age' space on the survey, meaning that their ages were not available. The age range of participants was 14 to 87.



Results

Quotes included in this section are intended as illustrations of the research findings and examples of additional points raised by participants. The open questions in the survey generated around 43,000 words of freetyped responses and we may in due course carry out additional qualitative analysis to explore different aspects of these. Quotes are italicised in this section and are followed in brackets by the age group and country of residence of the woman being quoted.

Section 1: Issues Affecting Lesbians

Figure 1 below shows a summary of the responses given to the question about whether lesbians are impacted as a group by various different issues. The issues we asked about were, in order, feeling unable to come out as a lesbian; pressure to identify as something other than a lesbian; misuse of the word 'lesbian'; loss of lesbian-only (single-sex) spaces and venues; lack of lesbian representation or role models in the media; isolation and not knowing other lesbians in real life; porn culture; pressure to have relationships with men; inclusion of men in lesbian groups/spaces; and organisations being captured by gender ideology. Three responses were possible to rate the impact of each item on lesbians: not at all, to some extent, or to a great extent.



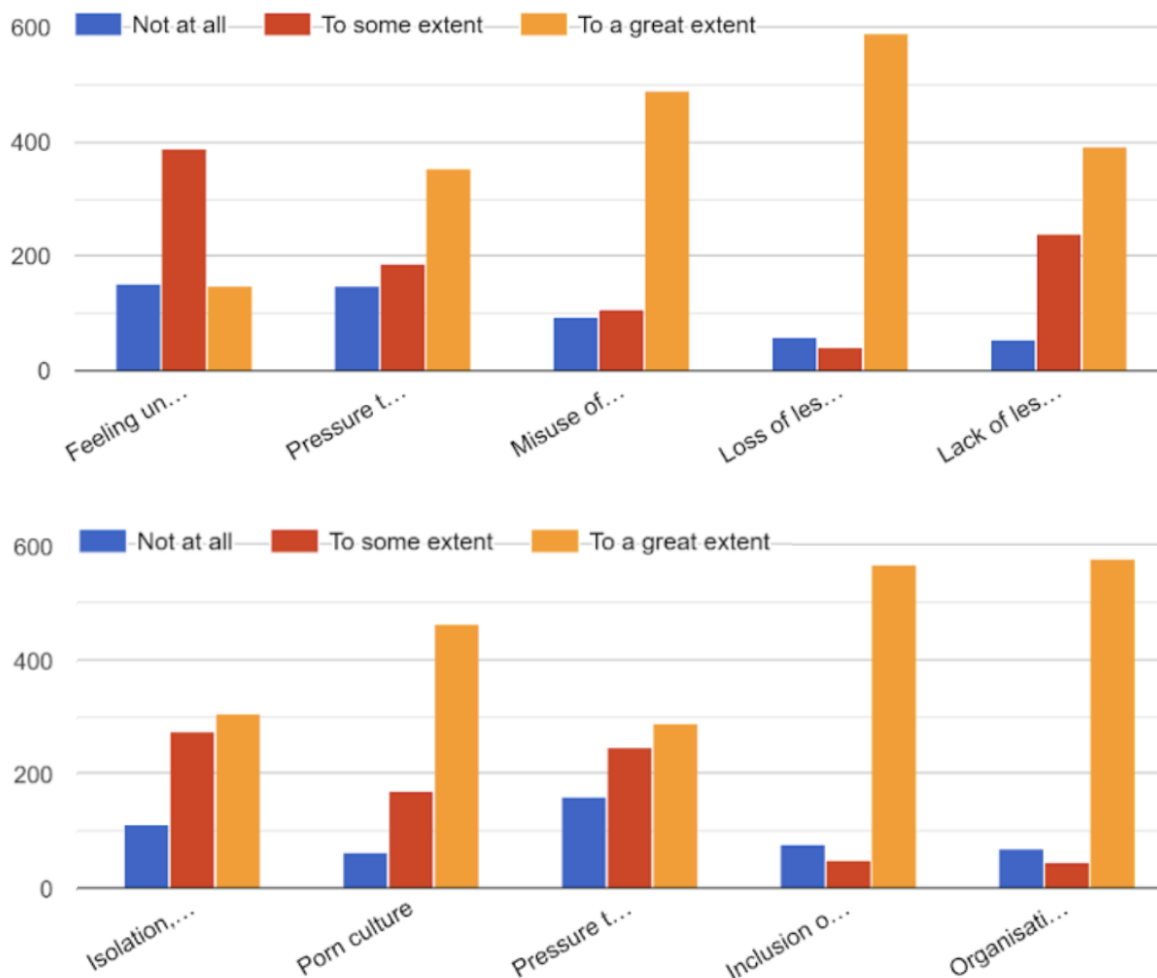


Fig.1 Results showing the impact on lesbians of a range of issues.



