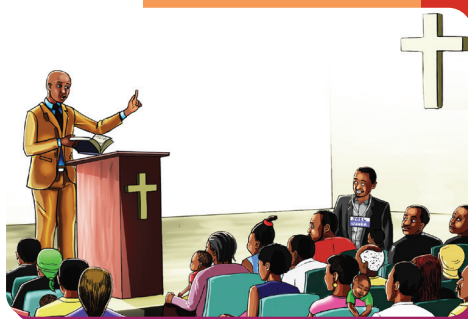


THE LIVED REALITIES OF LESBIAN, BISEXUAL AND QUEER (LBQ) WOMEN IN UGANDA



**THE LIVED
REALITIES OF LESBIAN,
BISEXUAL AND QUEER (LBQ)
WOMEN IN UGANDA**

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JUNE 2019

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements.....	i
Acronyms.....	ii
Glossary.....	iii
Foreword.....	v
Introduction.....	1
1 Background of the study.....	2
2 Methodology.....	4
3 Discussions On the Lived Experiences Of LBQ Women In Uganda.....	6
3.1 Social Realities.....	6
3.1.1 Family relations.....	6
3.1.2 Disowning by family members.....	7
3.1.3 Exclusion.....	7
3.1.4 Heterosexual Relationships.....	8
3.1.5 Sexual harassment.....	9
3.1.6 Coming out experiences.....	10
3.1.7 Awareness of identity.....	15
3.1.8 Relationship with culture.....	16
3.1.9 Relationship with religion.....	16
3.1.10 Parenting while LBQ.....	18
3.2 Political Realities.....	19
3.2.1 Involvement in women’s rights activities and organisations.....	20
3.2.2 The Inclusivity of the women’s movement in Uganda.....	20
3.2.3 Political Participation.....	22
3.3 Economic Realities.....	24
3.3.1 Employment.....	24
3.3.2 Academic qualifications as an enabling or limiting factor for accessing employment.....	25
3.3.3 Workplace discrimination.....	25

3.3.4	Discrimination in education institutions.....	26
3.3.5	Discrimination in housing.....	27
3.3.6	Property ownership.....	27
3.4	LBQ Women Health in Uganda.....	28
3.4.1	Channels of access.....	29
3.4.2	Challenges in accessing health services.....	29
3.4.3	Mental Health.....	31
3.4.4	Alcohol and substance misuse.....	31
3.4.5	Health needs of LBQ women in Uganda.....	32
3.4.6	Intimate Partner Violence.....	32
3.5	Legal Experiences of LBQ women in Uganda.....	34
3.5.1	An overview of existing laws affecting LBQ women in Uganda.....	34
3.5.2	Knowledge of the law.....	37
3.5.3	LBQ women rights violations (Arrest).....	38
3.5.4	Reporting violations.....	39
3.5.5	Access to legal services.....	40
3.5.6	Access to protection support services.....	41
4.	Conclusion.....	42
5.	Recommendations.....	43
1)	To Freedom and Roam Uganda.....	43
2)	To Government.....	44
3)	To Academic Institutions.....	44
4)	Parents.....	45
5)	Health Facilities.....	45
6)	REFERENCES.....	47

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Research commissioned by Freedom and Roam Uganda

Freedom and Roam Uganda (FARUG) is a Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LBQ) diverse persons and women's rights organisation based in Uganda and established in 2003.

It is a registered member-based organisation, with a secretariat in Kampala.

FARUG is also a feminist organisation that reinforces feminist culture and principles, equality of women as stipulated in the human rights and international instruments as ratified and the constitution.

Special thanks to:

The staff of Freedom and Roam Uganda; Mutyaba Gloria, Arthur Mubiru, who lead the data collection team and process and lastly the entire LBQ women community in Uganda for their willingness to participate in the documentation of this report.

Cite report as:

M Muwonge & J Nanyange 'Research on the Lived Experiences of Lesbian, Bisexual, Queer (LBQ) Women in Uganda' (2019)

Acronyms

AHA	Anti-Homosexuality Act
EOC	Equal Opportunities Commission
FARUG	Freedom and Roam Uganda
FEMA	FEM Alliance Uganda
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
HCD	Human Centred Design
HRAPF	Human Rights Awareness and Promotion Forum
LBQ	Lesbian, Bisexual, Queer
LGBTI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex
SMUG	Sexual Minorities Uganda
SOGIE	Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression
UPF	Uganda Police Force
VAW	Violence Against Women

Glossary

Bisexual	A person who experiences sexual, romantic, physical, and/or spiritual attraction to more than one gender, not necessarily at the same time, in the same way, or to the same degree.
Butch	A lesbian whose appearance and behaviour are seen as traditionally masculine.
Coming Out	Voluntarily making public one's sexual orientation and gender identity. It has also been broadened to include other pieces of potentially stigmatised personal information. Terms also used that correlate with this action are: "Being out" which means not concealing one's sexual orientation or gender identity.
Discrimination	Inequitable actions carried out by members of a dominant group or its representatives against members of a marginalised or minority group.
Femme	A lesbian whose appearance and behaviour are seen as traditionally feminine
Gender Expression	How a person outwardly shows their gender identity. It includes physical expressions such as a person's clothing, hairstyle, makeup, and social expressions such as name and pronoun choice. Some examples of gender expression are masculine, feminine, and androgynous.
Gender Identity	How a person sees themselves – their internal sense and personal experience of gender. Only the individual can determine their own gender identity. Many people have a gender identity of a man or woman, but some people do not. People who do not identify as a man or a woman may identify as both genders, neither gender, between genders, or not gendered at all.
Heteronormative	A set of lifestyle norms, practices, and institutions that promote binary alignment of biological sex, gender identity, and gender roles; assume heterosexuality as a fundamental and natural norm; and privilege monogamous, committed relationships and reproductive sex above all other sexual practices.
Heterosexism	The assumption that all people are or should be heterosexual. Heterosexism excludes the needs, concerns, and life experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and queer people while it gives advantages to heterosexual people. It is often a subtle form of oppression, which reinforces realities of silence and erasure.

Intersectionality	A term coined by law professor Kimberlé Crenshaw in the 1980s to describe the way that multiple systems of oppression interact in the lives of those with multiple marginalised identities. Intersectionality looks at the relationships between multiple marginalised identities and allows us to analyse social problems more thoroughly, shape more effective interventions, and promote more inclusive advocacy amongst communities.
Lesbian	A woman whose primary sexual and affectional orientation is toward people of the same gender
Outing	Making public the sexual orientation or gender identity of another who would prefer to keep this information secret.
Passing	A transgender person's ability to be perceived per their gender identity. Most often, this translates to a transgender man being socially perceived as a cisgender man or a transgender woman being socially perceived as a cisgender woman
Pronouns	Linguistic tools used to refer to someone in the third person. Examples are they/them/theirs, ze/hir/hirs, she/her/hers, he/him/his. In English and some other languages, pronouns have been tied to gender and are a common site of misgendering (attributing an incorrect gender to someone)
Queer	A political statement, as well as a sexual orientation, which advocates breaking binary thinking and seeing both sexual orientation and gender identity as potentially fluid.
Sexual Orientation	A term used to describe a person's pattern of attraction based on gender. Sexual orientation may include attraction to the same gender, a gender different than one's own, both or neither. Sexual orientation may be emotional, erotic, romantic, and sexual.
Socio-Economic Class	Social group membership based on a combination of factors including income, education level, occupation, and social statuses in the community, such as contacts within the community, group associations, and the community's perception of the family or individual.
Stigma	A shared social belief about a particular characteristic that negatively reflects on the person or group possessing that characteristic. Stigmas are often expressed as stereotypes and false assumptions. Prejudice refers to the attitude or opinion of an individual when they believe the stigma to be true. Discrimination occurs when stigma is acted upon.



Foreword

Greetings from Freedom and Roam Uganda (FARUG),

We are excited to finally bring you this pioneer research report on the lived realities of Lesbian, Bisexual and Queer Women in Uganda. This research report builds on FARUG's mission to empower LBQ women and jointly advocate for the respect, protection and fulfilment of their rights through research and documentation to create greater visibility and voice.

Why this research report? Because the time is now. Because we cannot allow our space to continue shrinking, Because we need to reclaim our space. It's time to take back our seat at the table; "if you are not on the table, you are the menu", Because our voices need to be heard. Because LBQ women suffer multiple discrimination: as women, (like other women) they are subject to patriarchal systems and structures discrimination and are at high risk of violence, because of their gender as well as their sexual orientation. Owing to this vulnerability, Many LBQ women suffer sexual violence especially lesbophobic rape also known as "corrective rape" because our very existence is illegal.

This report seeks to provide the space and mechanisms for LBQ women to share their daily lived realities including political, social, civil and economic to help debunk the myths and misconceptions surrounding their lives and to promote social understanding and inclusion.

FARUG wishes to thank all our partners, funders and the many Lesbian, Bisexual and queer women who shared their stories despite the stigma and risk surrounding sexual and gender minorities in Uganda.

We hope you enjoy reading the report and hopefully get inspired as much as we did.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ssenfuka'.

Ssenfuka Joanita Warry
Executive Director
Freedom and Roam Uganda

Introduction

This research report navigates the lived realities or experiences of Lesbian, Bisexual and Queer (LBQ) women in Uganda. It provides insights on the political, social, economic, legal and health experiences in the daily lives of LBQ women in Uganda.

The research is the first specific study of its kind in Uganda. Findings in this report are a result of data collected from 220 LBQ identifying women across Uganda living in Lira, Gulu, Tororo, Mbale, Jinja, Malaba, Kampala, Arua and Mbarara. All the women were above 18 years.

The research is intended to be a reference on the lived realities of LBQ women in Uganda. The scanty existing literature on this subject is scattered in different publications, which poses numerous challenges to efforts to study and understand the experiences of LBQ women in Uganda.

