

# Conversion therapy: still not illegal – or still not happening?

“It is beholden on us all to ensure that this conversation is based on real facts.”  
**Olivia Bailey, Minister for Equalities, 25th June 2026<sup>1</sup>**

On 25th June 2026 the government published a draft bill to criminalise “conversion practices” and pledged that it would “continue to fund the conversion practices support helpline”.

It was supported by an impact assessment signed by Minister for Equalities Olivia Bailey. She declared that she had read it and:

“I am satisfied that, given the available evidence, it represents a reasonable view of the likely costs, benefits and impact of the leading options.”

The minister told the House of Commons that her decision was based on “evidence on the prevalence and types of conversion practice abuse” in the UK. She pointed to a new report by Galop, an LGBT anti-violence charity,<sup>2</sup> saying it contained “hundreds of case studies” and demonstrated “appalling abuse that is happening right now in this country”.

In fact the report *Still not illegal: Evidence of modern-day conversion practices from Galop’s frontline services* contains a few dozen brief accounts. Most describe experiences that should not concern criminal law at all, such as family disagreements and “misgendering”. A handful concern assault and rape, which are already crimes. Overall it contains analysis of fewer than 200 cases, which are described in minimal detail.

What Bailey did not say, and what the Galop report also failed to mention, is that this evidence appears to include the entirety of calls concerning “conversion therapy” received by the government’s national conversion-therapy helpline. Galop was paid £360,000 over three years to run this. The charity described it at launch as “a vital lifeline for our community”.

The Government Equalities Office (GEO) thought that reports of conversion therapy would pour in, anticipating in the region of 10,000 calls each year.<sup>3</sup> But the Galop report’s findings seem to suggest that only a handful of people – in single figures each year – called to report “conversion therapy”.

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<sup>1</sup> Hansard (2026). [Record of the item ‘Draft Conversion Practices Bill’ on Thursday 25 June 2026.](#)

<sup>2</sup> Galop (2026). [Still not illegal: Evidence of modern-day conversion practices from Galop’s frontline services.](#)

<sup>3</sup> The Government Equalities Office has since been renamed the Equality Hub.

## The helpline that didn't ring

Galop is an LGBT anti-violence charity. In 2018 it published a report on “LGBT+” people’s experiences of domestic abuse, based on its work.<sup>4</sup> It did not mention conversion therapy as an issue, though it did cover “honour”-based violence and forced marriage.

In 2018 the government of the day made a commitment to stop “gay conversion therapy”, prompted by a survey that seemed to show that it was widespread. In 2020 Galop joined the “Ban Conversion Therapy” campaign coalition, despite having barely mentioned it as an issue previously.

In 2021 Galop anticipated a legislative ban and said:

“It was clear to us that victims and survivors would need somewhere to turn for support – but there was no service for them. So we created one – the first ever National Conversion Therapy Helpline.”<sup>5</sup>

Opening the helpline meant Galop was in prime position to bid for a lucrative contract, when a few months later the Cabinet Office invited organisations that were already running a relevant helpline to put in applications.<sup>6</sup> Galop was the only bidder and won the contract, worth £360,000 over three years.

The Cabinet Office said it expected “the number of unique callers to be in the magnitude of no more than 10–15,000 individuals per operating year”. This was based on the National LGBT Survey undertaken by the GEO, which found that 2% of respondents to a self-selected survey answered Yes to a question about whether they had undergone conversion therapy, with a further 5% saying they had been offered it.<sup>7</sup>

The Cabinet Office’s impact assessment justifying the draft Conversion Practices Bill makes no mention at all of data from the three-year national helpline the government had already funded.<sup>8</sup>

In 2023 Sex Matters asked the GEO for information on Galop’s bid, and on the performance and outcomes of the service. The GEO refused to release details, saying that doing so would prejudice Galop’s “commercial interests”.<sup>9</sup>

The figures in the Galop report indirectly reveal that only a handful of people ever called the helpline.

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<sup>4</sup> J Magić and P Kelley (2018). *LGBT+ people’s experiences of domestic abuse: a report on Galop’s domestic abuse advocacy service*. Galop.

<sup>5</sup> Galop Annual Report 2021.