These responses are also summarised in the table below.

Item on list	Not at all (%)	To some extent (%)	To a great extent (%)	Total reporting an impact (%)
Feeling unable to come out as a lesbian	22.0	56.5	21.5	78
Pressure to identify as something other than a lesbian	21.5	27.2	51.3	78.5
Misuse of the word 'lesbian'	13.4	15.8	70.8	86.6
Loss of lesbian spaces	8.7	6.1	85.3	91.4
Lack of lesbian representation or role models in the media	8.2	34.8	56.9	92.7
Isolation, not knowing other lesbians in real life	15.9	39.7	44.4	84.1
Porn culture	9.0	24.4	66.6	91
Pressure to have relationships with men	23.0	35.5	41.5	77
Inclusion of men in lesbian groups/spaces	11.0	6.9	82.1	89
Organisations being captured by gender ideology	9.8	6.6	83.5	90.1

Table 1. Impacts on lesbians of a range of issues, expressed as percentages of the responses.



Three of the issues we asked about (loss of lesbian spaces, inclusion of men in lesbian groups/spaces, and organisations being captured by gender ideology) were reported to be impacting lesbians 'to a great extent' by more than 80% of participants. We will show some examples of participants' comments about these issues below.

Loss of lesbian spaces and inclusion of men in lesbian spaces

85.3% of participants reported that loss of lesbian spaces was impacting lesbians 'to a great extent'. This figure rose to 91.4% when we also included those who reported that loss of spaces was impacting lesbians 'to some extent'. This issue was reflected in a large number of the comments made in the freetype parts of the survey, and we include a selection of these comments here. Many of the comments also relate to another item from the questionnaire, 'Inclusion of men in lesbian groups/spaces', which was reported as impacting lesbians 'to a great extent' by 82.1% of participants, and 89% when we also included those who said this issue impacted lesbians 'to some extent'.

Sadly there are no 'lesbian only' spaces, clubs and bars now , everything seems to be aimed at, or catering for the 'wider' lgbtqi+ etc groups, and I do not feel safe or welcome, as a lesbian in these now predominantly male dominated areas. (51-60, Scotland)

There are no single women only spaces where lesbians can meet each other. We are a marginal group and lesbian dating sites are all infiltrated by men. Also men transing to women and then saying they still attracted to women so now they are lesbians. That is the major problems nowadays with being a lesbian. Thank God I'm an old lesbian imagine If you were young looking for a partner and you can't get the opportunity cos men are invading your space. Nightmare for lesbians today. (61-70, Scotland)

I have been a lesbian activist since the early 1970s. If someone had told me what it would be like now, even 10 years ago, I wouldn't have believed them. Ironically, people generally are more accepting of lesbians than ever. If only we could rid our spaces of men. (61-70, England)

Not having any Lesbian only groups, places, activities etc to go to that doesn't include Men. All of the Lesbian bars closed down where I am in Australia years ago and are now mixed. It is socially isolating and lonely. (51-60, Australia/New Zealand)



As a young lesbian myself, I find comfort in the strength and wisdom of older lesbians, and it would greatly benefit the younger generation if we were able to speak to each other in single-sex spaces, be they online or offline. This is one of the biggest issues tearing apart the lesbian community: the lack of any male free space where we can gather and just speak, listen to each other and try to organise in some way. (21-30, Other European Country)

The last participant above describes the loss of spaces not only in terms of the impacts on socialising or finding a lesbian partner, but in the broader sense of a loss of community. She laments the loss of being able to ‘speak, listen to each other and try to organise’. This loss of community was marked by many participants.