The research is also intended to be a guide for members of the LBQ community, academics and researchers, activists and human rights defenders, policymakers and the public who seek information on the lives of LBQ women in Uganda.

The report is divided into five major sections. Firstly, it highlights the background of the research about the general context within which LBQ women live in Uganda. Secondly, the report explains the qualitative methods used to collect and analyse the data.

Thirdly, a discussion on the lived experiences of LBQ women in Uganda with a specific focus on their social, political, economic, health and legal realities.

Fourthly, the report provides recommendations to Freedom and Roam Uganda and the Government of Uganda on how to respond to the various issues resulting from the analysis.

Lastly, it concludes by providing a glance at the overall research while identifying opportunities requiring further engagement.

1 Background of the study

In Uganda, the context in which LBQ persons live, exist, evolve, develop and work has grown to become more aggressive and hostile towards the LGBTI community. However, despite the hostilities, there has been some progress and notable victories in court, particularly the annulment of the Anti-Homosexuality Act (AHA). However, there is still strong resistance by communities and social institutions that seek to maintain the status quo and prevent changes on a wide range of issues, particularly about body politics, autonomy, freedom and dignity about sexuality and gender.

Religion has been used to inform the enactment of the existing legislation and is often aided by rhetoric on so-called traditional and cultural values that should be observed and protected. The issue of homosexuality is the only standpoint that unites all religious sects hence making the advocacy for LGBTI persons quite challenging. As a result, LBQ women have been stripped of their rights to assembly and the freedom to assemble and associate. Also, there is always a tendency by the state to divert the attention of the populace from critical issues by fuelling anti-homosexuality sentiments to front their political agenda. Unfortunately, in most cases, this agenda is driven on the backs of minorities, particularly LBQ women.

There is an increase in the number of conversations that LBQ women are having about corrective rape and other forms of Violence Against Women (VAW). However, the stigma surrounding rape remains a hindrance to individuals who may want to report specific cases. Also, the absence of specific support, including legal advice to victims of rape makes it even more difficult. LBQ women also face unique challenges in accessing health services.

The challenges of poverty-related inequalities coupled with the low level of education and limited skills have posed a considerable challenge in sustaining the livelihood of LBQ women. This is further aggravated by high unemployment levels, which in turn makes them very vulnerable. As the broader LGBT community is under attack and often struggling for protection and recognition with grave danger to their lives, LBQ women have been pushed into ways of organising that are about immediate survival

The Act was annulled by Uganda's Constitutional Court in 2014, in the case of Prof. Oloka Onyango & Others v Attorney General (Constitutional Petition No. 8 of 2014).

See generally, Human Rights Awareness and Promotion Forum 'Uganda Report of Violations Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity' (2017)

See generally, Sexual Minorities Uganda 'And That's How I Survived Being Killed' (2015)

LBQ women that are sometimes perpetuated by religious institutions, traditional and political leaders, families as well as the media.

Whereas significant research has been conducted on the common issues affecting the broader LGBTI community in Uganda and the lived experiences of LGBTI persons, no specific documented research has focused on the experiences specific to LBQ women in Uganda. This research was therefore commissioned to cover the existing data gap, with the following objectives:

1. To document the lived experiences of LBQ women in Uganda with a specific focus on the social, legal, political, economic and health realities.
2. To inform the development of contextualised programs geared towards improving the plight of LBQ women in Uganda.

See for example FEM Alliance Uganda 'Prevalence of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) Among LGBTQ/WSW Persons in Uganda' (2018)

Howell, M. C., & Prevenier

2 Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of inclusion, marginalisation, and exclusion in the lives of LBQ women in Uganda. It explored multi-faceted dimensions including social, economic, health, and political realities.

This study was commissioned by Freedom and Roam Uganda (FARUG). As this research aimed to explore a particular phenomenon through people's experience, it was designed as a descriptive qualitative study, specifically 'phenomenology', which is helpful to obtain rich information 'concerning the current situation of the phenomenon and to describe "what exists" in a situation'.

It is because the phenomenology is concerned with the lived experiences of the people involved in the research and it is a powerful tool for understanding the subjective experience and gaining insights into people's inspiration and actions. The homogeneous sampling strategy was used in this study since it is suitable to look for participants who have similar certain characteristics or experiences.

The data was collected by semi-structured interviews, which is an appropriate approach to explore people's perspective. A topic guide was used by the interviewer in the process, which was adjusted to fit in the context better after two pilot interviews. All the interviews were audio-recorded with the consent of the interviewees.

Thirty (30) one-on-one in-depth interviews were completed in total, each lasting an average duration of 35 minutes. The interviews were recorded to capture the nuances of conversation intact rather than these being subjected to selective forgetfulness or skewed by bias on the part of researchers.

The research also used focus groups as a secondary data collection method to stimulate discussion and take advantage of the dynamics of the group process. Qualitative methods such as focus groups are ideal when a large sample is not necessary, and it is desirable to dig more deeply into the topic of interest, giving the researcher more insight into understanding an issue. Focus groups can be more efficient than in-depth interviews and more cost-effective than some qualitative or quantitative methods.

Howell, M. C., & Prevenier, W. (2001). *From reliable sources: An introduction to historical methods*. Cornell University Press. Greene, M. A. X. I. N. E. (1997). The lived world, literature and education. *Phenomenology & education discourse*, 169-190.

Lester, S. (1999). *An introduction to phenomenological research*.

Ahmed S. Who, when, where, what? Sampling in qualitative research. University of Leeds, 2017. As above

The total number of respondents for the research was 220 from Lira, Gulu, Mbale, Jinja, Malaba, Kampala, Arua and Mbarara, who identify as either lesbian, bisexual or queer, aged 18 years and above. The following schedule was used for conducting interviews and focus group discussions:

Table 1 - Schedule for conducting interviews and focus group discussions

S/N	Location	# Of Respondents	Date
1	Lira	20	21-Jul-18
2	Mbarara	20	24-Aug-18
3	Arua	20	21-Sep-18
4	Kampala	20	5-Oct-18, 26-Oct-18, 15-Feb-18
5	Mbale	20	16-Oct-18, 17-Nov-18
6	Gulu	20	21-Nov-18
7	Kampala, Jinja, Mpigi	40	15-Feb-19
8	Malaba	20	17-Nov-18
	Total Number of Respondents	220	

We conducted seven focus group discussions in both urban, mid-sized cities and smaller towns outside the urban core of LBQ community programs. We sought respondents from these locations because they would not have the same level of access to community support programs as do LBQ women within more resource-rich urban centres.

All focus groups and individual interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim by a professional transcriptionist.

3 Discussions on the Lived Experiences of LBQ Women in Uganda

LBQ women experience effects of heterosexism and homophobia in their lives. Their sexuality thus disparaged, they are subject to shaming, harassment, discrimination, and violence, while being denied legal rights and equal protections – all fundamentally denials of recognition of their very existence. LBQ women also suffer serious economic injustices; they can be summarily dismissed from paid work and are denied family-based social-welfare benefits.

The discussion below highlights the lived experiences of LBQ women in Uganda, while focusing on their social, political, economic, legal and health realities.

3.1 Social Realities

3.1.1 Family relations



Family is in most parts of the world the cornerstone of social life. Exclusion from the circle of the family will thus result in economic and social hardship and possibly even difficulties for the LGBT or intersex person's survival. On this level there is also the risk of grave psychological damage through exclusion/risk of exclusion and LBQ women may compromise their sexual orientation or gender identity to the point where they will comply with family ideals of marriage and procreation.

LBQ women in Uganda encounter stigma and discrimination due to the

criminalisation of and negative attitudes towards homosexuality. Disclosure of sexual orientation may be self-affirming but could increase exposure to negative responses and stressors. Outcomes of group discussions suggest that disclosure of one's SOGIE to the family is affected by the level of economic independence.

Furthermore, negative familial responses to sexual identity significantly led to mental health issues such as depression, among others. In group discussions, majority of the respondents acknowledged the importance of family structures in providing social support systems.

However, they highlighted family resistance as a critical factor impeding their freedom to expressing their gender identity and sexual orientation.

3.1.2 Disowning by family members

Majority of the respondents who are openly out to their families were disowned by their families including by parents, siblings and extended family relatives. The common reasons for disownment are mainly driven by a heteronormative understanding of society by family members who reminded the respondents of biblical verses and the cultural values and norms that are supposed to be respected and abided by in a person's life.

VOICES OF LBQ WOMEN IN UGANDA ON DISOWNMENT BY FAMILY MEMBERS

"My school discovered that I was a lesbian and when my parents were informed, they decided to chase me from home, my brother beat me up and took me to police" – Paulina, Lesbian.

"My mother was the first to find out about my sexuality because people had started gossiping about me. My father said he does not give birth to spoilt children who will end up marrying fellow women. He beat me up and called for a clan meeting where I was beaten by my relatives who decided to throw me away from the family home" – Shanita, Lesbian.

3.1.3 Exclusion

In cases where respondents who are out were not disowned by their families, the majority of the participants highlighted exclusion by their families. The exclusion manifests in several forms including non-involvement in family activities, the lack of communication from the family, and in some cases, family members often distance themselves from respondents whenever they interface at family gatherings. Additionally, family members aware of respondents' sexual orientation regularly condemn 'the spirit and demon of homosexuality' whenever they face the respondents. Respondents also narrated instances where they had to distance themselves from their respective families due to fear of being insulted by relatives, and community

Interview with Paulina held in Lira on 21 July 2018

Interview with Shanita in Mabala on 17 November 2018

members living near their family homes. Some expressed concern of being misunderstood by their families, and would instead not attend family functions to avoid being coerced into presenting as per the patriarchal norms including dressing according to what family members perceive to be appropriate.

