



STRUGGLING AGAINST
HOMOPHOBIC

Violence & Hate Crimes

A report on the documentation and research conducted by EQUAL GROUND from April 2010-June 2011

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“Sumanawathi is still shocked and depressed about Chandra’s suicide and although she continues to cultivate and live with her husband she pines for Chandra.”

Case Study number 5: EQUAL GROUND (9th January 2011)

Introduction

Sri Lanka is one of the many countries where the extreme violation of women's rights is not yet an issue of the past. Still, women are viewed as less than their male counterparts both at state level and in civil society and especially within families. The inequality that women face, is truly overwhelming. The simple fact that men are more likely to inherit land over women can be considered a high level of discrimination. The laws, together with archaic cultural practises put women at risk in a number of ways including but not limited to; heightened poverty and harder life struggles, abuse - domestic and otherwise, different forms of violence and so on.

Sri Lanka today, remains one of the 80 plus countries in the world that criminalizes sexual relations between consenting adults of the same sex. The laws of the country remain discriminatory; promoting discrimination and stereotyping in society towards lesbians, gays, bi-sexual and transgender people.

In a country with high moral values and religious beliefs, Sri Lankan lesbian and bisexual women are faced with a dilemma. Lesbian and bisexual women are first marginalized as women in Sri Lankan society and further marginalised because of their sexual orientation. The double effect has great impact on the lives of lesbian and bisexual women in the country ranging from social exclusions to violence being imparted on these women.

This booklet will delve into the understanding of the violence facing lesbian and bisexual women living in Sri Lanka through creating a research report on the state of the lesbian and bisexual Sri Lankan woman faced with violence based on sexual orientation. It will express the presence of homophobia and its effects on the lives of the women.

It is aimed at deconstructing the misconceptions surrounding violence towards lesbian and bisexual women in Sri Lanka. It is important to understand the different forms of violence that women are faced with and to demonstrate how these forms of violence may differ. In doing so the linkage must be reiterated between the type of violence and the reason for this expression of violence. The reason behind the expression of violence helps one to effectively distinguish between them. Once such distinctions are made, it is then possible to find sufficient means to counter specific types and forms of violence.

The booklet will give an in-depth report on homophobia expressed towards lesbian and bisexual women in Sri Lanka. It will demonstrate that homophobia actually is a hate crime and should be recognized as such. Thus it will demonstrate that to eradicate violence against women in Sri Lanka, lesbian and bisexual women must be cited as a vulnerable group as well.

There is a dire need to afford and promote the human rights of all of Sri Lanka's women regardless of religious affiliation, social status, sexual orientation or ethnicity.

Sri Lanka on homosexuality

The way sexuality is perceived in Sri Lanka is highly influenced by the traditional beliefs and cultural practices of the country's people. There are a number of laws surrounding one's sexuality and the expression of sexuality. Heterosexuality between consenting adults is seen as the charmed/accepted sexual orientation and anything outside of that is considered unnatural and unacceptable and criminal.

Until 1995 Section 365 (A) of the Penal Code (1883) only held males guilty of homosexuality and criminal under the Acts of Gross Indecency. However, with its amendment in 1995, women were also criminalized under the Acts of Gross Indecency on the basis of same sex relations between consenting adults. Today homosexuals can face up to 2 years of rigorous imprisonment for sexual relations between consenting adults.

The law criminalizing homosexuality was taken from the British Penal Code. Like other countries colonized by the British Colonial system, Sri Lanka has amended the laws of the country after the end of colonial rule. However, Sri Lanka like many others in the same position, refuses to repeal Section 365(A) of its Penal Code which criminalizes homosexuality between consenting adults. There has been no recently recorded charge of homosexuality and subsequent imprisonment. However, the law is highly recognized by the state and citing homosexuality as an unacceptable criminal act, takes precedence over the homosexuals' ability to access many other constitutional rights. This is to say that the handing down of justice to a lesbian woman who was raped because of her sexual orientation would be less important than punishing her for homosexuality.

Within society, people's attitude towards homosexuality is mostly negative beginning in the families and extending to the communities. This negativity takes many forms and is expressed in different ways leading to very violent acts such as torture, forced psychiatric treatment, threats, blackmail and so on.

Sri Lanka and homosexual women's sexuality

There needs to be a focus on how lesbian and bisexual women are perceived and treated in the Sri Lankan context. Though both male and female homosexuals face challenges in Sri Lanka, lesbian and bisexual women are at a more vulnerable state as they are women in a country where women are not seen as equal to their male counterparts. The Sri Lankan woman is expected to form part of a marriage and become a 'good wife' and child-bearer. She is expected to be submissive and more often dependent. She is faced with a high level of pressure from the family and society to be a part of intimate heterosexual relationships and get married.

Not all of Sri Lanka's women wish to pursue this expected life that society has carved for them. Women, including lesbian and bisexual women challenge this ideal by trying to pursue independent lives. However, this idea of living meaningful independent fulfilling lives especially without a male partner can, and more often, have dreaded repercussions including mild to very extreme violence.

