

Baseline Research on Transgender Population

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(CRTA)
2010



Background

- A worldwide project started in April 2009 called the Transgender Murder Monitoring Project (TMM) reported that 180 killings occurred between November 2009 and November 2010.
- Since January 2008, a total of 487 transgender people have been reported murdered.
- The majority happened in Brazil (91), Guatemala (15), Mexico (14), and the USA (14). (*Source: Transgender Murder Monitoring Project, 2010*)

Background

- The data shared is believed to be only a fraction of the real figure for most countries, data on murdered transgender people are not systematically produced and it is therefore difficult to estimate accurately. T
- he documentation shows violations of human rights committed against transgendered people on a global scale, but there is also a need for in-depth research of various other aspects of transgender life in the region.

Background

- Due to a lack of data disaggregated by gender identity, information is lacking for transgender individuals. In Belize, data does not exist for the transgender population because there are inadequate data fields in the system of the Ministry of Health. Transgender health and human rights issues are not even on the Belize agenda, a situation that needs to change in the immediate future.

Methods

- Transgender persons
- 17 to 45 years old
- 6 districts
- Total of 41 participants

Findings

What is Transgender??

- The data collected found that 31.7% thought that a transgender person is about effeminacy while 53.7% believed that it refers to a person who feels like they are the wrong sex.
- Points to the role of education geared towards self-empowerment.

What is Transgender???

- Transgender is an umbrella term used to describe people whose gender identity (sense of themselves as male or female) or gender expression differs from that usually associated with their birth sex. Many transgender people live part-time or full-time as members of the other gender. Broadly speaking, anyone whose identity, appearance, or behavior falls outside of conventional gender norms can be described as transgender. However, not everyone whose appearance or behavior is gender-atypical will identify as a transgender person. (APA)

Legal Protection???

- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 1, establishes that all human beings are created equal in dignity and rights,
- yet the data shows that 78% of those interviewed believe that the laws do not protect the transgender population in Belize
- incidences of violence, abuse or discrimination would go unnoticed in the legal system because the system may fail to see the connections that exist between the crimes and the victims' sexual identity.

Legal protection????

- individuals shared how they were laughed out of the police station or feared humiliation.
- It is due to these conditions that the trans population does not trust the legal system to be responsive to its concerns if they make a complaint.
- non-existent health services further undermines confidence and isolates the population from much-needed services.

Q10. What's your current personal status?

Response	# interviewed	% interviewed
Acceptance	37	90.2%
Denial	2	4.9%
Other	2	4.9%
Total	41	

Social Isolation of Trans

- Acceptance is not synonymous with confidence, nor does it mean access to employment, education or family acceptance.
- The positive psychological impact of personal acceptance translates self-expression and a healthy general well being, but the struggle for basic rights enforcement can be met with intimidation and verbal attacks.
- Amongst trans individuals, there is often a tradeoff balancing rights, personal well being and social isolation.

Q13. Do you have a supportive person in your life?

Response	# interviewed	% interviewed
Yes	31	75.6%
No	10	24.4%
Total	41	

- A critical thing for a trans person is being able to access emotional support in times of great stress, which makes it concerning that close to a quarter of interviewed persons felt that they did not have support in their lives.

- *I don't befriend males that dress up in woman clothing because society had made them look weak or they get bashed on.*

- There is no trust in the police system in Belize.
- Many of the study participants have experienced being both verbally and physically assaulted.
- Some also told stories about having bottles thrown at them and being choked in the streets; and they never find the help of the police to file a complaint because, as one of the transgender individual said of her experience in 2000 in the district of Corozal

Police don't care! They would continue the bashing on us. So we don't look for help!

I am a medical office assistant with the certification and I went to all the clinics, hospitals and private ones and none would give a chance to work because my hair was long, my eyebrows were plucked, my mannerisms are not in accordance to their standard or work ethic...”
(employment issues)

- Everything done here in Belize by the trans community is done in hiding, especially in Belize City, because of fear that has been instilled by the society as a whole.
- There is a glimmer of peace in the Corozal area near the Mexican border because the community of Chetumal, Mexico is generally considered to be more tolerant to transgender persons.

Q23. Would you like to organize yourself into a community group to lobby for medical services?

Response	# interviewed	% interviewed
Yes	30	73.1%
No	6	14.6%
Don't know/ Maybe	3	7.3%
Other	2	4.9%
Total	41	

Q24. What are you prepared to do to reduce transphobia and discrimination?

Response	# interviewed	% interviewed
Go to talk shows	9	21.9%
Organize pageants	1	2.4%
Nothing	1	2.4%
Make presentations	7	17.1%
Do outreach	1	2.4%
Other	17	41.4%
No answer	5	12.2%
Total	41	

- Although transphobia and discrimination are considered major societal issues, when presented with the hypothetical opportunity to actively work against them, 41.4% of respondents did not wish to participate.
- This implies that public exposure may not be a comfortable option for them.
- However, 21.9% stated that they would go to talk shows in order to reduce transphobia and discrimination while 17.1% suggested making educational presentations as an option.

- There are no programs that address the issues of the trans community in Belize in place at the governmental level. Concerns regarding health, education, work, immigration, police and society remain neglected.
- A lack of visibility, and always being overlooked, causes the trans community to feel fear in regards to daily activities such as riding public transportation.
- Showing who they truly are is not an option for them because they fear being the targets of stigma and discrimination. One of the female to male's stated,

Recommendations

- More complete health information that realistically caters to the needs of the trans community and demonstrates a concern for their wellbeing needs to be in place in the public and private sector. This should be mandated by the government as a human rights-based approach as part of the National HIV / AIDS response.

- Furthermore, law enforcement agents such as police and immigration officers must receive correct information and appropriate training in order to decrease enacted stigma in the form of discrimination towards members of the transgender and LGB communities.
- Enforcement agents need to start protecting and serving members of the trans community like they would any member of the society, because they are human beings and their human rights should be respected unequivocally.

- Members of this community should be allowed access to education regardless of gender identity (dress code, garments, physical appearance)
- Non-discrimination in access to employment
- Policies that protect transgender and LGB members of the community from physical harm or legal repercussions must include penalties for agents or staff from enforcement agencies and health care providers who violate the rights of trans individuals.