The loss of our single sex spaces as a result of the growth and spread of trans ideology has meant that lesbians, regardless of age, can no longer organise, promote or establish our own groups, nor meet together in such groups, without including men. This has had a devastating effect on us. All those years of fighting for and establishing our own single sex lesbian spaces and building community and now these spaces are largely gone and our community itself is under threat. (61-70, England)

Lesbian erasure. We have lost our cafes, bars, bookstores, etc. our lesbian social groups are inclusive to men who think they're lesbians, because if we try to specify that lesbian means female, we are "cancelled," harassed, and venues are closed to us. The only true lesbian community we have in my state is underground, and thus impossible to find unless you know the right people to ask. (41-50, America)

One issue closely related to lesbian spaces and community, was the notion that lesbians have become divided and our community diminished by differences in opinion on gender issues. We have focused so far on contributions from participants who lamented the loss of lesbian single-sex spaces, since our results overwhelmingly indicated this as an issue impacting lesbians. The next selection of quotes shows participants from both sides of the gender debate commenting on splits within community. The first quote is from a lesbian who supports women-only spaces, and the subsequent three quotes are from those who want a broader, LGBT+ community.



The splits in our community due to disagreement about the trans issue has further marginalised an already very small community, I spent all my life trying to build a social network and now it's been reduced by at least half, again we are isolated! (61-70, England)

My issue is feeling isolated from lesbians who don't believe in "gender ideology". I've lost friends to this and it makes me sad. I'd love to discuss these issues in a kind way, not a way that divides us. There's so much more that we have in common than differences. (31-40, England)

Unity with the whole LGBTQ community, because when we fight together, we can make more noise and more impact. (31-40, America).

Transphobes co-opting lesbian spaces to push their agenda and create divisions with the LGBTQ+ community. Instead of standing up for their community, they want to tear it apart. They are actually causing other people in the LGBTQ+ to become Les-phobic by pushing such hateful agenda. (31-40, England)

It is difficult to see how these splits could currently be addressed: the source of the division is the very notion of which community we should belong to as lesbians: lesbian-only community, or a broader LGBT+ community. We could argue further that the split also concerns who can and cannot be regarded as a lesbian. There is a tendency among some of those who support the idea of a broader, LGBT+ community, to oppose the creation of any lesbian-only community spaces, even for those lesbians who want them. Lesbian or lesbian-focused events, from Lesbian Strength marches to the launch of The Lesbian Project, have been subjected to protests, while many lesbian groups have normalised ways of organising and sharing events out of the public eye, for safety reasons. There are, of course, also LGB events, such as LGB Alliance conferences, which have been subjected to protests and abuse, for focusing on same-sex attracted people.



Organisations captured by gender ideology

83.5% of participants reported feeling that lesbians are affected 'to a great extent' by organisational capture. This figure rose to 90.1% when we also included those who felt that this impacted lesbians 'to some extent'.

[...] some Rape Crisis centres have absorbed the trans / gender identity ideology and this may be a barrier to some lesbians using them if they want to be guaranteed female workers. And the LGBT organisations supporting around sexual violence are all captured by that ideology too, obviously. (51-60, England)

It is heartbreaking for radical lesbian feminists, such as myself who have been politically active on behalf of Lesbians and womyn since the early 1970s, to find myself having to be careful about what I say and write and publish for fear of litigation by the trans activists whose anti-lesbian rhetoric has been vicious and obscene to the extent that they have captured governments, institutions, politicians and the law round to their misogynistic and lesbophobic way of thinking and acting in order to make the world a mad unsafe place for Lesbians and womyn to be ourselves. (71-80, Australia/New Zealand)

Captured LGBT organisations and staff networks in public sector organisations which deny the ability for lesbians to express their same sex attraction and associated issues which only affect natal female lesbians. LGBT/pride networks have been hijacked and are mainly male centred. Eg fertility services or staff networks in the police. (31-40, England)

In Wales the Senedd is tiny for its workload and as a result a huge amount of policy and engagement is 'outsourced' to NGOs. Stonewall Cymru (and many so-called feminist organisations) are of course more than captured and act as a concrete layer stopping GC voices, especially lesbians on the sharp end, being at the table and influencing developments. This also happens in local govt. As activists we are a tiny group with no funding and limited time, and the difficulties simply getting heard can be disheartening. (61-70, Wales)



I think we need to campaign to get Stonewall to apologise to lesbians. It would be a hollow gesture, but would be of symbolic significance - and a useful way of drawing a line under the absurd idea that men who say they are women can be "lesbians". (41-50, England)

Section 2: Campaign Priorities for Lesbians

Participants were also asked to select from a list the issues that they felt should be campaign priorities for lesbians. This was followed by a question asking each participant to detail her top priority for campaigning. This could be something from our pre-populated list or it could be a different campaign priority.