<sup>6</sup> Crown Commercial Service (2022). *Conversion Therapy – Victim Support Service*.

<sup>7</sup> Sex Matters (2021). *‘Is there evidence of an urgent epidemic of conversion therapy?’*

<sup>8</sup> Office for Equality and Opportunity (2026). *Draft final stage impact assessment*.

<sup>9</sup> WhatDoTheyKnow (2023). *‘Freedom of information request: Galop’*.

## The victims who didn't call

Instead of reflecting on the evidence from Galop's almost silent helpline, the government has doubled down on the idea that tens of thousands of people are experiencing conversion therapy in the UK each year.

It has now come up with an even bigger number, drawing on a survey commissioned by Stonewall.<sup>10</sup> Carried out by Opinium Research in January–March 2024, this involved interviewing 2,000 adults online who identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender. It came up with a ludicrous figure of 10% for the proportion of LGBTQ+ people in the UK who have undergone an exorcism, and 2% for the proportion who had undergone an exorcism in the previous year alone.<sup>11</sup> As mathematician Dr John Armstrong has pointed out, this would imply that clergymen in the UK are performing 24,600 gay exorcisms a year (for comparison the number of religious weddings in England and Wales in 2022 was 41,915).<sup>12</sup>

The government plucks from the Stonewall survey the number who said they had been told to ingest “purifying” substances (11% ever and 2% in the past year) or who said they had been given “pseudo-scientific counselling” to try to change their sexual orientation or gender identity (12% ever and 2% in the past year). It adds these figures and multiplies the sum by the number of LGB or T people found in the most recent census to conclude that “approximately 75,000 to 93,000 people each year in England and Wales experience conversion practices based on their sexual orientation or gender identity.”

The government then cites an American study which estimates that the risk of developing depression is 38 percentage points higher among LGBT people who undergo conversion attempts than among those who don't. This doesn't mean the conversion attempts caused the depression – it might mean that people who underwent conversion attempts are from less supportive families or suffer more internal conflict between their orientation and religion, for example. But on the assumption that the ban would stop all conversion attempts, and that this would eliminate the excess risk of suffering depression, the impact assessment calculates that a ban on conversion practices would prevent 28,486–35,268 cases of depression each year in England and Wales. This, it says, would be worth around £700 million to the country in the 10 years following the ban.

On the other side of the balance, the government thinks the ban would cost around £45 million to familiarise public-sector workers with the new legislation. It thinks this would take just 45 minutes each for all the nation's police officers, GPs, nurses, social workers and so on.

These figures are fantastical.

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<sup>10</sup> Opinium (2025). [Stonewall press tables](#).

<sup>11</sup> Sex Matters (2025). [‘Exercising caution over Stonewall’s exorcism claims’](#).

<sup>12</sup> John Armstrong (2025). [‘Have a tenth of all gay people really had an exorcism?’](#). *Spectator Australia*.

## The research report

“Galop’s new report provides some of the strongest evidence yet that conversion practices are not a thing of the past.”

Jasmine O’Connor OBE, co-CEO of Galop, June 2026

Galop released its research report on the same day as the government published the draft bill. Galop described its report as revealing the “stark reality of modern day conversion practices” and providing “clear evidence that conversion practices are a widespread and ongoing issue across the UK”.

The report is based on anonymised case notes of clients of Galop’s advocacy and support services in England and Wales between November 2022 and November 2025. This was the period when the £360,000 conversion-therapy helpline was operating. The Welsh government also provided £30,000 a year to Galop to provide support for victims of conversion therapy in Wales.

The report was separately funded by UK Research and Innovation, which allocates public money for research, through Leeds University. The principal investigator, Professor Ilias Trispiotis, is on the steering group of the Ban Conversion Practices coalition.

Unsurprisingly the report backs the coalition’s recommendations for a new criminal law. It also calls for the government to provide statutory funding for specialist LGBT+ support services, including helplines.

## The evidence

The researchers trawled through records of 13,500 Galop clients over three years looking for cases of conversion practices, which the government estimates take place at the rate of 75,000 to 93,000 a year.