Often staff members at EQUAL GROUND are telephoned or called upon by lesbian and bisexual women who are frantic due to violence being inflicted on them based on their sexual orientation. As an organization working in Sri Lanka to eradicate homophobia in society and assisting the LGBT community with issues they face, the onus is usually on the organisation to act in some way or another to assist these women. This is often difficult for various reasons; these women are in so much fear of their lives and feel nothing or no one can help them. They feel powerless. These women fear that the threats made by their families may become reality (threat of imprisonment by the state upon reporting their acts of homosexuality, threats of violence etc.). These women feel extremely dependent on their families and may not want to lose this support; some also believe that their families are merely trying to help them off a wrongful path.

The difficulty arises for EQUAL GROUND where the true sense of the extent of violence against lesbian and bisexual women is unknown and the ability to classify the kind of violence. There also exists the fact that not all crimes and violence against lesbian and bisexual women can be reported because of the laws criminalizing homosexuality and because of the stigma and discrimination associated with being Lesbian or Bisexual.

EQUAL GROUND is also concerned that even in same sex relationships women's ability to negotiate is also hindered, and domestic violence between partners goes unpunished as lesbian and bisexual women are not able to report these acts. This is usually due to the fact that they fear being charged and imprisoned by the state, being ostracised by family and friends and being shunned by society. Over the past few years there have been reports of joint suicide where women have committed suicide with their same sex partner in order to escape the issues they face in their communities based on their sexualities. Forced marriages have been reported where lesbian and bisexual women are forced by their families to get married and expected to lead normal heterosexual lives. Women feel extremely helpless and more than anything fear that they will never be able to lead lives that are fulfilling and pleasing and a true reality for themselves.

The religious-cultural value and prestige awarded to the symbol of heterosexuality does not necessarily mean honour and prosperity for females as culture and religion have tended to proclaim. However, it does mean that female homosexuality and/or bisexuality is not acceptable within the Sri Lankan society. The symbolic meanings

and rituals attached to heterosexuality and marriage often results in the vulnerability of women, as they generate and aggravate tragic beliefs of sexuality which shapes the way they perceive and assume their own sexuality.

The main purpose of this documentation is to establish whether there is an association between domestic and gender based violence and homophobia extended towards lesbian and bisexual women in Sri Lanka. It will investigate the cultural ideas and traditional beliefs about female expression and acceptance of homosexuality and bisexuality as well as the violence imparted on lesbian and bisexual women because of their sexuality. It is expected that distinctions can be made between the types of violence towards lesbian and bisexual women as explored and communicated through symbolic beliefs about women in Sri Lanka and how it affects lesbian and bisexual women's perception of their sexuality. Specifically investigated were : (1) the ideas of the community on lesbian and bisexual sexuality and how they perceive the idea of these women to not conform to Heteronormativity; (2) the types and extent of violence that lesbian and bisexual women are effaced with in their homes, community and in general the wider society.

The main interest is to explore the sources or agencies (religion, tradition, community and the family in Sri Lankan communities) that generate these beliefs on female sexuality and then show how these beliefs affect the reality facing lesbian and bisexual women. It will demonstrate some of the ways in which lesbian and bisexual women are affected by challenging the ideal of how they should perceive their sexuality as women.

The documentation also places focus on the understanding that the violence facing lesbian and bisexual women is not purely violence against women but rather homophobic violence. This metaphoric connection might not be overtly made by the wider society, but to the person inflicting this violence and the recipient of the violent act, who is involved entirely in the act, the association is easily implied. Thus drawing us to question how we classify the violence that is faced by lesbian and bisexual women.

Sociologists and anthropologists alike have already explored how the body mediates and constructs reflection (belief) and action (practice) in society. The anthropologist Mary Douglas and sociologist Bryan Turner have particularly offered instructive insights on how religion is the centre of this social construction of the body as symbolic of relations between men and women. EQUAL GROUND's aim is to further delve into lesbian and bisexual women's perception of their own sexuality; investigating the role that religion play and how this may or may not influence homophobia (including internalized homophobia) and/or violence against lesbian and bisexual women.

The human rights of lesbian and bisexual women are challenged based on both gender identity and sexual orientation. This is influenced highly, by not only discriminatory laws, but also by religions and cultures in Sri Lanka, a society where women are seen as inferior to their male counterparts and homosexuality is viewed as not only unnatural but also un-Sri Lankan.

This booklet is based on findings by EQUAL GROUND through research within the rural lesbian and bisexual women's community. The findings reveal that lesbian and bisexual Sri Lankan women experience a high level of discrimination, violence and violations of their basic human rights on the basis of their sexuality in different environments; including family and the wider society.

What is Violence?

Violence takes many forms and can be categorized into different groups. It is any force inflicted on any person without his or her consent. Violence usually takes the form of detention, torture, harassment or intimidation. The World Report on Violence and Health, Volume 1 (Krug, E.G., The World Health Organization) breaks violence into three types; self inflicted, collective and interpersonal violence which will be relevant for looking at violence facing lesbian and bisexual women in Sri Lanka.

These types of violence can later be classified. The violence directed towards lesbian and bisexual women in Sri Lanka must be classified into sub-categories. It is important that we distinguish between gender based violence, domestic violence and homophobic violence. Though this booklet will focus more on homophobic violence it is important that other forms of violence be mentioned to limit misconceptions surrounding violence directed at lesbian and bisexual women.