The results from the pre-populated list question are shown in Figure 2 below. The items on the list are, in order, improved political representation for lesbians; provision of genuine, single-sex lesbian groups and spaces; better treatment of all women by organisations such as the NHS and the police service; better cultural representation of lesbians, e.g. on the BBC; improved data collection and research into lesbian lives; support for younger lesbians; anti-pornography activism, ending the promotion of gender ideology in schools, colleges and workplaces; and support for desisters and detransitioners.

In order to address the issues affecting lesbians, which of the following would you prioritise for future lesbian campaigning? Please tick all that are applicable.

692 responses

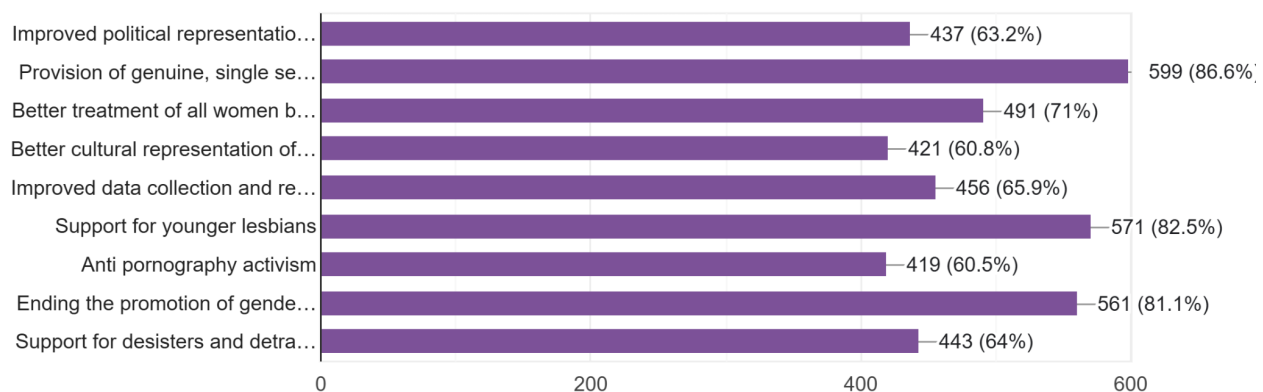


Fig. 2. Priorities for lesbian campaigning.



Provision of single-sex lesbian groups and spaces received the highest level of support, with 86.6% of participants choosing this as a campaign priority. This was followed by support for younger lesbians (82.5%) and ending the promotion of gender ideology in schools, colleges and workplaces (81.1%).

Anecdotally, some participants informed us that they had selected a few items from this list as priorities, rather than choosing them all. There are, as is always the case with survey research, alternative approaches we could have taken to this question. We could have asked participants to rank the items in order of importance, or we could have asked participants to select all items from the list that they felt were important, rather than a priority. However, the question as asked has generated useful insights, with support clearly coalescing around single-sex spaces, younger lesbians, and ending the promotion of gender ideology in institutions. The support shown for all items on the list is arguably a conservative indication, given that some participants felt that they should not choose every item on the list.

We have illustrated the issue of lack of single-sex lesbian spaces in Section 1, as well as the issue of organisational capture by gender ideology. We give some examples below of comments regarding support for younger lesbians. Comments regarding young lesbians came both from older lesbians and from young lesbians themselves.

As a younger lesbian, the assumption that all young adults, even (especially?) lesbians, support trans over-reach is really irritating. But there is also the fear of sticking one's head over the parapet when surrounded, seemingly, by it and knowing how nasty they can get. I'm just at the end of university and this feeling of 'don't rock the boat' is very strong I think. Ironically of course, it means we have no idea how many other people are thinking like me and also keeping their head down. (21-30, Scotland)

It is extremely difficult to find community amongst other lesbians especially as a younger woman. For example, from the bio of the only event ostensibly for young adult lesbians in Glasgow (hosted every couple of months): 'Glasgow based queer night focused on lesbians, queer women, non binary and trans folks'. This night consistently has a large male presence and often male entertainers during the cabaret section, and obviously if you raise concerns you're a 'TERF'. (21-30, Scotland)