They seem to have been able to find only 371 potential cases, of which only 195 (from 191 clients) were judged to have sufficient depth and detail to be usable as evidence in the study. 132 of these were recent, while the rest were historical. Around 50 cases are included in the report, but with minimal detail. Only 29 were reported to Galop through any of its helplines.

Most cases in the study came to Galop’s services through official referrals from local authorities, police, social workers and other external support organisations. Only 51 clients specifically presented for support in relation to attempted conversion. Most requests were for help with domestic abuse, “honour”-based abuse, forced marriage, sexual violence, housing or asylum support, hate crime or mental-health support.

Almost all cases identified by the researchers as conversion practices involved what Galop defined as “**coercive and controlling**” behaviour by parents towards their (often) adult children. Overall, 76% of cases occurred within families, mostly – 63% – involving actions by parents. (All the quotes that follow are from the Galop report.)

“Client is frequently told by his parents to cut his hair, that his sexuality is just a phase, and [is] pressured to marry a woman or have children. Client disclosed that this abuse is continuous. Client’s family have passed around his phone number trying to match-make him, they pray for him and try to emotionally blackmail and manipulate him. At a family event, Client’s mother and uncle/family friends were trying to set him up with a woman and encouraging him to marry a woman. [...] In [date], Client’s mum made him attend a church gathering in a [location] where there was group prayer; Client says this is part of her mission to change his sexuality.” (Client G7)

“Dad threatened to stop financial support [to young person in the UK as a student] stating that ‘this will make you come back to [location]’.” (Client E5)

“Client stated that every time she is alone with her dad he begins questioning her about her sexuality which leads to arguments. [Father] will ask why client doesn’t have a boyfriend and accuses her of being a lesbian and says that being a lesbian is disgusting. [In a later incident] Dad was shouting in client’s face and client was crying [...] ‘if you are like that that’s disgusting’; ‘you’re not a lesbian, I’ll straighten you out’.” (Client O4)

“Dad makes frequent comments that ‘[Client] is not trans’ and that he is a woman. [...] [Client] disclosed his parents want to take him to counselling to ‘convince him he is a female’. [...] [Client’s] friend came to his house and called him by his chosen name and pronouns. Mum heard them. [Mum] is forcing [Client] to cut off all relationship with friends who call him by his chosen name and pronouns. [Mum] is also telling the child to bring friends over to confirm they are using the dead name.” (Client L6)

“Parents found out about trans identity about a year and a half ago. They were pushing for conversion practice since. [Client] was not given a choice. His parents made comments, ‘You are going to go there’. [Client] was threatened with being kicked out of his parents’ home if he would not engage with conversion practices.” (Client J8)

“Throughout secondary, my mum told me if I ever consider becoming gay, that my brothers will rape and murder me.... Would remind me, if I ever am gay, God will also send people to rape me to death. [...] I tried coming out to my brother who was meant to be safe, and he told me if I am being serious he will murder me right there and then.” (Client I3)

“Discussion of plans to marry Client to cure bisexuality. [...] Mum knows [Client is] LGBT+ although believes it is a phase and can be corrected. [...] Mum looking for a wife for Client as solution (believes boyfriend was a phase).” (Client O1)

“Family have found out I’m gay and aren’t supportive and have prohibited me from school and working so far. [...] I was about to do my Master’s degree prior to this but was told I’m no longer allowed so I had to drop out. [...] I’m unable to leave the house by myself to see friends or do anything else.” (Client S0)

"[Mother] followed client all the way to GP whilst on the phone with relatives trying to convince client not to go ahead with gender transition support. [...] GP called client into a private room and mum grabbed client and would not let go and was trying to drag her out. GP threatened to call police if mum did not leave. Mum threatened to kick client out and harm herself." (Client Z2)

"Clients' family members tell her she must send money to the Mosque and Somali organisations otherwise she will go to hell for being gay. Client stated they check her bank statements to ensure money is sent and have previously stolen cash from her home. She is subsequently in rent arrears and facing financial hardship. [...] Client is too fearful not to send money or participate in conversion practices as she is afraid of further abuse." (Client X4)

"forced into a marriage in Nigeria to 'cure' their sexuality" (Client C3)

"was taken from the UK against her will by her parents [...] she was then subject to conversion practices due to her gender identity" (Client U7)