Homophobic violence is any form of violence displayed towards homosexuals on the basis of opposing their sexuality. Stereotypes and discrimination aid in homophobia as do laws, traditions and cultural practices. It is widely faced by persons of the LGBT community and is usually expressed in different ways and through different mediums.

Gender based violence is violence directed towards a particular gender. Though the term has been used widely to refer to violence primarily committed towards women, it has also been used to refer to violence directed towards the 'other gender' or transgendered people. In essence the term can be used to refer to any form of violence directed towards any particular group on the basis of gender, including men.

Domestic violence is any form of violent/abusive act committed by one or both partners in a relationship which can include families, friends or partners in cohabitation. Domestic violence usually takes many forms including but not limited to; physical violence (kicking, punching, restraining), emotional violence (name calling, neglect), sexual abuse, intimidation, and/or economic deprivation.

Though we are able to make a breakdown of three types of violence it is important to note that these can in some cases be coupled. That is to say that Gender-based violence can constitute domestic violence as domestic violence can constitute homophobia and so on.

In Sri Lanka it is often that lesbian and bisexual women can face a myriad of all three types of violence being directed towards them all at the same time. Women being given a place in society that is less than their male counterparts usually afford the opportunity for gender based violence. In this light lesbian and bisexual women in the Sri Lankan society who are found out to be homosexuals can face a high level of violence in the home which attaches itself to homophobia because this violence is directed towards them because of their sexuality. However, it must also be considered as it is often the case, that the heightened violence that is imparted on lesbian and bisexual women is also gender based as women are not 'allowed' to express certain behaviour nor challenge the social constitution of her place in society; which is that of wife to a male and only as such.

On the other side of things it is almost always the case that the homophobic violence imparted on the lesbian or bisexual woman is domestic. The closest persons who they expect to protect, love and care for them are usually the ones to respond violently towards lesbian and bisexual women on the basis of their sexuality. It is usually parents, siblings and relatives who attempt to and most often; institutionalize these women, restrict them from leaving the home, withdraw economic and other necessary support, arrange unwanted marriages and express other forms of physical aggression.

The types of violence expressed towards lesbian and bisexual women in Sri Lanka

Types of violence affecting Sri Lankan lesbian and bisexual women living in Sri Lanka include; self inflicted violence, collective violence and interpersonal violence.

Self inflicted violence

The cultures in Sri Lanka allows for children to form part of religious practices and beliefs from an early age. As females find themselves moving out of childhood into adolescence and then into womanhood, they also seek to associate with their sexual selves. However, the rigorous religious, traditional and cultural practices play a great role in how they will perceive their own sexualities. More than often their ideas around homosexuality are similar to that of the wider communities which they form part of. They also have negative perceptions of homosexuality believing that it is unnatural and should not exist.

For some lesbian and bisexual women this negative perception of homosexuality coupled with all the other issues they are faced with surrounding their sexuality can cause a myriad of problems. Their own beliefs and the society around them cause them to feel guilty and shameful of their homosexuality. This causes lesbians and bisexual women to live in heightened secrecy which has proven difficult for them to deal with.

- It is common for lesbian and bisexual women in Sri Lanka to commit suicide associated with their sexuality or harm themselves in other ways. One can take into account the case of 43 years old Arundathi who today still suffers emotionally from her girlfriend committing suicide. The two girls had a 3 year old relationship in school which started at grade 9. When this was made public by others to their superiors and families, Arundathi's girlfriend could not stand the shame that was brought upon her and committed suicide.
- Lesbian and bisexual women assume the heteronormative role that society expects of them in order to escape the guilt they face or bring onto their families, should they lead a homosexual life. Often these heterosexual relationships do not last very long or the women live miserably in these relationships.

Internalized Violence

The World health organization breaks Internalized violence into two major groups;

- Family and intimate partner violence and;
- Community violence

In the context of Sri Lanka, partner violence is not recognized or often not mentioned of as the act of homosexuality is criminal under state law. Lesbian and bisexual women are forced to suffer in silence as they are unable to report

abusive same sex partners. This allows for continued domestic violence in same sex relationships and extreme pain and suffering for lesbian and bisexual women.

Family based violence also affects lesbian and bisexual women and is a form of violence they can also not report to the state's authorities in order to seek protection or any form of justice. Families thus are able to commit major forms of violence against lesbian and bisexual women including;

- Physical violence inclusive of beating with objects.
- Controlling of or denying the lesbian or bisexual woman's sexuality; this is often assumed through forced marriages without the women's consent. For example the case of 43 years old Neetha who was given in marriage without her consent by her family, after rumours got to them that she was dating another woman.
- Rape in the home is also a form of the violence faced by lesbian and bisexual women.
- Confining them to the home and restricting them from contacting the outside world including friends. This takes many forms, in one particular case recorded by EQUAL GROUND; a 22 year old woman in the Galle District was restricted by her parents from going anywhere without her mother chaperoning her because her parents found out she was in an intimate relationship with another woman.
- Restricting their use of cell phones or internet
- Often the family threatens to restrict financial and other support and to some extremes family will actually restrict that support. Some families marry off lesbian women and refuse to accept them in the home or support them in any way if the marriage fails. Reference can be made to the case of Vineetha, a lesbian woman from the village of Raja Ela, Kothmale. Vineetha had been in a relationship with Anula and when her family became aware of this they constantly insulted her. Without her consent her parents gave her in marriage. Her protests went unacknowledged and after being unhappy in her marital home she returned to her parents' home only to be chased away and forced to return to her husband.
- It is also common for the family to destroy the personal property owned by lesbian and bisexual women especially clothes for women who wear clothes assumed to be only for the opposite gender.
- Families also use religious beliefs to manipulate and control lesbian and bisexual women.
- One of the most common form of abuse lesbian and bisexual women face, usually carried out by the family, is emotional blackmail. This can be for example a woman telling her mother she's a lesbian and the mother in turn telling her to keep it a secret from other family members or friends as it would bring disgrace to the family. Some parents go to the extreme of saying its best to keep it secret from the other parent as he/she may have a heart attack or even die.

