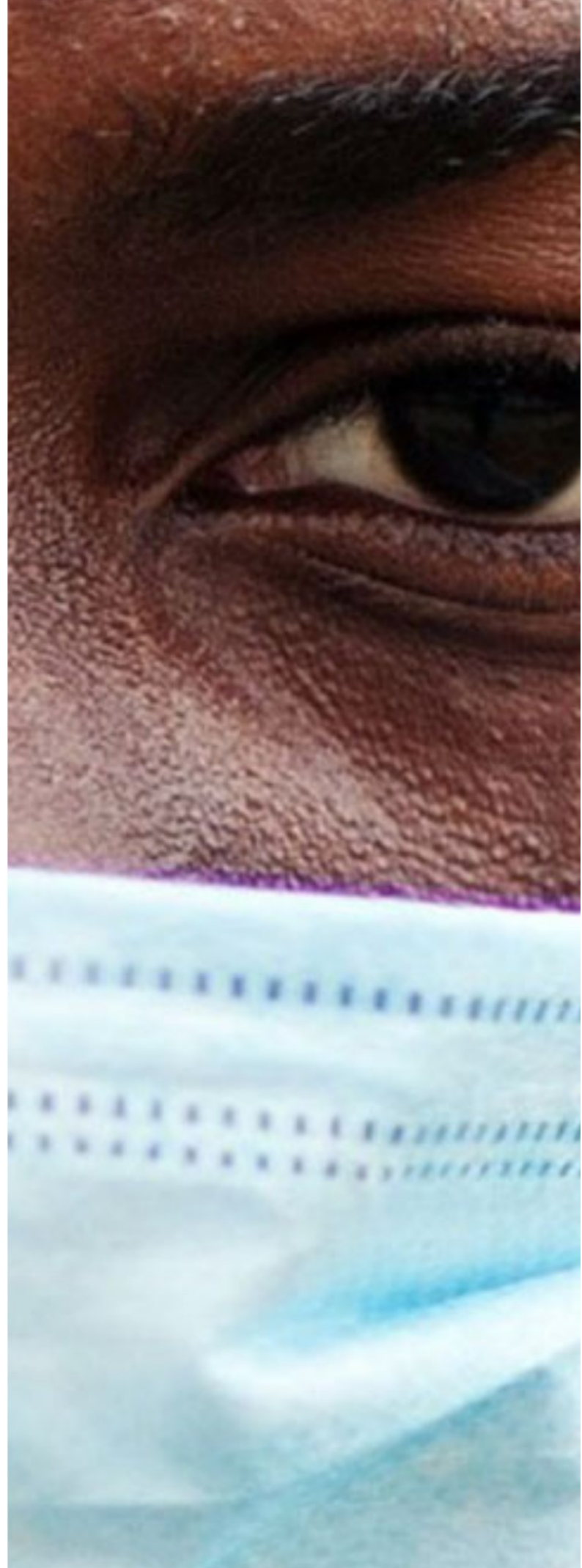


COMMUNITY VOICES IN THE COVID-19 ERA



A community research project by

GALZ
AN ASSOCIATION OF LGBT+ PEOPLE IN ZIMBABWE

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BACKGROUND

The Covid-19 pandemic which emerged in January 2019 severely impacted the lives of many people. More so, it magnified the challenges being encountered by the LGBTIQ community. 'Community Voices', is a project that is aimed at exploring concerns of LGBTIQ people during the pandemic. Community Voices is qualitative in nature, in exist in the form of talk therapy, interviews and group discussions in informal settings, with respondents unraveling their problems exacerbated

by Covid-19. Community Voices is more than having a conversation about personal life during Covid-19. It is more about highlighting the LGBTIQ's main concerns in health service delivery, family, friends and work relations. It is about reflecting on the opportunities and prospects revealed by the Pandemic.

The Community Voices inception research is therefore meant to unpack what the community voices have been raising at a grassroots level.

INTRODUCTION

This qualitative research explores the experiences of LGBTIQ people in Harare. The study took place between May and June 2021. A GALZ research officer and a research assistant went into the field in high density residential areas (Epworth, Norton, Hatcliffe, Mabvuku and Chitungwiza) to explore realities of

LGBTIQ people during the pandemic. The research was conducted through door-to-door visits. Interviews and focus groups were conducted in secluded areas for the respondents' privacy and safety. Below are the experiences captured and compiled.

TARGETED LOCATIONS

- Norton
- Kuwadzana
- Epworth
- Chitungwiza
- Hatcliffe
- Mabvuku

* NB: Target audience was 30 people but ended up reaching 54 due to an unexpected increasing in audience in all locations.

BREAKDOWN OF GROUPS ENGAGED

- Lesbians-5
- Trans women– 25
- Trans men– 6
- Gays– 9
- Bisexual women– 2
- Bisexual men– 6
- Intersex– 1

* NB: Intersex group had a low attendance due to several reasons such as fear of discrimination or disclosure.

