LESGIAN, GAY, BI, TRANS, INTERSEX AND QUEER (LGBTIQ+) WOMEN

Who are LGBTIQ+ women?

Lesbians are women who are emotionally, physically or romantically attracted to other women.

Some women who are attracted to women also use the term “gay” to refer to themselves.

Bisexual or bi women are attracted to people of more than one gender.

Transgender or trans women, are women whose gender differs from the sex they were assigned at birth.

Intersex women, or women with intersex variations, have sex characteristics that do not fit typical binary notions of female bodies.

Queer women typically feel they do not conform to a given society’s gender, economic, social, cultural, and political norms based on their sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression.

The plus sign (+) represents women who identify with other terms to describe their sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and/or sex characteristics.

The Basics

LGBTIQ+ women often face combined forms of violence, stigma and discrimination that are similar to and distinct from those facing women who are not LGBTIQ+. They may be targeted both as women as well as on the basis of their sexual orientation, gender identity, expression or sex characteristics. LGBTIQ+ women will often also face discrimination and exclusion based on other characteristics, such as age, skin colour, religion, ethnicity, nationality, migration status and disability.

The fight for the human rights of LGBTIQ+ women is an integral part of the fight for women's rights. The feminist goals of justice and gender equality can only be achieved if all women – including LGBTIQ+ women – are included, as part of a broad, intersectional feminist human rights movement.

Criminalization

Consensual same sex relations between women are still criminalised in at least 42 countries around the world, resulting in the arbitrary arrest and detention of lesbian, bi and queer women. Trans women are criminalised and face arbitrary arrest and prosecution in a number of countries worldwide on the basis of various laws including those criminalizing consensual same-sex relations, “cross dressing”, sex work and other, often vague legislation.
Violence, killings, torture and ill-treatment

Despite the lack of investment in the collection of data on violence against and killings of LGBTIQ+ women, and significant underreporting, the available evidence is alarming. Violence is commonplace in public and private spaces, health settings, places of detention, humanitarian emergencies, conflict zones and other settings.

Violence perpetrated by government entities includes physical and sexual violence, harassment, torture, and inhumane and degrading treatment that can include public flogging. Violence is also widespread within families and local communities.

Numerous reports have documented how lesbians are targeted for so-called “corrective rape”. Lesbians also face other forms of physical, verbal and sexual violence as forms of punishment for being perceived to defy gender and sexual norms. In the UK, 21 percent of lesbians have experienced a hate crime based on their sexual orientation. Lesbian and bisexual women also face high risks of forcible impregnation and acid attacks.

According to a study from the USA, almost half of bisexual women report having experienced rape, which is three times higher than other women. They are also twice as likely as heterosexual women to experience intimate partner violence. Seventy-five percent report having experienced other forms of sexual violence. Bisexual women in Japan, Malaysia, Pakistan and the Philippines also report that sexual and intra-family violence is a major concern.

Trans women are regularly subjected to forced or coerced sterilisation and other unwanted medical procedures as a requirement to access legal gender recognition. Trans women also face particularly high levels of violence and murder, with trans women of colour and sex workers being particularly at risk. This often remains grossly underreported due to misgendering. Close to half of the killings of lesbian, gay, bi and trans people documented by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights in 2013-2014, were of trans women.

Intersex women and girls are frequently subjected to medically unnecessary and non-consensual surgeries and medical procedures in their childhood which can cause severe, long-term physical and psychological suffering. Girls with intersex traits are also at risk of being killed, with documented cases of infanticide of intersex infants in East and Southern Africa and South Asia.

There is widespread impunity for crimes committed against LGBTIQ+ women. Re-victimisation by law enforcement is common, and access to justice is hindered by harmful stereotypes within the judiciary. LGBTIQ+ women also face exclusion and discriminatory attitudes when trying to access safe shelters and support for victims/survivors of violence.

Research from the USA shows that lesbian and bisexual girls face frequent threats of sexual violence from their classmates. Trans and gender non-conforming students also face physical or verbal abuse when accessing bathrooms and are often barred from participating in gender-segregated class activities and sports.

LGBTIQ+ women face high levels of hate speech and incitement to violence, both as women and based on their sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics. It is perpetuated both offline and online by members of the public as well as political, religious, and other community leaders. Few countries have taken measures to prevent and tackle this phenomenon, which fuels violence and discrimination against LGBTIQ+ women and girls, and in particular women human rights defenders.
Discrimination

LGBTIQ+ women face high levels of discrimination in education, employment, housing, healthcare, sports and in access to justice. Still, only one third of the world’s countries protect people from discrimination based on sexual orientation, only a tenth of the world’s countries protect trans people from discrimination based on gender identity and less than one in twenty protect intersex people from discrimination.

Discrimination and harassment at the workplace are common for LGBTIQ+ women. A study from Indonesia revealed that more than 80 percent of respondents would not be comfortable with a lesbian boss or colleague. Sixty-six percent of lesbian and bi women surveyed in Europe were not comfortable to disclose their sexual orientation at work. Studies similarly suggest that trans women face high levels of discrimination and exclusion in the workplace, with significantly lower earnings and high unemployment.