These are only a few of the ways that families inflict violence on the lesbian or bisexual Sri Lankan woman. In some cases more extreme measures such as; threat or harm with weapons is used. Another method of intimidation used includes the threat of removing children from lesbian mothers or preventing lesbian mothers from having access to their children.

Lee and Newby (1983; 57) challenged notions of community being only physical stating that; the most significant community is defined by the nature of the relationships people form and the social network to which they belong. This adds value to the conceptualization of community violence in this work as violence perpetrated against lesbian and bisexual women can be viewed in a truer sense. Hence, reference to community violence will not only constitute the violence facing lesbian and bisexual women in the workplace, learning institutions or the physical community in which they live; but also includes friendships, clubs and other social networks. The most common forms of violence lesbian and bisexual women face in their communities include:

- Blackmail; often lesbian and bisexual women are blackmailed where they face the risk of being 'outed' (making their sexuality public). To prevent this, women may be forced to engage in sexual and other acts that they would not engage in normally.
- Religious beliefs are highly used as a tool of abuse against lesbian and bisexual women and often forced marriages are encouraged by religious institutions. Religious institutions also act in collaboration with families to carry out various form of violence against lesbian and bisexual women including constant criticism, name calling and sometimes physical violence.
- Society at large imparts a great deal of emotional violence on lesbian and bisexual women. Through promoting the idea that homosexuality is not a natural act and Western, lesbian and bisexual women are made to feel un-Sri Lankan and un-welcomed in their communities. Often women are made to feel ashamed of themselves and their sexual identity by friends, colleagues, co-workers and other associates and relations.
- Within the work place lesbian and bisexual women are continuously discriminated against even to the extent of being fired from their jobs. The number of cases recorded by EQUAL GROUND is far too many to be included in this booklet. However, mention can be made of a particular case in the Nuwara Eliya District. Vineetha and Anula who worked in the same factory were forced to leave their jobs due to the high level of discrimination displayed by fellow staff members, upon suspicion that the women were in a lesbian relationship with each other.

These types of violence exist on a wide scale in all Sri Lanka's communities including small villages extending to cities and developed urban areas. Institutions, especially learning and religious institutions, where all people should feel safe does not afford the lesbian or bisexual woman this sense of safety. Persons such as bosses in the workplace also take part in discriminating against lesbian and bisexual women leaving these women with no recourse.

Collective violence

The laws of Sri Lanka criminalizing homosexuality aid in collective violence against lesbian and bisexual women. It enables civil society to discriminate and harm this particular group of women. The act of criminalizing homosexuality by the state restricts lesbian and bisexual women's ability to report any forms of crime committed against them on the basis of their sexuality. There is the possibility of being criminalized by the state itself on the same basis and being ostracised by family and society if their true sexual orientation is made public.

Partners, families and communities then find it easy to violate the rights of lesbian and bisexual women and cause them harm as they know for a fact they will not be faced with consequences or face any form justice.

Classification of the violence faced by lesbian and bisexual women

It is necessary and important to draw some form of classification between the types of violence that women are experiencing in the Sri Lankan context. Violence against women must be broken down to make the necessary linkages between discriminatory oppressive laws and how violence against women is rectified. In order to address violence against women special attention must be paid to homophobic crimes against lesbian and bisexual women.

Lesbian and bisexual women suffer from violent crimes associated with their sexuality as well as their gender. However, failure to recognise the violence imparted on these women based on sexual orientation limits the solutions to the problem. This includes;

- Parents forcing their children into heterosexual marriages to stop them from engaging in sexual relations or loving intimate relationships with persons of the same sex.
- Parents and other family members locking individuals in the home upon finding out they are homosexuals
- Individuals harming themselves to escape shame of homosexuality
- Blackmail is commonly faced by lesbian and bisexual women who may be outed or who come out (being open about their sexuality)
- The religious messages and traditional beliefs and cultural practices lead women to internalize homophobia and often lead them to the point of harming themselves physically even to the point of committing suicide
- Lesbian and bisexual women are forced into mental institutions where it is believed they will be cured of homosexuality
- In the home lesbian and bisexual women are raped to cure them of homosexuality
- In some cases religion is used in the attempt to cure lesbian and bisexual women
- Physical violence such as beating has also been used in the home to punish lesbian and bisexual women.