3.1.4 Heterosexual Relationships

A significant number of LBQ women are in heterosexual relationships. However, the majority of them wish they were not. Most would prefer not to be, and continuously think about possible ways to leave those relationships. Some suspect their husbands and boyfriends of having concurrent relationships with other women. However, they do not feel free to leave. In a few instances, LBQ women noted that getting into a heterosexual relationship was the only way to ensure acceptance from their families, while others highlighted sexual fluidity as a critical driver for such relationships.

In other cases, respondents provided messages recognising a heterosexual relationship as a helpful cover to preserve invisibility for LBQ women in Uganda. LBQ women from rural areas presented more cases of being in heterosexual relationships or marriages than their counterparts in urban areas.

Some of the bisexual women respondents noted the high levels of bi-phobia existing within the broader LBQ community which creates a hostile environment and leads to isolation from the community.

However, some participants argued that belief that bisexual people in heterosexual relationships are afforded 'heterosexual privilege' because they are less exposed to the stressors associated with being in a same-sex relationship, such as having a more visible sexual minority status.

Further conversations in the group discussions revealed experiences of pathologisation of LBQ identities by family members. Key messages centred around family attitudes upon discovery or suspicion of the respondents' sexual orientation. Participants listed several cases where their families attempted to 'convert' them into heterosexual-identifying individuals including 'family prayer sessions', suggestions to seek the 'help' of a psychologist to facilitate the healing process, among others.

For related insights, see for example Lee Mondry, et al 'If i were a boy - insights into the lifeworlds of lesbian, bisexual and queer identifying women in Northern Uganda' (2018)

Focus Group Discussion held in Arua on 21 September 2018

Focus Group Discussion held in MBarara on 24 August 2018

VOICES OF LBQ WOMEN IN UGANDA WHO HAVE BEEN IN HETEROSEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS

“I realised that a woman alone could not solve all my financial problems. My partner and I are currently dating men because they can provide us with some support to cater with day to day bills” – Mercy, Bisexual woman.

“I was not comfortable with my first marriage to a man because it was forced. My husband’s family suspected my sexual orientation and decided to investigate until they caught me together with my girlfriend. My husband separated from me and abandoned all the five kids we have together. Most people have advised me to take legal action against him, but I do not know of the available laws that can protect me. One of the reasons I am reluctant to take action is because I do not know how to explain the reasons for separating with my husband” – Sunshine, bisexual woman.

“I was previously married to a man, but he subjected me to emotional abuse. I could not bear it anymore which made me opt for women. My husband and I have access to our child, and he provides support whenever called upon” – Shan, bisexual woman.

3.1.5 Sexual harassment

Respondents also shared experiences of sexual harassment inflicted by family members with the majority identifying extended relatives as the main perpetrators. In group discussions, masculine-presenting women raised the majority experiences of sexual harassment including threats of corrective rape, and in some cases actual rape. Other respondents who are out to their families highlighted fewer similar cases. Generally, almost all respondents agreed that such experiences cause lifelong psychological and emotional trauma.



Interview with Mercy held in Malaba on 17 November 2018
Interview with Sunshine held in Malaba on 17 November 2018
Interview with Shan held in Arua on 21 September 2018
Focus Group Discussion held in Kampala on 26 October 2018

3.1.6 Coming out experiences

Disclosure of SOGIE is a part of the dynamic process of identity development that takes place along a continuum involving self-awareness, clarification, acceptance, negotiation, and the consolidation and integration of one's sexual identity into various aspects of one's life.

For LBQ women in Uganda, realising their sexual orientation or gender identity and sharing that information with family and friends is often a gradual process that can unfold over a series of years. Group discussions looked at the process of coming out—when and how it happens, how difficult it is, and what impact it has on relationships. Conversations also explored the interactions LBQ women have outside of their circles of family and close friends—in their communities and workplaces. Group discussions focused on the central question of whether respondents were out to family, friends, or colleagues and exploring the experiences of whether being out came with any challenges.

Majority of the respondents were not out to their family, friends and colleagues citing various reasons including the fear of isolation due to the stigma against LBQ persons in Uganda. Additionally, the financial dependence on family members provides a challenge to LBQ persons' coming out to their relatives due to fear of being financially cut off. Respondents further argued that remaining in the closet mitigates stigma from family and the general community.

3.1.6.1 Coming out to family, friends and colleagues

"I Used to be my father's favorite daughter. Our relationship is stained. We rarely talk.

My ex-girlfriend sent phone screenshots to him insisting i was her partner."

#LBQWomenLivedRealities



Few respondents narrated their ordeal about voluntarily coming out to their families and friends. When probed on the factors that influenced the decision, almost all indicated active involvement in LGBT activism with leadership roles in their respective communities and the desire to live a free life without having to worry about 'secrets'. Interestingly, some respondents attributed their decision to financial independence, indicating that their ability to provide financial assistance to family members positively provided a ground for acceptance among relatives.

Majority of respondents who agreed to have come out voluntarily identified their siblings as the most comfortable family members to whom they came out. A few narrated to have found it easier to come out to their mothers. When probed on the reactions from family members, all respondents reported mixed reactions, including requests from their family members for some time to think about the 'new reality'.

Coleman, E. (1982). Developmental stages of the coming out process. *Journal of homosexuality*, 7(2-3), 31-43.
Focus Group Discussion held in Kampala on 15 February 2019

Whereas some family members ended up being receptive, others chose to distance themselves from respondents. One respondent narrated that her mother resorted to regularly reciting biblical verses as a form of prayer to facilitate 'the healing of the child', thus:

"He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say to the Lord, "My refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust." Psalms 91:1-2

Some respondents, for example Glamorous found solace in their peers. She narrates as follows:

"I realised I was lesbian while still in high school. My friend found me watching porn, and I felt attracted to her. After some time, she revealed that she too was a lesbian. We both kept each other's secret and felt free and safe together" – Glamorous, lesbian.

3.1.6.2 Outing

During the discussions and individual interviews, respondents who are out were asked whether their outing was voluntary or against their will. Those who agreed to have been outed forcefully identified the common ways through which they were outed and these included local media platforms (print and online sources) and outing by scorned ex-lovers. Some respondents narrated being outed by individuals who attempted to solicit intimate relationships with them. Lesbian and Bisexual women are most at risk of falling victims of being outed by cis-hetero men in cases where they reject the latter's advances.

Respondents highlighted various challenges experienced in the aftermath of being outed or coming out. The majority were banished from family homes, some were disowned by their families, others lost employment or had to endure constant condemnation from family members, while others narrated that their families assured them of how 'being gay was a phase'. Majority of the respondents agreed to have sought support from their friends within the community, while a few were aware of the existence of support mechanisms to provide temporary assistance.

Respondents who did not get enough support from their families during the critical experience highlighted that the rejection by their families exacerbated their mental health challenges.

Interview with Redemptor held in Arua on 24 August 2018

Interview with Glamorous held in Gulu on 21 November 2018

The conversations also revealed the deep-seated psychological effects of rejection such as suicidal ideation, substance misuse, or the use of violence as coping mechanisms.

However, whereas some respondents were outed to their families, some reported a limited degree of acceptance by their families where the latter hopes that they will change one day. For example, Shantal narrated as follows:

“When I was expelled from school for being lesbian, my mother did not disown me, but she sat me down and cautioned me never to engage in such behaviours again. I gave up on dating girls at school at the time. My family members always tell me that what I am doing is bad, and advise me to try and date a boy” Shantal, lesbian.

The discussions revealed the importance of childhood and teenage years of LBQ women in facilitating the coming out process to parents and other family members. Conversations highlighted the need for positive familial relations to mitigate the effects of past mental health issues in adult life.

The discussions revealed the importance of childhood and teenage years of LBQ women in facilitating the coming out process to parents and other family members. Conversations highlighted the need for positive familial relations to mitigate the effects of past mental health issues in adult life.

See generally, Corliss, H. L., Cochran, S. D., & Mays, V. M. (2002). Reports of parental maltreatment during childhood in a United States population-based survey of homosexual, bisexual, and heterosexual adults. *Child abuse & neglect*, 26(11), 1165-1178.

Focus Group Discussions in Kampala, Jinja, Arua, Lira and Mbarara
Interview with Shantal held in Malaba on 17 November 2018

*Table 2- Coming Out: Information for Parents of LGBT Teens,
Extracted from healthchildren.org*

COMING OUT or BEING OUTED - WHAT CAN PARENTS AND FAMILIES DO TO SUPPORT LBQ RELATIVES?

- When your relative discloses his or her identity to you, respond in an affirming, supportive way. Understand that although gender identity is not able to be changed, it often is revealed over time as people discover more about themselves.
- Accept and love your relative as they are. Try to understand what they are feeling and experiencing. Even if there are disagreements, they will need your support and validation to develop into healthy teens and adults.
- Stand up for your relative when he or she is mistreated. Do not minimize the social pressure or bullying your child may be facing.
- Make it clear that slurs or jokes based on gender, gender identity, or sexual orientation are not tolerated. Express your disapproval of these types of jokes or slurs when you encounter them in the community or media.
- Be on the lookout for danger signs that may indicate a need for mental health support such as anxiety, insecurity, depression, low self-esteem, and any emotional problems in your child and others who may not have a source of support otherwise.
- Connect your child with LGBT organisations, resources, and events. It is crucial for them to know they are not alone.
- Celebrate diversity in all forms. Provide access to a variety of books, movies, and materials—including those that positively represent gender diverse individuals. Point out LGBTQ celebrities and role models who stand up for the LGBT community, and people in general who demonstrate bravery in the face of social stigma.
- Support your child's self-expression. Engage in conversations with them around their choices of clothing, jewellery, hairstyle, friends, and room decorations. Reach out for education, resources, and support if you feel the need to deepen your understanding of LBQ youth experiences. See Support Resources for Families of Gender Diverse Youth.

