

Not dancing to their music

**The effects of homophobia,
biphobia, and transphobia
on the lives of LGBTQ people
in Nigeria**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

"I met a guy on social media and we decided to hook up at his place. On getting to his place about 3 other guys showed up and threatened to take me to the police station... I was beaten and all the cash with me was collected by [these] hoodlums. Thereafter I was raped"

- GAY MAN LIVING IN NIGERIA

"Mum's threats after she found out about my sexuality... 'if i found out you are a lesbian i will kill you myself'"

- LESBIAN LIVING OUTSIDE OF NIGERIA

"I have been harassed by the police...They threatened taking me to their station and giving me a reason not to smile (the words one of the officers used)"

- GAY MAN LIVING IN NIGERIA

"I was seriously harassed by a police officer...I was locked up in cells for more than 2 weeks and I was denied access to a lawyer, phone calls and my human rights was being violated"

- TRANSGENDER MAN LIVING IN NIGERIA

BACKGROUND

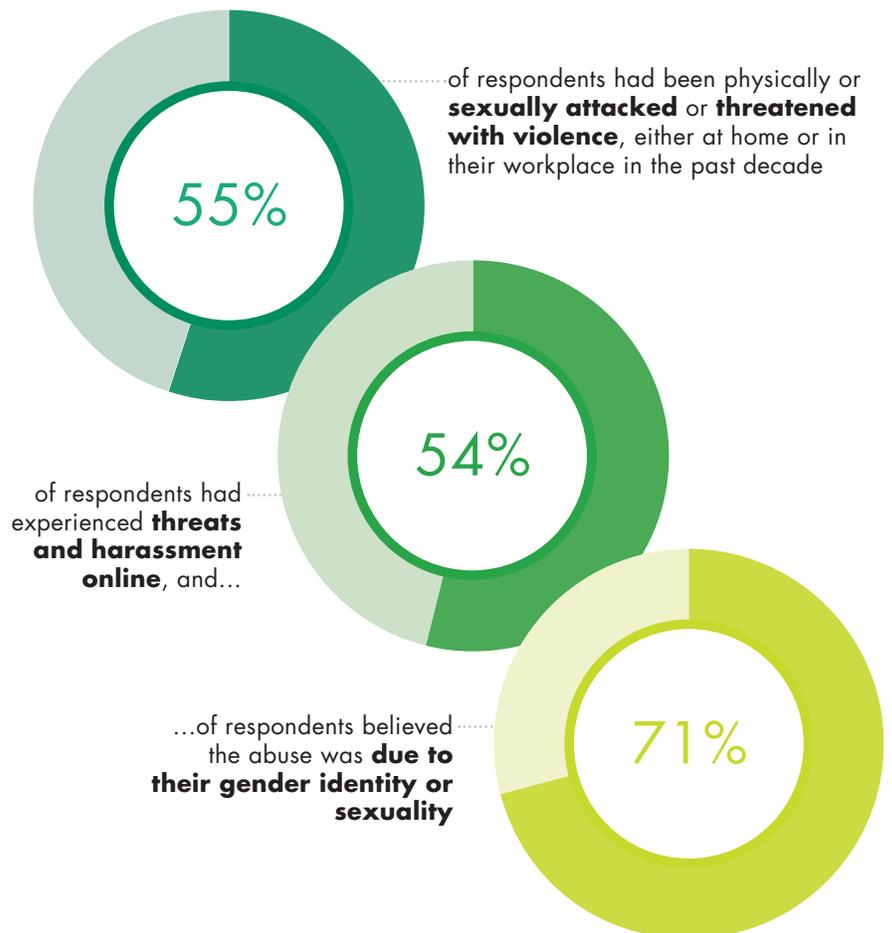
Since 2014 and the introduction of the Same Sex Marriage Prohibition Act (SSMPA), life for LGBTQ Nigerians has become increasingly difficult and unsafe. Pre-existing fiscal and organisational problems with law enforcement, education, healthcare, and the media have created an environment where LGBTQ Nigerians are at risk if they are out about their sexuality or gender identity; limiting what healthcare, work, and educational opportunities they can access; with scant legal protection if they need assistance.

A SNAPSHOT OF LGBTQ LIFE IN NIGERIA

As a charity focused on supporting the rights, needs and well-being of LGBTQ Nigerians we ran an online survey promoted via social media, and through charities, NGOs and other LGBTQ organisations. 446 LGBTQ Nigerians aged 18-65 (median age 27.40) answered questions covering six key areas of their lives - physical and mental health; public perceptions and reactions to gender identities and sexualities; harassment and violence; daily life experiences; law and legal issues; and demographic information.