I thought things were getting better; that young lesbians would have it easier than I did growing up in the eighties. Instead, I feel that things have got worse and I worry about all young women, but lesbians especially. At least in the eighties, it was only outright homophobia & Clause 28... now young lesbians have to navigate gender ideology, transidentified straight men in their spaces, and horrendous porn imagery. (51-60, England)

We need to provide social venues again particularly for young lesbians who have nowhere to go and have never experienced the joy and strength of having our own spaces. We need to provide our young dykes with a safe space. (61-70, England)

Support for younger lesbians is urgent. They are completely isolated, as shown in your previous research and also in our own experience, e.g. through Lesbian History Group which we still run regularly in London. We have had very young lesbians contacting us for support. (71-80, England)

I am taking this in my college library at the moment, my exam is in May. On the windowsill to my right is the library's LGBTQ+ display. I count the books. 11 of them. 6 focus on gay men. The other 5 focus on trans people. The only one featuring a woman would be disgusted that I just referred to her as such. You ask me what issues affect lesbians today - how's nonexistence? (Under-21, Scotland)

Related to the issues of support for young lesbians and to the need for lesbian space and community, some participants noted the importance of intergenerational support and role models.

Need to increase safe mentorship of young lesbians by older lesbians. We are losing generational interaction. (61-70, Canada)

Being able to meet with older lesbians has been absolutely amazing for me. It's given me a concrete image of what a long, happy life with another woman could look like. That exposure in and of itself is pretty magical. It's hell out here, but those women have survived through a lot and still come out the other end unabashedly themselves. It gives me hope for myself. (21-30, England)



At 23, I couldn't picture me in the life I knew I wanted. We older lesbians owe it to both our younger selves and those just beginning to experience life as a lesbian to defend our rights to love only women as publicly and robustly as we can. (51-60, Scotland)

Other issues highlighted by participants

In an open question on the survey, we asked participants to highlight their priorities for lesbian campaigning, regardless of whether these appeared on our pre-populated list or not. We will now briefly cover other issues which were highlighted in the responses.

Needs of older lesbians

There were many comments about the particular needs of older lesbians. These included areas of overlap with the broader results of the survey, including older lesbians' need for single-sex spaces and services which are not captured by gender ideology.

I feel that older lesbians are getting more isolated. There is a loneliness epidemic facing those who can't make connections with other women. (41-50, England)

As an older lesbian, recognition and safe services for older lesbian in the care system. (61-70, England)

More support and protection for older lesbians; women only spaces in which to age, congregate and socialise are crucial to good mental health (61-70, Australia/New Zealand)



Misrepresentation and misuse of the word 'lesbian' by women

In the results table in section 1, we showed that misuse of the word 'lesbian' was reported by 70.8% of participants as affecting lesbians 'to a great extent'. While most participants commented on the issue of trans-identifying men stating that they are lesbians, some participants - particularly younger lesbians - also commented on the word 'lesbian' being misused by bisexual or heterosexual women.

The inclusion of transgender-identified men and bisexual women in lesbian spaces, which is allowed through the silencing of lesbians and the refusal to allow lesbians to properly define the term. (Under-21, Canada)

Can be hard to find specific social venues to meet other lesbians; often difficult to work out whether a woman in my age group is 'actually' interested in other women sexually due to popularised language by which both lesbian/bisexual and also some non same sex attracted women may refer to themselves/their identities. It sometimes feels socially taboo to attempt to clarify this [...] (21-30, Wales)

[...] bisexual women referring to themselves as lesbians because they are currently dating a woman, leading to men (both normal and trans identified) to believe that SOMETIMES lesbians will be into men or can be 'turned'. Particularly concerning from various celebrity musicians with huge platforms, but most of their music is about their heterosexual relationships and their boyfriends, but are currently in a relationship with a woman and are calling themselves lesbians. This is the current 'lesbian' representation in the media. (21-30, Other European Country)

This issue may be particularly heightened by the current environment for younger lesbians, who are likely never to have experienced lesbian-only spaces, whose boundaries are widely disrespected and who struggle to find any lesbian role models they can trust. Further research focused on younger lesbians would be of benefit in understanding this. We would caution that this would need to be handled sensitively by a lesbian researcher, with an awareness of pre-existing lines of division between lesbians on issues such as whether lesbians need to be 'born this way' or can come out later in life, and so on.