Finding a place to live can also be very challenging, due to discriminatory attitudes. A study conducted in Eastern Africa shows that evictions or denial of accommodation was common based on women’s perceived sexual orientation, gender identity or expression. In Europe, a survey conducted by the Fundamental Rights Agency indicates that 32 percent of lesbian and bisexual women surveyed, stated that they had difficulty in finding housing because of discrimination. A study from Nepal shows that trans women are at heightened risk of homelessness. LGBTIQ+ youth are especially affected by homelessness owing to economic dependence and reliance on family and community networks that are often hostile.

LGBTIQ+ women face discrimination, stigma and bias when accessing healthcare. As a result of the discrimination, stigma, violence, and bias that they face, lesbians are less likely to have access to preventive cancer treatment, and trans women are more at risk of HIV transmission, poor mental health, and suicide, and are less likely to have access to medical insurance. A study conducted in the USA shows that 24 percent of trans women reported being denied equal treatment by doctors or hospitals. Intersex women receive poor quality healthcare, face institutional violence, and lack access to their medical records. In some instances, medical insurance does not cover medical needs that may be life saving for intersex and trans women.

Lesbian, gay, bi, trans and queer women are regularly subjected to unethical so-called “conversion therapies” that seek to forcibly alter their sexual orientation and gender identity or expression, causing great physical and psychological harm. A worldwide study conducted in 2019 showed that conversion therapy was prevalent with 28 percent of respondents in Africa, 26 percent in Asia and 20 percent in Latin America and the Caribbean terming it very common.

Trans women and girls face barriers at school, amateur and elite levels of sports. This includes restrictive sport regulations, rules and practices requiring medical or other procedures to participate, bullying and restrictions on use of sex-segregated bathrooms or changing rooms. Women with intersex traits have been disqualified and humiliated due to discriminatory eligibility regulations introduced by sport governing bodies, which have been used to target women, and particularly women of colour, who are perceived not to conform to certain gender stereotypes of femininity.

Only 1/10 countries protect trans people from discrimination

Education settings are often hostile and discriminatory towards LGBTIQ+ girls. Many schools have discriminatory policies, regulations, curricula and teaching materials. A European Union study found that 80 percent of school-age children heard negative comments or saw negative conduct directed at schoolmates perceived as lesbian, gay, bisexual or trans. A South Korean study highlighted that teachers and students often bully students perceived not to be heterosexual. In addition to experiencing bullying and harassment, intersex students undergoing repeated surgeries or medical treatments can end up missing or dropping out of school because of long recovery processes. As a result, LGBTIQ+ students often have lower academic achievement rates or leave school with fewer qualifications, which in turn, negatively influences their employment prospects.
TAKE ACTION!

1. Educate yourself on the experiences of LGBTIQ+ women and girls, their specific issues, and concerns.
2. Make sure you and those around you have zero tolerance for gender stereotypes and stigma about LGBTIQ+ women and women more generally.
4. Respect the privacy of others and do not make assumptions about their sexual orientation, gender identity or expression and sex characteristics.
5. Share our online and social media content to spread the word among your friends and social networks.
6. Celebrate and affirm LGBTIQ+ women in your community and support local LGBTIQ+ women’s organizations.

GOVERNMENTS SHOULD:

1. Adopt measures that aim at protecting all women, irrespective of sexual orientation, gender identity and sex characteristics, from violence and discrimination.
2. Investigate, prosecute and provide remedy for acts of violence and discrimination against LGBTIQ+ women and those who defend their rights, and hold perpetrators accountable.
3. Ensure LGBTIQ+ women survivors of violence have access to inclusive and non-discriminatory shelters and support.
4. Repeal laws that criminalize consensual same sex conduct, laws that criminalise trans women, and other laws used to arrest, punish, detain, harass or discriminate women, and people more generally, including based on their sexual orientation and gender identity or expression.
5. Prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity or expression and sex characteristics and adopt anti-discrimination policies that are inclusive of LGBTIQ+ women, including in education, health, employment, housing, and public services.
6. Train law enforcement and judicial officials on how to treat LGBTIQ+ women with dignity and respect, how to provide them with effective protection and access to remedy, and how to combat gender stereotypes and bias.
7. Carry out public education campaigns to combat the root causes of violence and discrimination against LGBTIQ+ women, including negative and harmful gender norms and stereotypes.
8. Enact legislation and policies that address hate speech and hate crimes based on sexual orientation, gender identity and sex characteristics.
9. Ensure that everyone – including trans women – can access legal recognition of their gender identity based on self-identification and through a simple administrative procedure without abusive preconditions such as medical certification, diagnosis, treatment, surgery or divorce.
10. Ensure that intersex people – including intersex women – have access to facilitated procedures to amend sex and/or gender markers on official documents based on self-determination, without abusive requirements.
11 Sensitize and educate healthcare providers on the specific health needs of LGBTIQ+ women and ensure that LGBTIQ+ women have access to safe, non-discriminatory health services that address their specific concerns including their sexual reproductive health and rights.

12 Provide comprehensive gender and sexuality education based on human rights that is inclusive of LGBTIQ+ women.

13 Prohibit medically unnecessary surgery and procedures on the sex characteristics of intersex children, including girls with intersex variations, protect their physical integrity and respect their autonomy.

14 Protect and promote LGBTIQ+ women’s freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, and association.

15 Support organizations of LGBTIQ+ women and ensure they participate in decisions on legislation and policies that impact their rights, including on gender equality and the empowerment of women.

16 Support safe disaggregated data collection on the situation of LGBTIQ+ women including in relation to poverty, employment, housing, health, education, sports, immigration and access to public services.