WHAT LGBTQ NIGERIANS TOLD US

Our survey suggests the SSMPA, cultural attitudes, and infrastructure in Nigeria create a situation where LGBTQ people are not safe to come out, where discrimination and human rights abuses are routine, and where isolation and stigmatisation is commonplace. This, in turn, has a knock on effect to mental health, causing more distress and reduced life satisfaction, with few LGBTQ friendly services available for support. In short, wherever an LGBTQ person may turn for help it is likely they may be met at best with a refusal, but at worst with abuse or sanction. In the words of one respondent "the present Nigerian situation is designed to kill gay people."



"we just need good legal representation for lgbt people in Nigeria, right now, we don't know who to contact when issues arise, [PrEP]... and anti retroviral drugs are difficult to get, you can't tell your doctor about your sexuality so getting the right care is difficult, plus stigmatization of gay and hiv positive people"

- GAY MAN LIVING IN NIGERIA

"I've had to deal with physical, emotional and verbal abuse from family. So bad I've incurred wounds and scars from it... Depression has become the order of the day and suicide sometimes seems like the best way out"

- QUEER PERSON LIVING IN NIGERIA

"I'm straight acting so people don't even suspect.... That's a whole lot of hard work, it's like fighting [war] u have no idea of"

- BISEXUAL MAN LIVING IN NIGERIA

"I live in fear everyday scared what my dad and siblings would do if they got to find out. Dunno if I could survive it"

- GAY MAN LIVING IN NIGERIA



12% of respondents were told by doctors or nurses that their **health problems were their own fault**, and 12% reported experiencing **verbal abuse** from doctors or nurses



The top reasons given for **not reporting abuse** were shame (14%), fear of reprisal (12%), and a belief that no one would help (6%)



Was the perpetrator (abuser) alone, or was there more than one perpetrator?

- More than one (64.6%)
- Alone (20.8%)
- Unsure (14.6%)



Where did you experience discrimination or abuse?

- A cafe, bar, or club (25.5%)
- School or college (23.8%)
- Work (21.7%)
- When seeking housing (15.7%)
- Jobseeking (13.3%)

We asked people about how 'out' they were (how able they felt to be open about their sexuality to others). Predicatably, given the situation in Nigeria, we found the more out about their sexuality and/or gender identity someone is, the more negative Homo/Bi/Transphobic reactions they encountered. Which, in turn, increases their likelihood to both internalise self-hatred and become mentally distressed.

FUTURE PLANS FOR THE BISI ALIMI FOUNDATION

Based on the findings from our survey, the Foundation is in a far stronger position to offer bespoke training, outreach and advocacy. This will include:

- Lobbying for a change in the SSMPA.
- Media training for journalists to support them in more accurate, fair and representative coverage of LGBTQ issues in Nigeria.
- Developing online content addressing the specific mental and physical health needs and rights-based information for LGBTQ Nigerians (including noting ways new technologies and social media can best deliver these resources). This includes interventions to build and deliver LGBTQ Nigerian-focused psychological support packages to increase personal resilience.
- Engaging businesses in developing culturally sensitive equality and inclusion based training in Nigeria that will empower them to address issues of gender identity and sexual orientation in the workplace.
- Supporting NGOs, charities, law makers, educators, policy makers, politicians and healthcare providers to work in positive, supportive and non-discriminatory ways with diverse LGBTQ communities.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP?

- One of the key findings from the research was how isolated, lonely and afraid respondents felt. Stereotypes, stigma and legal sanctions all serve to ensure sexuality is hidden and secretive. Fragmented and disenfranchised health workers, and a media and third sector working within a repressive legal situation also serve to stop people speaking out about sexuality in positive ways. A key step all of us can take is to mobilise, to connect together - on or offline - and to share stories of all aspects of diverse sexualities and genders.
- Support, mentor and speak up for existing services, rewarding good practice in education, the workplace, healthcare or the law. Who do you know who is doing a great job - what help do they need and how can you give it?
- Create safe spaces on or offline for LGBTQ people to connect, network, and feel stronger together. While also helping activists, charities, NGOs, journalists and health providers find each other to share good practice.
- Support big, medium and small-scale businesses to create safe and healthy spaces for LGBTQ staff to come out. Can you enable companies to set up and run equality and diversity units?
- Challenge legal inequalities and other barriers within healthcare, education, and workplaces. Who is currently being left out? What is keeping them outside services and opportunities that are theirs to access by right? How can you help existing organisations to welcome LGBTQ people and create more harmonious communities?
- You can also assist with the steps we are taking, as outlined above. Please contact the Bisi Alimi Foundation for updates on events, activities and calls for donations at bisialimifoundation.org

A full copy of this report can be found at [**bisialimifoundation.org/reports**](http://bisialimifoundation.org/reports)