Issues of safety and legality

Most of the participants in this survey live in countries in which it is legal and broadly safe to be a lesbian, despite the challenges we have covered in this report. Of course, there are many countries in which homosexuality remains illegal or where it is not safe to be openly lesbian, and this was highlighted by several participants.

I live in Russia, we are facing (10 years)prison and corrective rape for lesbianism. We get beaten up if we see women holding hands in public, if a woman has short hair. Female artists are sent to prison and given huge fines for artwork featuring lesbians. We have a punishment for promoting childfree. We have illegal abortions, my government SUPPORTS young births. (Under-21, Other country).

Where I live, lesbians are illegal and can't safely come out. There's even discrimination within the lgbt community all over the world. We don't have our own safe spaces exclusively just for lesbians. (21-30, Other country)

Taking a global view, the fact that a woman can be raped and tortured, and sometimes killed, usually by men, for being a lesbian, is a horror that we and our representatives should definitely be campaigning about. (61-70, England)

Issues which were described via the open questions in the survey cannot, of course, be compared to the issues we listed, in terms of the frequency with which they were reported. It is much easier to choose an item from a pre-populated list which has already been made salient, than to volunteer it as an additional answer. However, bearing this in mind, it was notable that issues around access to IVF, currently prioritised in campaigns by organisations such as Stonewall and Diva, were mentioned by fewer than five participants. There was a disconnect between these high-profile campaigns and the priorities reported by lesbians in the survey.



Discussion and conclusions

Recruitment for our Lesbian Survey 2025 took place while we were involved as interveners, together with The Lesbian Project and LGB Alliance, in support of For Women Scotland in their UK Supreme Court case against The Scottish Ministers, as detailed in the introduction. The outcome of this case has of course been widely reported; For Women Scotland prevailed and the judgement clarified that for the purposes of the Equality Act 2010, sex means sex at birth and is not changed by the possession of a Gender Recognition Certificate. The case of lesbians formed part of the judgement, as seen here in point 206 of the judgement (UK Supreme Court, 2025).

206. Accordingly, a person with same sex orientation as a lesbian must be a female who is sexually oriented towards (or attracted to) females, and lesbians as a group are females who share the characteristic of being sexually oriented to females. This is coherent and understandable on a biological understanding of sex. On the other hand, if a GRC under section 9(1) of the GRA 2004 were to alter the meaning of sex under the EA 2010, it would mean that a trans woman (a biological male) with a GRC (so legally female) who remains sexually oriented to other females would become a same sex attracted female, in other words, a lesbian. The concept of sexual orientation towards members of a particular sex in section 12 is rendered meaningless. It would also affect the composition of the groups who share the same sexual orientation (because a trans woman with a GRC and a sexual orientation towards women would fall to be treated as a lesbian) in a similar way as described above in relation to women and girls.



After the Supreme Court ruling was made, we received some survey responses which directly alluded to it, including the comment below.

Men, no matter what identity they claim should never legally be women and therefore lesbians. We need a For Women Scotland ruling at the European level or individually for each European countries (but that would take ages). If men are not legally lesbians, we can get rid of them, if not, they will never stop to steal and destroy lesbian spaces and communities and our identity. We can not thrive as lesbians if our own definition is not respected in law. (31-40, Other European Country)

The results of our survey provide strong support for lesbian-only, single-sex spaces. 85.3% of lesbians who participated felt that loss of lesbian-only spaces was impacting lesbians ‘to a great extent’, and 86.6% wanted to prioritise campaigning on this issue. This result is similar to the WIT Collective result (2025) which showed that 96% of lesbians were concerned about the loss of lesbian groups and spaces. The WIT Collective study was not advertised publicly but was shared with women involved in the ‘global women’s movement’, while our survey was promoted publicly and subsequently screened for off-topic or abusive responses, as reported earlier.

Relatedly, 83.5% of participants reported that organisational capture by gender ideology was impacting lesbians ‘to a great extent’, and the corresponding figure for men being included in lesbian spaces was 82.1%. 81.1% of participants wanted to see an end to the promotion of gender ideology in schools, colleges and workplaces, and 82.5% wanted to prioritise support for younger lesbians, with many quotes from participants illustrating the connections between this desire for support and the inability to find any lesbian-only spaces or culture.