"stopped the client from attending therapy because they thought this was influencing client' in terms of their sexuality" (Client T7)

"Kicked out because of sexuality (lesbian) after years of emotional and verbal abuse from mother (African descent and mother does not accept sexuality)." (Client I4)

"Sister said door is always open [to return back to the family], only if Client is straight. Client was accused again of not loving family 'enough' to change for them." (Client L2)

"father has stated he is banished and stated that Client was ungrateful for their efforts to help him" (Client G7)

"client was told by his family that 'if he chooses to be gay then he will be doing it alone'" (Client E6)

As Sex Matters said in our previous review of Galop research, coercive control and physical and mental abuse of children are covered by existing legal provisions, and while family tensions and estrangement between parents and their adult children are distressing, they are not something that can or should be criminally prosecuted.<sup>13</sup>

52 cases (27%) involved **religion**:

"Mum used to force [Client] to watch religious sermons about queer people who had found God and became heterosexual. [...] Family members have paced around bedroom praying that [Client] is not condemned to hell." (Client L1)

"The lead Pastor stood up and said something and Client messaged the youth leader, who advised Client to speak with the Pastor, and Client met up with the

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<sup>13</sup> Sex Matters (2024). *Conversion therapy: understanding the GALOP survey*.

Pastor's wife who said that 'it's a sin but we can help you to fix this'. Client reported that the church made them learn Bible verses and if Client had a thought about someone of the same sex, Client had to replace this with a Bible verse." (Client X3)

"[Parent] has had members of the church perform exorcisms on client. [...] Two incidents of forced exorcism. The most recent incident of forced exorcism took place in [date] and involved multiple alleged perpetrators from the wider faith community. Client was pinned down while scripture was read to her during this incident. [...] Client stated that she was physically restrained during this incident, while scripture was read over her." (Client B6)

"Client reports repeated events where an Imam came to the house, put his hand on client's head and read aloud from the Quran. Client was also taken to the Imam's house for the same. [...] Once – to 'help get the devil out' – client was made to lay down while needles were put into her back and a woman sucked blood out of client." (Client C8)

"Client states she was taken to Church and kept there for 2 days and had to fast, read the bible and hold candles as a form of conversion practices. Client has also been hit with a bible by a pastor in her home to 'beat the demon out'." (Client U4)

"When client came out around age [teen], their Dad said they need to fix and change them and said he would take client to Mosque readers (Imam) or make them drink a potion to fix them." (Client T7)

"[Client] stated that her dad regularly tells her that being LGBT+ is demonic and that [Client] is possessed and needs to go to his church's pastor with him. [Client's] dad has advised [Client] that he has already spoken to the church's pastor and they agreed that [Client] 'needs to be delivered'." (Client S9)

Most of the religious examples fall within the sphere of private life. It is not for the state to limit what people pray about or talk about as part of their religion. The examples that concern violent or abusive religious practices can already be prosecuted as assault.

47 cases involved **physical violence or threats**.

"Client was 'punched in her vulva multiple times when [mother] found out the client was having sexual relations with her female partner.'" (Client F2).

"One client described an instance where 'family returned home from church and strangled her with a belt.'" (Client C5).

"One client was beaten 'regularly for being gay' and lost a finger due to an infection following the physical abuse." (Client T5)

"One 'ended up in hospital' after being beaten following the discovery of his sexuality." (Client H3)

A very few (18) involved **sexual violence**.

"I was raped by someone at school who wanted to 'turn me straight' [...] it happened when they were in their [subject] classroom at lunch doing a practice paper before the lesson." (Client Z6)

"A male uni [sic] friend kissed her forcibly and put his hand up her shorts. His motive was to 'prove that she's straight'." (Client J0)

"when they were having sex, [alleged perpetrator] became transphobic and said he was going to 'fix' client's gender and referred to him as a girl. Client said [alleged perpetrator] also removed the condom." (Client N4)

"Two cases, for example, involved repeated or 'ongoing' 'corrective' rapes by the same perpetrator." (Client V6, an intimate partner; and Client B7, a neighbour)

"One client, for example, was forced to disengage from paid employment, subjected to threats to their immigration status, nonfatally strangled and sexually assaulted by her estranged husband, who told her: 'since you don't enjoy having sex with men I will show you, and you will get used to this'. (Client Z8)

"One trans+ client was physically abused and threatened, in addition to being sexually abused by their father when they were a teenager 'to make [Client] a girl' as he 'didn't want Client to be a man'." (Client M4)

23 involved **deprivation of liberty**.