The nature of these types of violence renders that the classification be associated with more than violence against women. It is important that the type of violence is properly classified. Often the violence faced by lesbian and bisexual women in Sri Lanka is mistaken for either domestic or gender based violence hence the reality is not confronted. This leads to the lack of evidence to support homophobia against lesbian and bisexual women. Moreover, the laws ability to hinder women's ability to report homophobic violence leads to the dominant idea that this does not exist.

The effects of homophobia on lesbian and bisexual women

These particular research findings revealed that lesbian and bisexual women are highly affected by the different types of violence mentioned in this work. Most commonly lesbian and bisexual women suffer as individuals but it must be noted that their own families are also affected. One particular mother in Colombo expressed her concerns for her children to EQUAL GROUND. She is a mother of three and her two daughters are lesbian women. Though she readily accepts her children's choice, she continuously worries for them, fearing that the community will cause them physical harm.

Some of the effects that homophobia has on lesbian and bisexual women are inclusive of;

- Violation of women's basic human rights
 - Women do not get to decide whether they want to have children, instead this is dictated by their unwanted marriages.
 - Families restrict women's mobility.
 - Women face marital rape.

- Emotional breakdown due to:
 - Women in relationships being prevented from seeing each other
 - Shame: usually associated with the feeling of disappointing their families
 - Gossip and insults in their households, workplace and communities and so on
 - Women are made to feel hopeless and lonely when forced into unwanted marriages.

Emotional breakdown usually leads to suicidal feelings in lesbian and bisexual women. In some cases such feelings lead to women actually committing suicide.

- Deprivation
 - Families take away financial support or restrict women from working, leaving them unable to provide for themselves.
 - Women forced into heterosexual marriages are left to live a life without sexual or emotional satisfaction. This has the ability to impact on the women's meaning of life negatively where they feel life is meaningless and has no value.

- Joblessness results; leaving women unable to provide for themselves and forced to engage in activities they would not normally engage in, in an attempt to meet their needs.

Why should homophobic violence be classified as a hate crime?

A hate crime is said to be any crime that is motivated by intolerance towards a particular group within the society. It is a crime committed with some form of bias motivation where the act carried out is a crime under the legal jurisdiction where it is committed.

Homophobia is often expressed in the form of violence. Lesbian and bisexual women face great levels of violence expressed towards them. Most, if not all these forms of violence, warrants criminal charges under the laws of Sri Lanka and are considered violations of an individual's basic human rights. The fact that these crimes were motivated by intolerance is the basis on which homophobic violence must be classified as such.

The types of violence often expressed towards lesbian and bisexual women on the basis of their sexuality should on their own be classified as hate crimes. The extent to which these crimes are committed displays high levels of intolerance for lesbian and bisexual women. In essence these crimes at face value replicate that of hate crimes and is further reiterated on the basis that it suits the conditions necessary to be classified as a hate crime.

It suggests that the inability for Sri Lanka and other states to classify homophobia and homophobic crimes as hate crimes is formed out of a notion of bias.

Why overcome homophobia?

Homophobia affects an entire group of people. Even when homophobic violence is not directed towards the entire LGBT community, the violence expressed towards one member affects the entire group. This drives fear in the rest of the community; where other LGBT persons fear that the time for them to be violently attacked will most definitely be realized. It brings to the attention the reality that LGBT people are not equal citizens in a society where homosexuality between two consenting adults is criminalized. This reality can cause various effects; often people live in fear and never fulfil their life's desires, people migrate or seek asylum in countries where they are better able to access basic human rights as LGBT people. The latter should be a great concern for any country as this affects, not just the family who has to be geographically challenged, but also the country as a whole. The 'Brain Drain' leads countries to lose a wide range of assets that would be otherwise added to the country's development.

Homophobia more than anything causes a group of people a great deal of hurt, pain and suffering. It can limit one's ability to access his/her full potential as it leads to depression and a sense of loneliness, which often people are unable to deal with. It has been seen both in Sri Lanka and worldwide where LGBT people commit suicide as a result of homophobia. In Sri Lanka homophobia affects the lives of lesbian and bisexual women so much that they even attempt and successfully carry out joint suicides or singularly kill themselves to avoid being forced to live heterosexual lives. This is also a concern for the state as persons who would otherwise add to the country's resources are not able to contribute, limiting the full employment of labour.

It is necessary to overcome homophobia because it is war on a group of people based on discrimination, stereotypes and bias. No person or group of people deserves to be discriminated against to the point that basic human rights are denied; it is on this basis that Sri Lanka needs to overcome homophobia and put measures in place to counter homophobic crimes.

Human Rights have five components. They are;

- Indivisible
- Universal
- Interdependent
- Inalienable
- Inherent

It is the responsibility of the state to afford its entire citizens their human rights. Hence, to respect, restore and fulfill human rights all these components must be present. This is to say that sexual and reproductive rights for all citizens of Sri Lanka must be interpreted equally. LGBT people should have all their rights allocated and respected as heterosexual Sri Lankans.

To truly rectify violence against women, ALL of Sri Lanka's women must be taken into consideration. This will only be possible if stereotypes, discrimination and homophobia directed towards lesbian and bisexual women is also taken into consideration and work is directed at ending homophobia.

How do we overcome homophobia?