DISTRIBUTED RESOURCES

Male condoms– 7860

Female Condoms– 300

Lubricants– 550

Sanitizers– 55 Bottles

Envelopes– 100

CONCERNS RAISED BY COMMUNITIES

MENTAL DISTRESS

Community members articulated that in the covid-19 phase they had mental health issues ranging from depression, loneliness, suicidal thoughts, isolation, boredom and

confusion. Paranoia of particular mention was noted. Community members indicated how Covid-19 fatality statistics were astonishing, pushing them into a panic mode.

LOCKDOWN

Due to Covid-19 imposed lockdowns, many LGBTIQ persons explained how they had their movements restricted forcing them to remain confined in the same spaces. For those that were quarantined as a result of contracting COVID-19, they expressed feel-

ings of claustrophobia and despair. Additionally, one major concern that stood out from the rest was the fear of not being able to pay bills due to closure of workplaces and the economic activities.

VIOLENCE

Violence is a topical issue that was raised in a majority of the discussions. Violence between partners was highlighted as a result of being in close proximity over a long period of

time as prompted by the lockdowns. Participants expressed their concern with how violence was at an all-time high in their households.

DRUG SHORTAGE

LGBTQ community members on medication such as ART (Anti-retroviral) and PreP (pre-exposure prophylaxis) expressed distress over running out of crucial drugs and not being able to get refills due to travel restrictions

enforced by army and police. They also cited a lack of money for medicine that required currency. Due to drug stock-outs, some members reported turning to herbs and traditional medicines which were not medically approved.

DISCRIMINATION

In the event that members contracted Covid-19, they expressed disgruntlement towards facing discrimination and stigma. Members reported feeling isolated from families and friends due to fear that they might fall victim

to the virus. The novelty of the virus shows how the individuals would especially experience differential treatment once they come into contact with those infected or once they themselves were infected.

WATER SHORTAGE

Community members reported inaccessibility to clean water, as gatherings were banned including at community boreholes and water taps. They reported resorting to rivers, dams

and fountains for water to cook, bath and drink. Some explained how shortage of water presented challenges such as poor health and sanitation.

LOSS OF LIFE

One of the devastating impacts of COVID-19 is the result in loss of lives. Community members have reported their loved ones losing life due to chronic illnesses and diseases.

ECONOMIC IMPACT

In the wake of the Corona virus, many businesses had to close to combat the spread of the virus or to downsize due to reduction of revenues. Some members in the community were affected by the downsizing causing failure to meet expenses such as rentals, food, and school fees and internet broadband to connect with the rest of the

world. Regular income generation avenues such as bartending, currency trading, street vending, hair styling were also heavily impacted leaving little options for the community who are largely dependent on these sources of income. Little or no cross border activities were also taking place as borders remained closed.

SPIKE IN DISEASES

There has been a spike in cases of infections, new STIs were recorded and there was resurgence of anal warts, new HIV cases, default in ART and PrEP medication and experiences

of unprotected sex among partners. Participants expressed concern over the risk of contracting STIs from partners.

VACCINATION ROLLOUT

Despite the rollout of COVID-19 there was hesitancy in taking vaccination. There is fear and misinformation being peddled by social media such that community members have

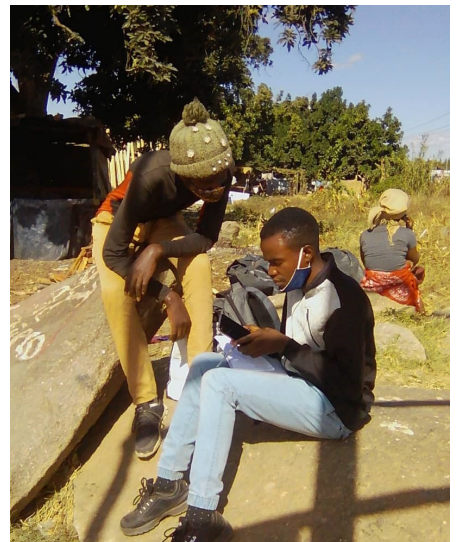
become hesitant to take part in the vaccination efforts by the Government. Participants have also cited conspiracy theories around LGBTIQ being blamed for bringing Covid-19.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- A safe house must be put in place to assist members who are at loggerheads with parents and relatives about their status.
- Employing more peers to mobilize people and raise awareness of clinical services offered at GALZ seeing how some members are not aware of such information.
- An institutional repository to be established to help share resources with the LGBTQ community online.

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS





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GALZ is a membership-based organization providing services to the Zimbabwean LGBTI community in areas such as counselling, health, legal assistance and the provision of information on LGBTI issues.

Whether you are lesbian, gay, transgender, bisexual or intersex (LGBTI) and living in Zimbabwe, you are part of our community and welcome to join our organization.

Join us as we strive to promote a Human Rights culture based on tolerance and respect for all regardless of race, color, creed, geographical position, sex, gender, gender identity, gender expression or sexual

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