3.1.7 Awareness of identity

While every respondent self-identified as either Lesbian, Bisexual or Queer, they varied widely in the importance attached to their sexual orientation or gender identity, and in the sense of community they share with other LBQ women. Some view their sexual orientation or gender identity as extremely or very important to their overall identity, but others say it carries relatively little weight. Most participants reflected on the use of appropriate labels to represent their identity including femme, and butch among others.

Respondents also reflected on the use of local variants of Western-derived terms, including “311 gay” (an “original” gay, meaning “gay from birth,” as opposed to an “environmentalist,” who might briefly experiment or engage in same-sex acts in circumstances such as boarding school or prison), “straight gay” (completely gay, not bisexual or environmentalist), “lesbian man” or “top lesbian” (lesbians who enact a masculine-subject position).

Most LBQ women became aware of their identity during their puberty stages while others during their childhood, primary school, high school, and university. At all stages, respondents reported different experiences including the feelings of being possessed by evil spirits, while others utilised the LBQ women community to learn more about their newly discovered identities further. Others found challenges in finding comfortable clothes to wear. Generally, respondents mostly identified as either lesbian or queer and only a handful as bisexual. Whereas bisexual women acknowledged their orientation, the majority raised concerns of biphobia within the broader LBQ women community in Uganda. The complexities of identity politics experienced by masculine presenting LBQ women can be summarised in a quote below:

‘I found challenges to find comfortable clothing, and when I did, my parents always asked me whether I did not have any feminine clothes to wear’ – Naira, Butch lesbian.

Nyanzi, S. (2013). Dismantling reified African culture through localised homosexualities in Uganda. *Culture, health & sexuality*, 15(8), 952-967.

Focus Group Discussion held in Kampala on 5 October 2018

Interview with Naira held in Kampala on 26 October 2018

Nyanzi S (n31 above), Tamale, S. (2011). *Researching and theorising*

3.1.8 Relationship with culture

Anti-gay sentiments in Africa, which run counter to a history of same-sex practices across the continent, are often fuelled by the hostile attitudes of some in key leadership positions. This idea of homosexuality being “un-African” reverberates throughout the continent’s political and other elite circles. Historical evidence in many instances dispels this notion that LGBT people, as well as alternative gender expressions and identities, are alien to African culture.

Respondents were engaged in discussions to provide an insight into their understanding and relationship with their respective cultures. To a greater extent, respondents positively identify with their cultures with majority highlighting the fact that culture gives them identity and a sense of belonging to a community. However, all respondents agreed that patriarchy is deeply rooted in most cultures, which ultimately leads to heteronormativity hence creating a less inclusive environment.

Further discussions highlighted the role of culture in perpetuating heterosexism which manifests itself through the attitudes of family members, who in most cases consider LBQ relatives as ill, and in need of being ‘corrected’. Participants also narrated instances where their families advised them to behave like ‘real women’ in accordance with their respective cultures. In all regions where discussions and one-on-one interviews were conducted, respondents indicated that all their cultures expect women to get married to men.

Most of the respondents attributed resistance from their families and the general public to the heteronormative architecture of cultural institutions. They argued that the lack of inclusion in most cultures provides an environment where only those cultural traits are supposed to flourish.

3.1.9 Relationship with religion



**IF YOUR RELIGION MAKES YOU HATE
SOMEONE, YOU NEED A NEW RELIGION**

Feminists have long criticised conservative religious dictates that prescribe women’s roles as homemakers, mothers, and subservient to men. As LBQ women frequently fall outside these norms, these dictates to conform to the traditional feminine stereotype

Nyanzi S (n31 above), Tamale, S. (2011). Researching and theorising sexualities in Africa. *African sexualities: A reader*, 11-36.

add even higher pressures to live according to widely acceptable social norms. They may be subjected to negative messages within conservative religions about same-sex sexuality for women being unnatural, pathological, and threatening to male supremacy. Further, because the experiences of white, heterosexual men are often presented as the basis for healthy human experience and spiritual practice, there is persistent invisibility of LBQ women in conservative religious texts.

Generally, respondents contended that religious beliefs pose one of the significant challenges that hamper positive recognition to LGBT rights and acceptance. None of the major world religions expresses an openly tolerant attitude to homosexuality. Religious leaders including Muslim, Catholic and other Christian churches - evangelical protestant churches in particular - have expressed some of the most violent hatred and repressive attitudes against LGBT persons. Religious organisations have also been stated to have intolerant attitudes to transgender and intersex persons. Non-conforming gender identities and unidentifiable gender at birth is a challenge to the religious scriptures that states that humans are created as man and woman. Religious beliefs about gender may affect even modern medicine and non-religious persons.

Participants expressed mixed feelings about religion with the majority agreeing to identify as religious affiliated to either Christianity or Islam as their primary belief. However, they expressed concerns on the intolerance and lack of inclusion in their religious affiliations. Respondents were able to identify reasons for continued affiliation to the identified religions which include: strong family ties which play a role in influencing their belief systems, the reliance on scriptures of inclusivity in the respective religious texts and books, and the need for hope amidst stigma and discrimination. Some respondents attributed their continued relationship with religion to the following scripture.

"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy; it does not boast; it is not proud. It does not dishonour others; it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs" – 1 Corinthians 13:13

See generally, Chitando, E., & Van Klinken, A. (Eds.). (2016). Christianity and controversies over homosexuality in contemporary Africa. Routledge.

Hagen, W. B., Arczynski, A. V., Morrow, S. L., & Hawxhurst, D. M. (2011). Lesbian, bisexual, and queer women's spirituality in feminist multicultural counseling. *Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling*, 5(3-4), 220-236.

J Boutchie 'Globalising Hatred' (2019) Harvard Political Review www.harvardpolitics.com/covers/globalizing-hatred/ (Accessed 17 April 2018)

A few respondents identified as spiritual, but not affiliated to any religious class, citing strong beliefs of equality and fairness. They narrated experiences where they were cast out of churches after being outed in the media. Additionally, respondents echoed the experiences of being forced by their relatives to attend 'change prayers' hence the fear and resentment to associate with institutions that classify their identities as 'demonic spirits'. Almost all respondents prefer non-denominational religious spaces that are inclusive to all human beings irrespective of social groupings. The following quote by a respondent is one of the examples of what LBQ women experience about religion:

"I believe in God, and I am an SDA, but I never go to church. I stay at home with people that understand me. I fear to go to church because I will be mocked and mistreated" – AK, Butch Lesbian.

3.1.10 Parenting while LBQ

LBQ women historically have faced more rigorous scrutiny than heterosexual people regarding their rights to be or become parents. Experiences by respondents revealed cases of discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity regarding their rights as custodial parents.

Discussions revolved around the current context in Uganda which assumes a heteronormative understanding of parenting. Majority of the participants were affirmative on the possibility of having children but raised challenges in accessing the existing alternatives such as adoption which necessitate heterosexist requirements to be met by prospective parents.

The Children's Act Cap 59 contains problematic provisions with a direct effect on the custodial rights of LBQ parents. Whereas the law recognises the right of the child to stay with their parents, if it comes to the knowledge of the relevant authorities that the parent or parents of a child are LGBTI, it is probable that this provision can be invoked to take such a child away from its parent or parents because it can easily be said that living with an LGBTI parent is not in the best interests of the child.

Interview with AK held in Kampala on 26 October 2018

See generally, Rosik, C. H., Griffith, L. K., & Cruz, Z. (2007). Homophobia and conservative religion: Toward a more nuanced understanding. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 77(1), 10-19.

Focus Group Discussion held in Kampala on 5 October 2018

Respondents with children identified as either bisexual or lesbian. In the latter's case, conversations focused on the circumstances that led to pregnancy, and the majority of the respondents said the pregnancies were a result of rape. Responses from bisexual respondents who agreed to be parents highlighted their challenging experiences, with the majority identifying stigma within the LBQ community for having children or carrying a child during pregnancy.

Furthermore, some have their children taken away by their fathers or in-laws upon discovering one's sexual orientation. Almost all participants identified the lack of community programs for supporting LBQ parents in Uganda. A respondent's experience provides a glance at what some of the LBQ women parents go through in their daily lives:

"The father of my kids is always demanding to take them away because of my sexuality. He says I am too immoral to raise children" – Paulina, Lesbian.

3.2 Political Realities



Non-discrimination and equality are fundamental principles of international human rights law, and they are essential to the enjoyment of all human rights. Exclusion, marginalisation and discrimination cannot be adequately addressed unless all people are provided with meaningful opportunities to exercise their rights to participate in political and public life and other related rights. Discriminatory restrictions on political and public participation rights serve to further marginalise and exclude different groups by depriving them of avenues for challenging and redressing the disadvantages they face. Human rights mechanisms have noted that criminal law sanctions that target lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons, as well as discriminatory restrictions on their freedoms of peaceful assembly, association and expression result in severe limitations on their participation in political and public life.

3.2.1 Involvement in women's rights activities and organisations

Conversations revolved around whether LBQ women are actively involved in any community activities and ascertaining whether such activities are valuable to the respondents. Generally, respondents confirmed that they are involved in activities organised by LBQ women organisations and were able to identify activities such as workshop gatherings, the celebration of LBQ related days and safe space social gatherings. Participants highlighted the importance of such gatherings and identified benefits accruing from such spaces including connections with other LBQ women, facilitative access to health services through referral services, and opportunities to participate in domestic, regional and international workshops.

However, some respondents expressed concern about the lack of awareness about the various community activities in which they would wish to participate. When probed further, they attributed the situation to being newly introduced to LBQ women's social spaces. Overall, LBQ women are optimistic about active involvement with organisations and activities relating to their needs.