There are a myriad of reasons why as a people, Sri Lankans need to overcome and end homophobia and homophobic crimes. However, to say exactly how would be a general prescription that would not necessarily work for everyone, every family or community. Therefore, though this booklet will make a few recommendations, how each person goes about challenging themselves to be less homophobic, less stereotypical and discriminatory is entirely up to the individual. What is important is that one recognizes the dangers of homophobia, the pain and suffering that homophobic violence causes to the victims and families, and makes an effort to put an end to the negative role they play in this dilemma.

Individuals struggling with internalized homophobia

Sri Lankan cultures and the influence of religions remain the most influential in lesbian and bisexual women developing self-hate based on their sexual orientation (internalized homophobia). Lesbian and bisexual women continue to suffer mentally, emotionally and physically even to the point of committing suicide.

Attempts must be made by lesbian and bisexual women to overcome self-hate and not only learn to accept their sexuality, but to also love themselves regardless of the fact that they do not fit into the social construction society has coined for them. It is imperative to learn to accept yourself and learn to be comfortable with who you really are; whilst ones sexuality doesn't define them, it is and always will be a part of who an individual is.

- It is first and foremost important to know that there are other lesbian and bisexual women existing in Sri Lanka and the rest of the world.
- Because of stigma and stereotypes around homosexuality lesbian and bisexual women may find it difficult to accept their sexuality. Therefore, acknowledge that though dealing with internalized homophobia will be an uphill battle it is possible to get past this stage.
- Dealing with any form of self hate usually requires external interventions. Hence it is recommended that persons who find themselves in this situation seek help.
 - Speak to a friend or family member or anyone else you trust. Regardless of the high level of homophobia present not all of Sri Lanka is homophobic. Very good examples are cited in case studies at the end of this booklet.
 - Seek counselling; it is usually more fruitful to contact organizations working with the LGBT community.
 - EQUAL GROUND is an LGBT organization working in Colombo but offers assistance nationwide. To seek assistance from this organization please view contact details at the back of this booklet.
- Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832) coined it quite well; "If God wanted me otherwise, he would have created me otherwise". Start by learning to accept and love yourself.

The family

Each member of the family regardless of their differences is and should be seen as equally important as the next. A family is usually the first source of safety, love, and the source that individuals usually gather their strength and courage from. Hence, it is important that this support system remains a source of safety, love and general support to each individual.

Put an end to unwanted arranged marriages

Homophobia continues to kill Sri Lanka's women. The case of Chandra, from the Nuwara Eliya district, who took poison and committed suicide because her girlfriend was forced into marriage by her brother, is a classic example. Women lose control because their love and care for each other is constantly challenged by society and not respected. The ability for family members to tear apart, by whatever means, two women in love leaves these women heartbroken and depressed. They often see no other way out and take their own lives. It is in this regard that the seriousness of forced marriages must be taken into consideration and an end to it becomes the solution.

Stop the control of the lesbian and bisexual woman's sexuality

Many families have come to accept their family member's homosexuality and find that they have so much more to gain than anything to lose. Whilst some families such as Susima's family from the Anuradhapura District has given up all forms of relations with her because of her homosexuality, other's such as the family of Tharaka, Susima's partner, have accepted and continue to love their relatives. Though in this case members of their community continue to discriminate against the women because of their relationship, the support of Tharaka's family gives the women peace of mind. They are provided with a support system which boosts their self worth; this results in them being less emotionally drained by the pressure of the community and enables them to contribute effectively to the family.

Husbands can emulate the behaviour of Samanthi's husband (Eppawala, Anuradhapura), who willingly ended his marriage to her peacefully, with mutual understanding; after she explained to him that she was unhappy in their marriage. Samanthi explained to her husband that she had been forced into the marriage by her family and had no sexual feelings for him as she had feelings for other women. Unlike many husbands who in turn rape their wives, embarrass and humiliate them publicly or even beat them and hold them captive away from friends and family, Samanthi's husband understood her pain and subsequently released her from the marriage.

End violent punishment and imprisonment

Punishment and violence never actually changes the individual's sexuality. What it in turn does is divide families, pushing the victim into a world where they feel unloved, insecure and uncared for. Acts such as forced marriages deemed to cure the lesbian woman of homosexuality does far more harm than good for all persons involved.

These forms of violence also cause major problems for these women and as a result lesbian and bisexual women find themselves in intimate relationships where they cannot negotiate power due to these circumstances. The ability to negotiate power is dictated by their inability to care for themselves in the event that their partners should also take away all forms of security leaving them with no place to go and no other sense of security.

Civil society

For the sake of this booklet civil society will be categorized into two groups; movement and community. Movement will take into account women's movements and groups in Sri Lanka including NGOs, whilst community will refer to; the general community in which one lives, works, socializes, studies etc.

Women's movement

In July 2011, The Women and Media Collective Colombo presented a Shadow Report on Sri Lanka to the Committee on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). The report saw a vast amount of issues facing Sri Lankan women being reported and recommendations made. Whilst this is progressive for Sri Lanka's women in advancing human rights it has still failed to mention issues facing lesbian and bisexual women in Sri Lanka. Of a 49 paged document a shocking three sentences were dedicated to mentioning section 365A of the Penal Code which criminalizes homosexuality between consenting adults. The reason for this might be due to the fact that while chunks of the document was dedicated to 'Rural Women' at least 5 different committees on rural women were invited to draft the report from at least 5 different districts. How many of the 61 organizations represented lesbian and bisexual women a minority group in Sri Lanka?

