

Is game-changing advocacy for the rights and wellbeing of lesbian women and girls just around the corner?

Introduction

Rights, Evidence, Action — amplifying youth voices (REA) is an AmplifyChange - funded multi-country programme partnership between RNW Media (Love Matters) and CHOICE for Youth and Sexuality. REA advocates for the rights and wellbeing of young people including young LGBT persons. REA is implemented in four countries: Nigeria, Uganda, Kenya and India.

Methods

In 2018, REA conducted a study on young people's knowledge and attitudes towards LGBT persons in Kenya and India. We had an online survey, using an online convenience sample, and focus group discussions. Doubling our target, we had 3,291 respondents for the quantitative survey, followed by qualitative research involving 63 participants. Participants were Love Matters' online platform users 18- 30 years old. Of these users, 66% were in the 18-24 yr bracket and 75% in the 25- 30 yr old bracket and self-identified as women.

Results

The study's findings have potentially game-changing implications for promoting the rights and wellbeing of young lesbians, and possibly of young queer and trans* women and girls. First, about 30% of participants in each country thought straight sex can 'cure' a lesbian woman. Second, in Kenya, participants defined LGBT couples using heterosexual frameworks: there is a 'woman' and a 'man'. Third, in both countries a large majority said LGBT persons should have the same rights as heterosexuals, and a smaller majority said laws should protect against discrimination. Fourth, most heterosexual participants said they would support family or friends to come out but had few suggestions on how to do it.

Advocacy Impact

The findings suggest 'good will' is greater than one might expect. That provides scope to support young people to contribute to positive social change for young lesbians. Support could mean deepening understanding of lesbian identity and life, beyond awareness-raising. The findings show existing confusion about gender and gender roles, what it means to be a lesbian, and what lesbian relationships are like. The support could also mean advocacy with young people may be 'preaching to the choir', and messaging using love, sex and relationships could be more effective than human rights framing. REA will be piloting different messaging approaches. We hope follow-up research will reveal clear pathways for action.