3.2.2 The Inclusivity of the women's movement in Uganda

Group discussions reflected on whether the mainstream women's movement is inclusive and welcoming to LBQ women in Uganda. Respondents shared mixed views on the matter, with a few highlighting the progress made by the LBQ women and the broader women's movement in as far as achieving intersectional feminism. Respondents noted that despite claims that the women's movement is all-inclusive, most women in the movement are reluctant to discuss issues related to sexuality, using the pretext of religion and morality. As a result, the women's movement, just like the broader Ugandan society has failed to wholesomely accommodate persons with different sexual orientations and accept them on equal terms. Participants who were supportive of existing inclusion identified different

ways through which they engage with other broader movement stakeholders. These included mainly: participation in training workshops, health-related advocacy campaigns and invitation to participate in events. From these conversations, it was visible that LBQ women working in human rights spaces are more likely to interface with the women's movement and ultimately included in various interventions organised by the latter.

Furthermore, LBQ women are always invited to organisations organised by women rights organisations with the majority having benefited from various programs in leadership, advocacy, among others. However, some participants reflected on incidents where they felt unwelcome, misunderstood, isolated and stigmatised when they interfaced with predominantly cis-het spaces. Overall, participants were optimistic about the progress that has been made by the women rights movement to include LBQ women in programmatic areas. One of the outstanding experience is transcribed below:

"I tried to be part of the women's community organisations and efforts, but whenever I joined, I became an outcast because of my sexual orientation. Women would always tell me that their culture does not allow homosexuality" – May, Lesbian.

A/HRC/26/29 para. 10

Focus Group Discussions held in Kampala on 5 October 2018 and 15 February 2018

Focus Group Discussions held in Lira, Jiunja, Gulu and Arua

Uganda Women's Network 'Documentation of Pluralism within the Women's Movement in Uganda Re-echoing voices of women activists' 18

3.2.3 Political Participation

LBQ women in Uganda are hesitant to participate in general politics in their respective communities, at various levels of political leadership. More than half of the respondents identified stigma as the major factor for non-involvement in country politics. Other factors identified included: limited leadership training, lack of funds to finance electoral campaigns and the fear of being outed. Furthermore, the existing legal framework in Uganda is not inclusive enough to cater for the diverse identity needs of LBQ women, which discussants argued, creates exclusion of LBQ women who would prefer to use pronouns that do not conform to the heteronormative standards.

Whereas electoral laws do not outrightly bar LBQ women from participating, they provide broad moral requirements which might impede respondents from participation. For example, the Parliamentary Elections Act, 2005 provides for qualifications of a member of parliament, thus:

4. Qualifications and disqualification of members of parliament
- (2) A person is not qualified as a member of parliament if that person
- f) has, within the seven years immediately preceding the election, been convicted by a competent court of a crime involving moral turpitude.

Black's Law dictionary defines moral turpitude as an act of baseness, vileness, or the depravity in private and social duties which man owes to his fellow man, or society in general, contrary to the accepted and customary rule of right and duty between man and man". Whereas this provision is not directly targeted to LBQ women and the fact that there is no known case of an LBQ person being convicted for their SOGIE based on this provision, they a high risk of being convicted for engaging in same sex sexual conduct which is criminalised under the penal code.

Generally, LBQ women in Uganda are not well represented in the political landscape in Uganda. Whereas the electoral laws provide for the election of women representatives at different levels of government, in practice such positions are restricted to cishet women. Participants in group discussions argued that women representatives do not reach out to LBQ women during campaigns which leave the former ignorant of the peculiar needs of LBQ women in Uganda.

Participants also noted the importance that people attach to women who are married and have family and highlighted that unmarried women, or those whose sexuality is unclear do not command the same respect in politics like their married heterosexual counterparts – a factor which further shrinks the willingness of LBQ women to participate in mainstream political activities.

Furthermore, participants highlighted that the majority of women representatives elected at different levels utter heterosexist remarks in various media whenever they interface with issues relating to LBQ women. Relating to the existing gaps in political participation, LBQ women highlighted the lack of community-led leadership programs for grooming LBQ women leaders; the lack of awareness among mainstream cishet women representatives at different levels of government; and the lack of requisite academic qualifications to contest for various positions of government in their respective communities as the significant gaps that need to be addressed. Academic qualifications to contest for various positions of government in their respective communities as the significant gaps that need to be addressed.

Parliamentary Elections Act, Sec 4 (2)(f)

Hamdan v. I.N.S, 98 F.3d 183 (5th Cir. 1996)

Focus Group Discussion held in Kampala on 15 February 2018 As above

3.3 Economic Realities



There are many disempowering barriers for LBQ women in Uganda including the stresses of coming out, constant workplace discrimination and general societal marginalisation which may limit their ability to achieve full economic empowerment. Unemployment remains one of the critical issues of the LBQ Women community in Uganda. As a consequence of cultural and legal injustice, LBQ women also suffer economic injustice (being denied employment or summarily dismissed from work, being denied family-based social welfare benefits, etc.). Cultural, legal and economic disadvantages reinforce each other and, thus, the discrimination of LBQ women forms an escalating negative cycle of injustice and poverty.

3.3.1 Employment

LBQ women in Uganda have different experiences relating to access to employment opportunities. Socio-economic class was found to be a determinant that influenced the employment status of the respondents. Participants with formal qualifications from higher institutions (Diploma, Bachelors and above) reported being employed in formal settings. However, when asked about whether they are open about their sexuality to their employers, only a handful answered in the affirmative. Whereas the Employment Act, 2006 provides for non-discrimination in the workplace, there is no specific mention of SOGIE among the basis upon which one cannot be discriminated against. A report by Human Rights Awareness and Promotion Forum highlights the non-existence of any court decisions to determine whether sex as a basis for discrimination comprises aspects of gender identity and sexual orientation.

See generally SIDA 'Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Issues in Development' (2005)
Employment Act, 2006 sec. 6(3)

Human Rights Awareness and Promotion Forum 'A guide to the normative framework on the human rights of LGBTI Persons in Uganda' (2015)

3.3.2 Academic qualifications as an enabling or limiting factor for accessing employment

Respondents without formal academic qualifications (either 'O' level, 'A' level or none) highlighted challenges in accessing employment opportunities. They attributed the challenges to limited skills to access the mainstream job market, lack of entrepreneurial skills to finance their business plans which are in most cases small scale business ideas, and mostly the lack of capital to start-up businesses.

3.3.3 Workplace discrimination

Respondents were asked about their employment status, and more than half of all the respondents agreed to have a job or a primary source of income. Some participants claimed to be out to their employers, while others agreed to suspicion of their SOGIE by employers. Respondents reported cases of verbal and physical discrimination, hiding gender identity or sexual orientation at work, and hiding personal life. Trans identifying or masculine-presenting women provided more experiences of such discrimination.

Amongst all respondents who are openly out, with or without formal academic qualifications, there was a common concern relating to stigma and bias from prospective employers who reject their applications based on their sexual orientation. A few participants narrated experiences where they lost their jobs when their employers discovered their sexual orientation.

"I tried looking for jobs and failed because many people could not place my gender because of the way I was dressed" – Minara, butch lesbian.

When probed on whether they report these cases of harassment, respondents reported that they prefer to remain silent in order to stay employed. This overall experience reflects on the general opinion amongst almost all respondents who thought that there are few employment opportunities for LBQ women in Uganda.

However, not all respondents experienced harassment and discrimination in their workplaces as a result of revealing their SOGIE. LBQ women of a higher socio-economic class reported more bargaining power at their workplaces which helps them influence the kind of treatment they receive. A lesbian, masculine presenting woman with a bachelor's degree and formal employment narrated as follows:

"I have not faced any violence or discrimination at work. I raised the issue of strict dress code adherence with management and told them that as long as I can deliver my work, I should not be forced to dress a certain way. The organisation has subsequently relaxed its dress code requirements"
Redemptor, Lesbian.

Interview with Minara held in Malaba on 17 November 2018

3.3.4 Discrimination in Education Institutions

Discussions focused on how much formal education the participants have and the challenges encountered due to their sexuality. The respondents had varying levels of education with the majority lacking a bachelor's degree. However, few participants possess a diploma from a reputable institution. Those without diplomas either possess an O Level Certificate or A level certificate (equivalent to a high school diploma) or possess none.

A few participants admitted to their former education institutions being aware of their SOGIE and shared experiences on the reactions of the academic institutions. The respondents were either suspended from school, and in one particular case, the matron of a girl's school fainted when one respondent was outed. In another instance, a butch-presenting respondent was suspended from a university amidst pursuing a bachelor's degree.

From the discussion, it was clear that masculine presenting LBQ women are more likely to be discriminated in schools compared to their counterparts. In all cases, respondents reflected on the lack of any support mechanism to assist in litigating education-related cases, or tuition assistance to LBQ women who would wish to reclaim their potential through further education. The following experiences provide an insight into the existence of outright discrimination in education institutions:

VOICES ON DISCRIMINATION IN EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

"I had a boyfriend in high school whom I never had any feelings for. He suspected me of being a lesbian, and he told school authorities. The school contacted my parents who did not believe the story, but the school decided to expel me from the institution" – Shanice, lesbian.

"Rumours started spreading around the school that I was in a lesbian relationship, and I was expelled from school. It was hard to explain to pupils in a new school the reason I was expelled from my previous school. I had to change eight different schools until I dropped out because of stigma. My parents got tired and stopped paying my school fees" Assumpta, bisexual woman.

Interview with Redemptor held in Lira on 21 July 2018

Interview with Shanice held in Mbale on 17 November

3.3.5 Discrimination in housing

Conversations on housing revolved around experiences of acquiring tenancy across the country. Masculine-presenting LBQ women shared more negative experiences and challenges about housing access and the maintenance of tenancy agreements. Respondents reported that they are usually questioned by their neighbours where the latter question the former's identity and expression because it does not conform to the widely accepted norm. Furthermore, stud LBQ women have experienced more cases of discrimination from neighbours who in some cases demand that the former is evicted from the neighbourhood due to the 'fear of corrupting and recruiting young girls into homosexuality.'