This is not to underestimate the report but to rather highlight that whilst it stated that "All Sri Lankan women have therefore a legal right to choose their residence and domicile." (2011; 29), they have overlooked a group of women who are constantly forced into marriages and forced to reside in households with their husbands. This statement has also disregarded the fact that lesbian and bisexual women find it difficult to cohabitate as intimate partners in Sri Lanka. The problems facing lesbian and bisexual women on the basis of their sexuality were nowhere to be found in the document. It therefore begs the question; what about lesbian and bisexual Sri Lankan women? Are they not to be afforded equal human rights?

The Women's movement of Sri Lanka needs to recognize lesbian and bisexual women as women. There needs to be as much focus on advancing sexual and reproductive health and rights for lesbian and bisexual women as there is on advancing human rights for women living in poverty. Whilst the LGBT movement works to advance the rights of LGBT people in Sri Lanka the onus is also on the women's movement of Sri Lanka to recognise the problems of lesbian and bisexual women and actions be taken as necessary.

It is therefore recommended that the Women's movement of Sri Lanka;

- Cite lesbian and bisexual women as **vulnerable Sri Lankan women**
- Allocate space to LGBT organizations working on lesbian and bisexual women's rights within the women's movement; where the two groups can work together to advance the rights of women.

ALL of Sri Lanka's women deserve to be afforded their basic human rights regardless of sexual orientation.

Communities

Community plays a crucial role in generating people's sense of belonging (Crow and Allan. 1994; 6). Abraham Maslow (1908-70) looked into the sense of belonging as a basic need. He coined what is known as Maslow's Hierarchy; where the need for love and belonging is seen as the third most important after physiological needs (e.g. air, water and food) and safety needs are satisfied. At the top of Maslow's Hierarchy is the need for self-actualization. Self-actualization where human beings are able to reach their full potential, according to Maslow, is unattainable if other needs such as the sense of belonging or physiological needs are not met. This means that lesbian and bisexual Sri Lankan women, due to homophobia, are not able to produce up to their full potential. Often the level of productivity is non-existent due to the high level of homophobia and homophobic crimes against lesbian and bisexual women. This not only affects lesbian and bisexual women but the communities and the country as a whole suffers.

- Though it is often that homophobia is justified with religious beliefs, tradition, laws and culture the onus is on individuals to play their role in putting an end to homophobia. It is for individuals to acknowledge the effects of homophobia and realize that there is a need for a society that does not discriminate on the basis of sexuality.
- It is too often the excuse, that allowing LGBT people their human rights will promote homosexuality. Let's face it, sexuality is natural be it heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, asexual or transsexual; were this not the case everyone would be heterosexual. Most LGBT people are from heterosexual households. If it were so easy to get anyone to conform to any form of sexuality there would really be no LGBT people in the world.

To deal with homophobia individuals should;

- Seek information and education on what homosexuality really is. One will find that they are often misguided by stereotypes and that LGBT people are indeed as human as heterosexual people.
- Challenge yourself as to how you would feel if you were discriminated against, as LGBT people are, maybe because of your ethnicity or even the colour of your hair. For example, how would you feel if you were fired from your workplace because your Gay male boss refuses to have a married Sinhala woman working for him?
- Note that there are a vast amount of resources that one can access. Information about homosexuality is available in as many forms ranging from hardcopy (e.g. printed books) to soft copies (e.g. via websites).
- There is also a host of work being done by organizations working to sensitize individuals in the workplace. Should this be a route that managers and other superiors in the workplace wish to take they can also contact EQUAL GROUND whose details are at the back of this booklet.

Homophobia is often based on individual ethics. On this basis it is important to question whether it is ethical to promote hate or remain discriminatory in any case. The basis of this is to understand how sensitive this issue is and how it affects the individuals who are discriminated against.

The Sri Lankan Government

It is a general consensus within the LGBT community that section 365A of the Penal Code needs to be repealed. However, to repeal this law which criminalizes homosexuality between consenting adults alone, will not be a solution to ending homophobia in Sri Lanka or anywhere else in the world. It is the responsibility of the Sri Lankan Government to serve its entire people and therefore uphold the human dignity of all. The Government must take pride in investing in its entire people regardless of sexual orientation.

As there are measures being put in place to combat violence against women and resettling displaced Muslims for example, measures must also be put in place to advance human rights for LGBT people and protecting them.

- Protect lesbian and bisexual women by classifying homophobic crimes as hate crimes and ensure that the lines of communication are open for women to report this type of violence. Classifying homophobic crimes as hate crimes will be a step forward in advancing human rights and upholding the human dignity of lesbian and bisexual women.
 - The State must respond to homophobic crimes by investigating, trying and punishing violators.
- As a signatory to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the government of Sri Lanka has an obligation to all its citizens to uphold all 24 Articles of the Declaration; more so, in this regard to;
 - Uphold Article 3 and afford everyone (inclusive of lesbian and bisexual women), the right to liberty, life and the security of person.
 - Uphold Article 5 ensuring that no person (including lesbian and bisexual women), is subjected to torture or to cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment.
- Lesbian and bisexual women should be regarded as equal Sri Lankan citizens and should also be afforded protection under the antidiscrimination laws of Sri Lanka.
- With the current state of the country (coming out of the war) benchmarking will be a vital tool for the Sri Lankan government in advancing human rights for its entire people. The progress made by South Africa, post apartheid, in rectifying it's constitution to afford LGBT people equal rights is an example Sri Lanka might want to consider.