As we showed in Figure 2, there was a reasonable level of support among participants for all the potential campaign goals we had identified, but support clearly coalesced around three areas: provision of single-sex spaces, support for young lesbians, and ending the promotion of gender ideology in institutions.



These results clearly support the outcome of the For Women Scotland Supreme Court case in clarifying that sex refers to birth sex in the Equality Act 2010 (and hence, that lesbians are same-sex attracted biological women), and they support the rolling out of this clarification in schools, colleges and workplaces. At the time of producing this report, For Women Scotland are again preparing for further legal action against the Scottish Government due to its failure so far to incorporate in its policies the legal clarification provided by the UK Supreme Court (For Women Scotland, 2025).

Further, there has been a great deal of resistance to the new Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) guidance for services and public bodies in the light of the Supreme Court judgment, including from elected Members of the UK Parliament (Berry, 2025). Our results here show that for many lesbians, it is a priority to be able to have our own groups and spaces, and for our public bodies and services to operate in line with the Equality Act 2010.

The results of the Lesbian Survey 2025 are markedly different to those reported by bodies such as ILGA, as well as different to the plethora of peer-reviewed papers to have emerged in recent years which openly denigrate those who define our sexual orientation as based on sex, not gender. Similarly, the priorities identified by participants in our survey bear no resemblance and lend no support to the actual campaigns being run by organisations including Stonewall, originally established to represent the needs of lesbians and gay men. Although we do not benefit from the funding or resources bestowed upon these organisations, we hope to be able to contribute to an emerging picture of the needs and priorities of lesbians - same-sex attracted women - by asking clearly-worded questions and using a clear, Equality Act-adherent definition of lesbian. The lives and needs of lesbians have been obscured for too long by organisations and by research which fails to define correctly who is, and is not, a lesbian.



Based on the results we have reported here, we make the following recommendations:

1. The UK and devolved Governments, and our public bodies and services, must implement and adhere to the Equality Act 2010 as recently clarified by the UK Supreme Court.
2. There must be provision for lesbian-only (single-sex) services and spaces, addressing issues around funding, resources and safety.
3. Further research and consultation is needed involving young lesbians and there must be provision of support to address the needs of this cohort.

Hope and resilience

Having had a similar experience when we conducted our previous research study, it was not surprising to us that despite the challenges reported by lesbians in this survey, some of the comments we received were infused with hope and resilience. We would like to finish the report with a few of these comments.

Womyn-loving womyn are the greatest category of humans on earth.(51-60, America)

Let's take our identity back and use the word lesbian (71-80, America)

Congratulations and thank you to For Women Scotland! (61-70, England)

Maybe our age has something to do with it, but people often tell us that we are a cute couple.
(81-90, America)

When women gather and forge real alliances, we can tackle the rest. (41-50, America)

Let's reclaim the word lesbian and celebrate it more. (41-50, England)

We are starting to organize (again) as lesbians in Canada and I'm so happy you've been doing the same! (61-70, Canada)



Podcasts like The Lesbian Project and Peak Lesbian are very affirming and enjoyable. (61-70, Australia/New Zealand)

Feeling a lovely sense of community now with the LGB Alliance. I love what they're doing and the support they're providing. Being in women only spaces with other feminists and lesbians is fab. (41-50, England)

Thank you for doing this research. I picked up a booklet on the results from your 2023 survey at FiLiA and it made me feel so many things. Upset, anger, but also a sense of sisterhood. It is incredible, knowing I am not alone in this. (Under-21, Scotland)

Thank you

We would like to express our sincere thanks to the lesbians who took part in our Lesbian Survey 2025. Although we had designed this survey to be relatively easy and quick to complete, we were rewarded for including some freetype spaces by a wealth of thoughtful, detailed responses. It was a privilege to read them, and we hope that in the quotes and excerpts we have selected for this report, we have been able to convey some sense of the time and care taken by participants to answer our questions fully. We have only been able to include a small selection of quotes here, but we are already planning a follow-up piece of work as we would like to publish a greater selection.

We would also like to thank the individuals and groups who supported our research by sharing and promoting our survey link. We are very grateful for all the goodwill and the help we received in reaching participants.

Our thanks to FiLiA Charity for inviting us to launch this report of our findings at the 2025 FiLiA conference in Brighton, UK.

Contact details

We welcome engagement with and feedback on our research. Please direct any communications to scottishlesbians@gmail.com



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