On the other hand, femme LBQ respondents did not raise any concerns or experiences relating to housing discrimination. However, group discussants highlighted the fear always associated with having their partners visit their areas of residence. The majority do not feel safe while being intimate with their partners due to the fear of neighbours breaking into the premises upon suspicion of homosexual activity.

3.3.6 Property ownership

Recognising the impact of stigma and discrimination on access to opportunities, the LBQ community in Uganda still registers barriers to property ownership. Only a handful of participants responded in the affirmative when asked on whether they own any property. The typical examples of the property identified included land, cars, household items, among others. The participants were able to identify ways through which they were able to acquire the property citing sources such as hard work, gifts from friends, and inheritance from relatives.

Group discussion participants agreed to the role of property and economic stability as an enabling factor that mitigates the levels of discrimination and stigma inflicted by family members. Discussions highlighted experiences where LBQ women are benefactors to their respective families, regularly providing financial assistance to relatives to cater for day to day expenditures and in some cases contributing to tuition fees for siblings and other family members.

Interview with Shanice held in Mbale on 17 November 2018

Interview with Assumpta held in Mbarara on 24 August 2018

Focus Group Discussions held in Kampala, Mbale and Jinja on 15 February 2019 and 16 October 2018

However, majority of the respondents highlighted the effects of stigma and systemic exclusion as a critical factor in limiting their ability to own property. Some respondents narrated experiences of being denied inheritance by their family members because of the former's sexual orientation, gender identity and expression. When asked on whether they were able to seek any legal support, respondents provided mixed responses where LBQ women from urban centres are always advised by their colleagues to approach HRAPF but those in rural areas lack awareness on the existence of any support mechanisms. In all instances, respondents highlighted fear of stigma as a key factor that influences their unwillingness to take legal action when faced with family instigated discrimination.

3.4 LBQ Women Health in Uganda



Intersectionality theory posits that these health-related challenges uniquely shape health equity in populations for whom multiple marginalised identities exist—such as LBQ women. Individual factors such as negative experiences with healthcare providers and fear of discrimination combine with structural factors such as lower rates of insurance and lower socioeconomic status to decrease the likelihood of lesbian and bisexual women seeking routine sexual health care (such as cancer screening tests and sexual health exams) compared to heterosexual women. A recent report published by sexual minorities Uganda highlighted the health care discrimination for Uganda's sexual and gender minorities. The attendant discussion therefore,

As above

See for example, Müller, A. (2017). Scrambling for access: availability, accessibility, acceptability and quality of healthcare for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in South Africa. *BMC international health and human rights*, 17(1), 16. See generally, Sexual Minorities Uganda 'Even If They Spit at You, Don't Be Surprised' (2018)

provides further insight on some of the lived health related experiences of LBQ women in Uganda:

3.4.1 Channels of access

Conversations focused on identifying the different ways through which LBQ women access health services in Uganda. The vital services sought by respondents can be categorised as primary, secondary, preventative healthcare and community services. There were mixed responses relating to access channels. The majority of the participants reported being able to access general health services through various health units in their respective communities. In some cases, the majority of these LBQ women also seek for appropriate referrals from FARUG, while the rest of the participants admitted to being supported by family members as and when they need medical attention.

Other respondents reported a preference for private health centres which they claimed could be accessed without challenges since most of them care about making money and rarely bother with SOGIE, unlike government-aided health centres.

3.4.2 Challenges in accessing health services

Group discussions revealed challenges faced by LBQ women in accessing health services in Uganda. Major issues centred around health practitioner training, disclosure of one's sexual identity and language. Almost all participants noted that whereas there has been some SOGIE training targeting health care workers, they still lack the requisite professional development to pursue LBQ women health related issues hence the use of non-inclusive language and the deliberate refusal to acknowledge one's sexual identity.

Additionally, respondents who expose their sexual orientation/identity to health workers noted more negative experiences such as overt homophobic responses, assumption of heterosexuality especially during HIV testing and the general lack of specific knowledge on LBQ women health issues. On the other hand, participants who choose not to disclose their orientation or identity to health workers do not register as many challenges than their counterparts.

Focus group discussion held in Arua on 21 September 2018
Focus Group Discussion held in Mbale on 16 October 2018
See generally Pennay, A., McNair, R., Hughes, T. L., Leonard

Overall, respondents who access services through referral networks initiated by LBQ organisations did not report any of the above challenges, which can be attributed to the regular engagements with the healthcare workers in those centres. In general terms, significant concerns relating to health services for LBQ individuals include heterosexism (prejudiced attitudes or discriminatory practices against sexual minorities), poor provider knowledge and communication skills, and lack of LBQ specific resources and referral networks. These challenges were highlighted by a participant, thus:

“When I get sick, I medicate myself even if it means putting an IV drip bottle on myself. It is hard, but I prefer not to go through the same experience of discrimination. I have tried to get hormonal therapy but it is expensive, and I cannot afford it” – MK, butch lesbian on self-medicated hormonal therapy.

Respondents were further engaged in discussions to provide reasons as to why they might be reluctant to disclose their identity to a health practitioner. This engagement was based on a hypothesis that disclosure of one’s identity is likely to impact on the quality of health services provided to LBQ women in Uganda. The following reasons were identified: an assumption that women preferred to disclose rather than be asked about their sexual identity; reduced confidence felt by LBQ women about disclosure after experiencing heterosexism; and deliberate silencing, whereby the provider was aware of the person’s sexual identity but did not acknowledge this information in subsequent interactions. Respondents also noted that some of the community peers working at friendly health centres spread many gossips and share their private information with the entire community.

The high medical costs are also one of the barriers to accessing quality healthcare services among LBQ women in Uganda. Key messages from the participants provided a preference for private health care to government-aided health services. The majority argued that whereas there is a possibility of being stigmatised or discriminated in either facility, the likelihood of being violated for a paid service is lower than when the service is free.

his argument was mostly supported by LBQ women of a higher socio-economic class which demonstrates the differences in probable experiences among various classes while seeking access to health care.

See generally Pennay, A., McNair, R., Hughes, T. L., Leonard, W., Brown, R., & Lubman, D. I. (2018). Improving alcohol and mental health treatment for lesbian, bisexual and queer women: Identity matters. *Australian and New Zealand journal of public health*, 42(1), 35-42.

Interview with MK held in Jinja on 15 feb 2018

Focus Group Discussion held in Mbarara on 24 August 2018

3.4.3 Mental Health



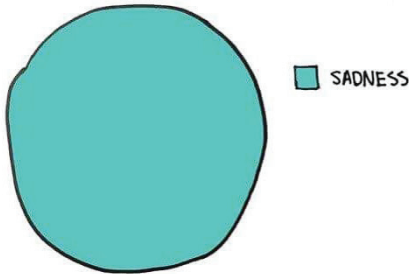
The discussion focused on whether respondents have faced any mental health challenges, and almost all participants responded in the affirmative. When probed further on the causes of the challenges, participants reflected on the lifelong experiences such as childhood abuse (including molestation and rape) and neglect, intimate partner violence, unsafe sex and abortion.

As a result of these long-standing psychological and emotional problems, respondents reported instances of self-harm, depression, trauma and suicidal

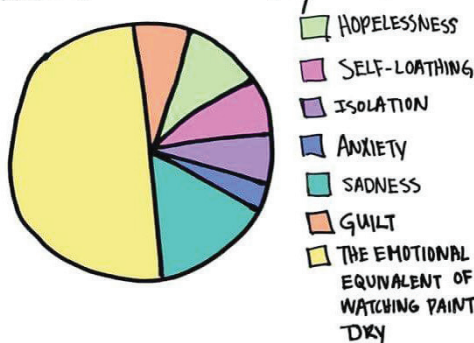
ideation. Some respondents reported having resorted to alcohol and other substances as a coping mechanism while others confided in their partners or friends for counselling. The discussions revealed the lack of a comprehensive mental health support system to address the mental health concerns of LBQ women in Uganda.

3.4.4 Alcohol and substance misuse

WHAT PEOPLE THINK DEPRESSION FEELS LIKE



WHAT DEPRESSION ACTUALLY FEELS LIKE



As a follow up on coping mechanisms for mental health issues, participants were asked to provide further information on alcohol and substance abuse among LBQ women in Uganda.

More than half of the respondents admitted to having used alcohol as a solution to overcome mental health challenges.

Furthermore, the majority of the participants admitted to over smoking cigarettes and the use of marijuana for recreational and coping purposes. Participants did not provide any experiences in alcohol and substance misuse treatment, which can be attributed to the lack of comprehensive treatment programs for LBQ women in Uganda.

See generally, Ryan, C., Russell, S. T., Huebner, D., Diaz, R., & Sanchez, J. (2010). Family acceptance in adolescence and the health of LGBT young adults. *Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Nursing*, 23(4), 205-213. Focus Group Discussions in Kampala, Lira, Gulu, Malaba, Mbale and Mpigi

3.4.5 Health needs of LBQ women in Uganda

During group discussions, critical messages offered by participants focused on a range of health needs for LBQ women in Uganda. The majority identified mental health and treatment for substance abuse as the significant issues the LBQ community in Uganda needs to focus on. Different needs identified by respondents related to sexual and reproductive health, support to access screening services for STIs, abortion, cervical and breast cancer.

Participants also noted the need for more research on the health needs of LBQ women in Uganda. From the discussions, the need for further interrogation of the specific needs in relation to the sexual identities of LBQ women in Uganda was evident, and participants' messages communicated that instead of treating LBQ women as a homogenous sub-population, it has been suggested that LBQ sub-groups should be considered separately in the context of their healthcare needs. Notably, most of the respondents believe differences in sexual identity among LBQ women shape their treatment experience and needs and therefore generalising the health needs further ignores the unique health-related experiences of LBQ women.

3.4.6 Intimate Partner Violence

IPV has been the subject of an increasing number of conversations and policy interventions in recent times. However, such interventions and conversations rarely focus on IPV as experienced in same-sex relationships among women and trans men.