"One client 'was taken from the UK against her will by her parents and her passport was confiscated, she was then subject to conversion practices due to her gender identity, before escaping and returning to the UK'." (Client U7)

"One client 'was beaten, locked in rooms and made to stay in his own filth as a way to change his sexuality'." (Client L4)

"One client was 'subjected to a home-conversion practice' by their parents after coming out when they were a teenager. Along with threats of homelessness, this 'Client was refused food unless they would deny they were from the LGBT+ community'." (Client Q0)

Assault, kidnap, neglect and rape are already criminal acts. There is no need to create a new crime in order to prosecute them.

Just 25 cases involved psycho-medical conversion practices such as counselling or psychotherapy.

"Client said this individual was not explicitly a 'conversion therapist' but he engaged him in conversion practices throughout the time that he was seeing him (twice a week for [time]). Client said that this 'destroyed his life' and that as a result, he had issues trusting people [...] Client stated that his mum intervened when she realised that this therapy was essentially conversion therapy and stopped him from seeing them." (Client Z3)

“One of my aunts put me in psychological therapy because I was depressed, I thought it was for that reason, but the real reason was that that psychologist was trying to do a conversion from being gay. When I realised her intentions I refused it and my aunt told me that I’m [an] abomination and many other insults.” (Client K1)

“When discussing an ex-therapist, one client said they “felt the conversation was going into conversion therapy. ‘I could help you to learn to love men’, he said.” (Client J0)

“Another trans+ client stated that a therapist “insinuated conversion therapy” when they ‘suggested that healing trauma could lead to [Client] no longer being transgender’.” (Client D6)

These short accounts may or may not be accurate, and they are not complete. They do not describe the other issues that led the person to seek therapy or diagnosis. No further details are given about the therapy.

There are no examples of the dramatic outdated “aversion therapy” approaches suffered by gays and lesbians involving electric shocks, vomit-inducing substances or other treatments that could amount to assault, or torture and degrading treatment. And there is certainly nothing to give credence to the government’s claim of tens of thousands of cases a year that could be stopped at no cost by a ban, resulting in a huge reduction in the number of cases of depression: this is simply not credible.

## Why create new criminal offences?

This analysis suggests that rather than being an urgent and serious problem, “abusive conversion practices” is a convenient policy agenda for organisations seeking to coalesce around a campaigning platform, and for a government department that views LGBT organisations as its clients.

The Galop researchers admit that some of the “conversion practice behaviours” evidenced in the cases “align with existing offences, including actual bodily harm, rape and sexual assault, forced marriage, and coercive control”. There is no information in the report about whether crimes were reported to the police as a result of Galop’s involvement or, if they were, what the outcome was.

Cases such as “intentional refusal to use a chosen name or pronouns” or suggesting that healing trauma could lead to [Client] no longer being transgender” are not abuse at all, but are rather accounts of parents or therapists not accepting the idea of “gender identity”.

**The Stonewall survey and the Galop cases are the best evidence the government has of conversion practices in the UK which merit a new criminal law. Even added together, they are remarkably weak.**

To the extent that there is a problem of “abusive conversion practices”, what the Galop report illustrates is that it overlaps strongly with domestic abuse, “honour”-based violence, forced marriage and coercive control, and tackling it is often a question of safeguarding and child protection. These are not simple problems that can be ended by a legislative ban. Responsibility for addressing child safeguarding and potential abuse in families and within religious settings rests with the Home Office rather than the Office for Equality and Opportunity (formerly GEO).

While it is hard to find compelling cases of “conversion practices”, it is not hard to find civil-society organisations that support the idea of a new criminal law. A conversion-therapy ban offers the chance to declare a campaign win and benefit from new sources of statutory funding, as well as the opportunity to use criminal prosecutions to shut down dissent.

The question of whether a £360,000 helpline that appears to have taken just a handful of relevant calls over three years provided value for money should be asked before the government commits more money to this fairy tale.