This is mainly because of the misconceptions regarding whether women can be perpetrators of violence or not and the fact that the LGBT community in Uganda continues to be pushed to the side-lines because of societal homophobia. Another reason why existing interventions and conversations may ignore LBQ persons is that there is limited data on the lived experiences of this segment of the population and most of this data is academic legal research not necessarily an analysis of quantitative data. This does not mean that violence does not occur in same-sex relationships particularly those in which both partners may be women.

LBQ women highlighted cases of IPV in their relationships during group discussions. Conversations centred around the perceived factors facilitating abuse in

relationships, and how IPV impacts on the security and the safety of respondents. Almost all respondents were able to identify various instances of physical, emotional, psychological and economic violence in relationships.

From the discussions, participants identified poverty, power struggles, non-commitment, and ignorance as the critical drivers of IPV in relationships among LBQ women in Uganda. Majority of the conversations reflected on the financial aspects in a relationship, with diverse views ranging from who is supposed to provide monetary support in a relationship to whether partners need permission from each other before securing employment or making money-related decisions.

Femme presenting LBQ women reported more cases of previous IPV in their current or past relationships compared to their masculine presenting counterparts. Majority of the former accused studs for being violent in relationships, while the latter either denied or affirmed the accusations claiming the right to 'be the man' in a relationship. The importation of heteronormative gender roles into LBQ women's relationships has detrimental effects for it exacerbates the already dangerous patriarchal standard of living. More respondents who have experienced IPV and chose to stay in abusive relationships mainly reported to be the causes of the abuse. The following experience highlights the daily manifestation of IPV in the lives of LBQ women in Uganda.

"I was at a party when my partner saw me with a man. He (trans-man) injured my foot and beat me up. This was not the first time she beat me up as she normally gets jealous. I think my partner is violent because she uses a lot of drugs and alcohol. There was a time she beat me up, and I lost my teeth" – Illuminata, bisexual woman.

See generally, Wallace, P. (2007). How can she still love him? Domestic violence and the Stockholm Syndrome. *Community Practitioner*, 80(10), 32-35.

Focus Group Discussions held in Kampala and Mbale on 5 October 2018 and 15 February 2019

Focus Group Discussions in Kampala, Mbarara, Arua, Lira, Mbale and Malaba

Interview with Illuminata held in Malaba on 17 November 2018

3.5 Legal Experiences of LBQ women in Uganda

3.5.1 An overview of existing laws affecting LBQ women in Uganda



Discrimination of LBQ women takes many forms and exists on different societal levels. It occurs as a direct and indirect state repression and in informal social settings. Discrimination of LGBT people can be in the form of criminalisation of homosexuality, institutionalised homophobia, abuse in state institutions, diminished access to health care, workplace discrimination and violence and harassment from official state representatives. Social repression with or without state tolerance can be manifested in the form of verbal abuse, silence, ridicule, hate crimes, corrective rape of lesbians, and forced marriage. Overt homophobia has been heard in political discourse in some countries. A recent report by Sexual Minorities Uganda highlighted verified cases of attack on people based on their SOGIE.

HRAPF has compiled a comprehensive guide with in-depth information on the normative legal framework on LGBT persons in Uganda. The table below is extracted from the mentioned report for purposes of simplification. It does not provide a detailed legal analysis but highlights key domestic legislation with a direct effect on LBQ women in Uganda.

Table 3 - A summary of the normative legal framework on the human rights of LGBTI persons in Uganda' – Extracted from a Report by Human Rights Awareness and Promotion Forum (2015)

LAW	APPLICABLE PROVISIONS	CONTENT
The Constitution of the Republic of Uganda, 1995	<p>The Bill of Rights</p> <p>The National Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy (NODPSP)</p> <p>Establishment of the Uganda Human Rights Commission</p>	<p>The Constitution has various provisions that are relevant to the human rights of LBQ women, both in the National Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy and in Chapter Four, which is the bill of rights.</p>

Sexual Minorities Uganda (n6 above)
 Human Rights Awareness and Promotion Forum (n55)
 As above

Penal Code Act , Cap 120	Secs 145, 146, 148, 160, 167, 168, 381	Criminalises same sex conduct
Registration of Persons Act, 2015	Secs 12, 13, 14	Relates to change of name of adults and children and change of sex for adults and children
The Companies Act, 2012	Secs 32, 36, 52, 72, 36 and 38	Does not recognise transgender persons, does not provide for change of names of transgender persons and lacks clarity on procedures for sex change for adults.
The Equal Opportunities Act 2007	Sec. 15(6)(d)	The Commission shall not investigate any matter involving behaviour, which is considered to be— (i) immoral and socially harmful, or (ii) unacceptable by the majority of the cultural and social communities in Uganda.
The Non- Government Organisations Act, 2016	Sec. 1	Places a special obligation on registered 'organisations not engage in any act, which is prejudicial to the interests of Uganda and the dignity of the people of Uganda' This provision restricts the registration and operationalisation of LBQ organisations since their work is widely considered as immoral hence being against the dignity of Ugandans
The Marriage Act Cap 251; the Customary Marriages Registrations Act Cap 248; the Marriage and Divorce of Mohammedans Act Cap 252; the Hindu Divorce and Marriage Act Cap 250; and the Marriage of Africans Act Cap 253.	General	They do not contain specific prohibitions against same-sex marriages, but in light of Article 31(1) of the Constitution, no same- sex marriage can be celebrated under these laws, thus: "Men and women of the age of eighteen years and above have the right to marry and to found a family and are entitled to

Act Cap 250; and the Marriage of Africans Act Cap 253.		equal rights in marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution."
Divorce Act Cap 249	Sec 4	Lists sodomy among the grounds for divorce
Employment Act, 2006	Sec 6	Does not explicitly identify SOGIE as grounds for non-discrimination in workspaces
Children's Act Cap 59,	Secs 4 and 45	Provisions can be invoked to take a child away from its parent or parents because it can easily be said that living with an LGBTI parent is not in the best interests of the child.

3.5.2 Knowledge of the law

Discussions revolved around ascertaining whether LBQ women know the laws that affect their daily lives. In the process, almost all participants reflected on the nullified Anti-Homosexuality Act which provided a lively debate on the effects of the law in the daily lives of the respondents. Majority of the participants were able to at least cite one penal code provision with a direct effect on their lives, with most messages referring to Section 145.

Further discussions revealed a basic awareness of other laws affecting gender identity, with a handful of masculine presenting LBQ women mentioning the Registration of Persons Act, and noted how the law does not recognise their gender identities. In other cases, a few participants had knowledge on legislation relating to employment, non-discrimination and equal opportunity, marriage, divorce, parenting and adoption, and were thus able to identify: The Children's Act, The Equal Opportunities Commission Act, The Employment Act, The Marriage Act, The Divorce Act, among others.

However, LBQ women with higher levels of education while living in urban areas presented more awareness of the law compared to those living in rural areas and with lower levels of higher education. This disparity might be attributed to the proximity of specialised LBQ organisations that are mainly located in urban areas.

3.5.3 LBQ women rights violations (Arrest)

Uganda, like many other African countries, remains a heteronormative society which has not yet overcome homophobia, with more work still needed to ensure a conducive environment for sexual minorities in the country. From the discussions, the violations facing LBQ women are three-pronged. Firstly, general violations that apply to other members of the LGBTIQ+ community; secondly, those that apply to LBQ women; and thirdly those specific to the various subsets within LBQ women that are attributable to sexual and gender identity.

Conversations aimed at ascertaining the various violations mainly faced by LBQ women and all respondents were able to identify at least one violation that has been experienced based on SOGIE. Common examples included the violations of the rights to privacy, liberty and security. More than half of the respondents reported to having been arrested in their lifetime, with a third of the respondents attributing their SOGIE as the sole cause of the arrest. In other instances, participants were arrested on grounds not related to their SOGIE including smoking illegal narcotics, being rouge and vagabond, drunk driving, among others.

Respondents also reflected on the sources of violations and highlighted both state and non-state actors, with the former including police officers, and the latter including the general public, intimate partners, academic institutions, employers, among others. The discussions also revealed that masculine presenting LBQ women are more likely to be targeted for human rights violations compared to their counterparts who can easily pass.

Among LBQ women who have ever been arrested, either for general reasons or as a result of their SOGIE, masculine presenting women noted more cases of harassment while in detention centres including inappropriate body searches, the use of misgendered pronouns by police officers, verbal abuse and threats of rape. Where the arrested respondents were charged, the typical charge reported in the group discussions was an impersonation. A masculine presenting woman shared the following experience which other respondents:

"I was taken to the police and tortured. I was separated from other prisoners and made to do all the work that prisoners do" – Malakai, masculine presenting woman.

LBQ women also reported instances where police officers became reluctant to provide them with assistance after discovering their sexual orientation. One respondent narrated an event where she was raped, and when she made a statement at the police station and declared that she was a lesbian, the officers were no longer interested in listening to her and blamed her for attempting to recruit a friend to her perpetrators into lesbianism and was subsequently (the victim) forced to sign for police bond so that her rapists could be released from police custody.

3.5.4 Reporting violations



Whereas LBQ women experience unique forms of human rights violations, the majority provided instances where they experience abuse and opt to remain silent. When probed further on why such cases were not reported to relevant authorities, participants emphasised the heterosexist composition of government services in Uganda and the lack of sufficient training of police officers to respond and communicate to LBQ women who report cases of human rights violations and the fear of being re-victimized at police stations.

Furthermore, respondents who reported cases of violations by non-state actors including relatives and intimate partners argued that their reluctance to pursue such cases is related to the emotional connection between them and the perpetrators. When probed further, some participants highlighted being financial dependants on their perpetrators who can quickly terminate any economic support in case any action is taken against them.

3.5.5 Access to legal services

Key messages provided by the participants about access to legal services revolved around alternative legal support structures that are available and accessible to LBQ women in Uganda. Almost half of the respondents were able to identify an LBQ friendly legal aid support provider. However, almost all these participants are located in urban areas where information on the availability of these services is most likely to reach. Respondents living outside urban centres either provided minimal information about existing knowledge on the existence of legal support mechanisms or lacked any knowledge on the same.

From the discussions, the majority of Kampala based LBQ women have mostly sought legal aid support from the existing friendly organisations than their counterparts. The latter highlighted bureaucracy and the lack of transportation to meet legal aid lawyers who are based in Kampala. Other respondents highlighted the issue of trust as a common barrier to access legal services where would-be clients do not wholly trust lawyers with personal information.

Interview with Malakai held in Mbale on 16 October 2018
Interview with Nash, held at Kampala on 26 October 2018

3.5.6 Access to protection support services



Recognising the volatility of the Ugandan environment towards LBQ women, discussions engaged participants on whether the existing protection services adequately address their protection needs. Almost half of the respondents agreed to know of the existence of protection services, the majority of whom had applied for support when they registered security attacks. Generally, most LBQ women can identify at least two service providers to whom they can run to should they need appropriate support. Sadly, LBQ women from rural areas either have little information about the existence of those services or lack necessary assistance to seek for the support.

LBQ women mostly seek for relocation support services, with a few instances of rest and recuperation support. The need for relocation can be attributed to their attendant realities, as discussed above, which in most cases expose them to security, safety and legal threats making living in their respective communities unpalatable and hence the need for safer spaces and residences.

4. Conclusion

This research aimed at documenting the lived experiences of LBQ women in Uganda. This report has highlighted some of the cross-cutting issues relating to their political, social, economic, health and legal realities in Uganda. Socially, LBQ women continue to face overt stigma and heterosexism in their respective communities. The majority are often banished from family homes, disowned by relatives, evicted from their residence, among other violations. The economic situation of many LBQ women in Uganda is worsened by the systemic homophobia which forces them to drop out of school, lose employment, cut off from financial support from their families and also find challenges in securing employment due to lifelong injustices that rob them of an opportunity to compete on the job market.

LBQ women in Uganda face various challenges in accessing health services, including the fear of being re-victimized, the lack of appropriate training by health workers to handle their specific issues, and the lack of contextualised services specific to LBQ health needs. Whereas most LBQ women in Uganda are keen on claiming their spaces and participating in the mainstream women's movement, the latter still fails them and in some cases discriminates them which bars them from contributing towards the realisations of broader women's rights. As a result of life long stigma and discrimination, LBQ women continuously battle with mental health challenges throughout their adult lives, which ultimately leads most of them into depression, trauma, chronic stress and in extreme circumstances to misuse of alcohol and other substances, suicidal ideation, among others. These factors affect intimate relationships of LBQ women, with some becoming violent to their intimate partners.

Political participation of LBQ women in governance remains a challenge, considering the existence of discriminatory legislation that contains provisions that pathologise LBQ identities hence limiting their aspirations to compete for political offices. The existing legal framework also impedes the ability of LBQ women in Uganda to actualise their safety, security and protection since the legal regime outrightly uses derogatory terminology and in most cases, does not acknowledge LBQ identities. FARUG should work with other stakeholders to develop and implement programs geared towards enhancing access to education, addressing mental health issues, enhancing political participation, developing guidelines and resources communicating inclusive ways of working with LBQ women in Uganda, and also carry out more research on issues affecting LBQ women in Uganda. The above findings, therefore, conform to the objectives upon which this research was commissioned.

The following recommendations are aimed at providing insight to Freedom and Roam Uganda (FARUG), other LBQ focused organisations and the government on putting in place measures to enhance the lives of LBQ women in Uganda and ultimately lead to positive life experiences.

5. Recommendations

1) To Freedom and Roam Uganda

A. More LBQ centred research

FARUG should embark on additional research geared towards issues related to specific aspects of LBQ women's experiences in Uganda to mitigate the existing data gaps on thematic areas relating to LBQ women in Uganda. The conducting of thematic research is based on the hypothesis that: evidence-based data has the potential to facilitate the design of human centred programs which can create a positive impact in the lives of LBQ women in Uganda

B. Development of contextualised programs

There is a need to develop human-centred programs aiming at providing contextualised support services to the cross-cutting areas identified in the research, such as Intimate Partner Violence, Mental Health, and support programs for LBQ parents. These programs should consider the intersectional factors amongst such as socio-economic class, to ensure inclusion of all women including those living in rural areas.

C. Redesigning of Economic Empowerment Support

FARUG should rethink and replace the current economic model to focus on competitive enterprise support solutions, which includes the provision of start-up interest tied grants to outstanding business proposals. LBQ women with existing businesses should also be empowered with additional professional development training to facilitate the achievement of their maximum potentials.

D. Enhancing Access to Higher Education

As a way of facilitating access to employment, there is a need to support LBQ women to access higher education opportunities to enable them to align their skills to in-demand education qualifications in the current job market. Additionally, FARUG should also identify the professional development needs of employed LBQ women and design interventions to facilitate their career growth.

E. Political Participation Programs

FARUG should partner with relevant organisations to build the leadership capacity of LBQ women to enable them to participate in the existing political systems in their respective communities at local government and national levels. The beneficiaries of these programs will not only become ambassadors of hope for the LBQ community but also key players in advocating for LBQ inclusive policies in Uganda.

F. Family Support Systems

FARUG should develop and facilitate social and structural interventions, and efforts to strengthen positive family relationships needed to foster an environment that enables well-being among LBQ women in Uganda. Family support programs should target parents and immediate relatives who, according to the majority of the research participants, are the key perpetrators of violence against LBQ women in Uganda.

2) To Government

G. Adoption of a comprehensive curriculum on Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights for training government health workers.

The government should facilitate the development and adoption of a comprehensive curriculum which recognises the unique health needs of LBQ women in Uganda. An inclusive curriculum will not only improve patient handling but might also increase the demand for services from government-aided health centres.

H. More training of police officers on handling LBQ women detainees

Whereas the Uganda Police has partnered with some organisations to build awareness of its officers on responding to cases related to sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, there is a need for development and implementation of comprehensive guidelines for police and prison officers on the treatment of LBQ women under incarceration.

3) To Academic Institutions

a) Implement Comprehensive Anti-Bullying/ Harassment Policies

One major step that schools can take to affirm their support for all students' safety is the implementation and enforcement of anti-bullying or harassment policies. These policies can promote a better school climate for LBQ students when sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression are explicitly addressed. School officials may not recognize that anti-LGBT harassment and bullying are unacceptable behaviors, or may not respond to the problem due to prejudice or community pressure without the cover of a specific policy.

Comprehensive policies that specifically enumerate sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression as protected characteristics removes all doubt that LGBT students, and all students, are protected from anti-LGBT bullying and harassment in school. Schools should therefore make their policies and practices LBQ-inclusive through sports, dress code requirements, equal participation in school events, among others. Homophobia, transphobia and heterosexism

can manifest themselves in school policies and practices, creating an unwelcoming, unsafe and hostile environment for LGBT students. Policies and practices that exclude LBQ students, or force them to conform to what is considered by others as “normal” can alienate LBQ students from the school community.

c) Learn more about creating inclusive school environments

Schools should utilise existing online resources and literature to educate teachers and school staff on better ways for creating inclusive learning environments for LBQ students. GLSEN has published comprehensive material on how schools can be allies and provide non-discriminatory spaces that recognise and are inclusive to diverse SOGIE. , Furthermore, schools should reach out to organisations working towards the realisation of the rights of LBQ persons in Uganda.

4) Parents

Recognising that most of the stigma and discrimination of LBQ women stems from their families. FARUG should engage with parents of LBQ persons in Uganda and develop responsive interventions to ensure the former's security and safety. “My Child Is Different”, a baseline study by Chapter Four Uganda found that while a majority of parents react with anger, denial and disbelief when their children come out, or are ‘outed’ as LGBTI, parents and other family members also expressed love and concern for their children and a need to learn more about what their LGBTI children. The research provides for comprehensive recommendations to parents and other stakeholders, on which FARUG can develop programs to benefit LBQ women in Uganda and their families.

5) Health Facilities

Creating an affirming and inclusive environment for LBQ women requires a combination of understanding them as a population, while treating each LBQ person as a unique individual. Finding this balance may seem complicated at first, but in fact it is no different than the procedures followed with any patient. Effectively serving LBQ women patients requires understanding the cultural context of their lives, and to modify our procedures, behavior, and language to be inclusive, non-judgmental, and helpful at all times.

GLSEN is the leading national education organization focused on ensuring safe and affirming schools for all students. GLSEN envisions a world in which every child learns to respect and accept all people, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. See for example GLSEN ‘The Safe Space Kit: Guide to Being an Ally to LGBT Students’ (2016)

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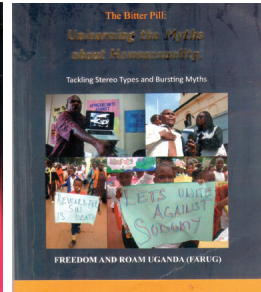
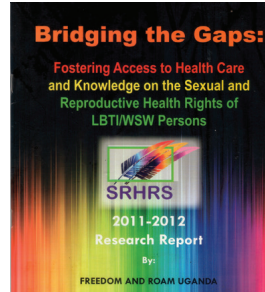
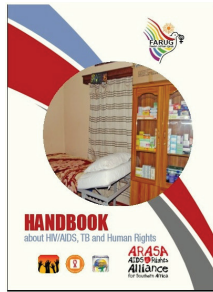
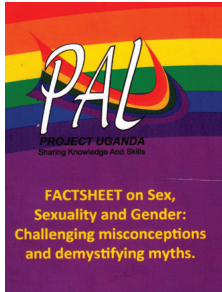
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We are grateful to



for the financial and Technical support



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