Everyone, at all levels, has a role to play in the elimination of homophobia in the Sri Lankan society.

Conclusion

Homophobia hurts and depreciates the value of any society. Whilst some countries have become cognisant not only of this fact but also the negative effects it has on its citizens, and have put measures in place to rectify the inequality and violations of human rights; countries such as Sri Lanka remain oppressive and discriminatory towards LGBT people. The laws, religious beliefs, cultures and traditional practices in Sri Lanka remain influential in this predicament. As demonstrated in this booklet, it not only influences the way in which lesbian and bisexual women are viewed by their community and families, it also holds bearing on how lesbian and bisexual women themselves perceive their own sexuality.

How lesbian and bisexual women construct their life currently is dictated by the laws and practices in Sri Lanka. Thus, to promote transformation in society's willingness to end discrimination based on sexual orientation theory and practice must complement each other; section 365(A) of the Penal Code must be repealed and discrimination and violence against LGBT people on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity must be non-existent.

It is time that inclusivity in the law to recognize LGBT people as deserving of human rights move beyond debate. LGBT people do exist in Sri Lanka and are as Sri Lankan as their heterosexual counterparts. To decriminalize homosexuality between consenting adults is not to promote homosexuality, it is rather to respect the reality of people existing in Sri Lanka.

This publication has demonstrated that difficulty exists in respecting individual's human rights based mainly on ethics. In line with this, it has revealed some of the violent consequences lesbian and bisexual women face by challenging these ethics and ideas and how their lives are then affected. Harsh realities exist for lesbian and bisexual women and everyone has a role to play, as Sri Lankan people, in ending homophobia and promoting equal rights for all.

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Appendices

Addressing violence against rural lesbian and bisexual women in Sri Lanka: Research project by EQUAL GROUND (April 2010- May 2011). ***Some names have been changed for reasons of confidentiality.***

Case Number 01

Name of SO : A. M. Swarnalatha
Reporting Date : 2011.03.22
District : Anuradhapura
Pseudonyms : Chandra and Maala
Age : 43 Years
Interview date/time : 2011.03.15 / 10.00 a.m.

Chandra is the youngest of 5 brothers and sisters. She had obtained primary education from a primary school and had studied up to 5th Grade in that school and then changed to another. Her mother had passed away and she was living with her father and her eldest sister. She had wanted to dress and behave like a boy and used to cut her hair short and dress up in T-shirts and trousers. She had also been known as “Chooti”.

During her school days she had tried to start relationships with many girls but had failed. She was determined to somehow start an affair with a girl. When she finished her Advanced level exams and while staying at home she always associated with boys. She used to ride bicycles and tried to get friendly with girls many times.

Later the villagers had got to know of her behavior and started insulting her and had not allowed her in to their houses either. When she worked in the Free trade zone she has had many affairs with girls in the boarding house. In 1992 she had started an affair with girl by the name of Maala. By this time Chandra had wanted to buy a Motor Bicycle. Chandra’s father had bought a Bike for her and she had started loafing all over with Maala on the Bike. In 1992 they had started working in a garment factory in Nochchiyagama. By this time their affair was revealed to the villagers and Co-workers and they could not continue working there. Therefore Chandra and Maala left that garment factory in 1994 and had come to a boarding house in Colombo and had started living together. After living together for almost two years they were found by the family members and were brought back to the village and assaulted. Maala was forced into marriage to a man from the Army and Chandra too was given in marriage to a man who was 8 years younger than her. Chandra is a mother of 4 children now and her husband is a driver.

Case Number 02

Name of the SO : Y.H.S Dissanayake
Pseudonyms : Renuka and Malini
Date of documented : April 2010
District : Anuradhapura

I am Renuka, 32 years of age and I live in a village close to Anuradhapura town. I studied up to advanced level in a popular school in town. I met my friend Malini who is 29 years old, when I was going for tuition for A/L classes. Our friendship turned into a love affair after some time. We both worked together and did everything together. When we go to bathe we always satisfy each other sexually. I used to sleep at her house every day.

One day as usual, she came to sleep in our house when my mother and my brother too were at home. As usual we were enjoying ourselves in bed when my brother came barging into our room. We were found naked in bed and we were asked to leave the house before dawn. For the moment we had no place to go and we could not think of parting from each other. Next day morning both of us left to look for work in a garment factory. We found a job in a garment factory and found a room for rent. We lived freely like this for a few months, but suddenly Malini's parents had got to know of our affair and took her back to the village. I could not bear the loneliness without Malini as we loved each other very much. We had to be happy with only conversations over the phone.

After sometime, Malini's parents brought in a marriage proposal for her and decided to give her in marriage. Malini had no courage to refuse as she was helpless. I was shocked and grieved. I became like a dead body. I once wanted to commit suicide. Malini got married and went to her husband's house in Galgamuwa. They have a daughter now. My whole life became senseless and still my love for Malini has not faded away. I look forward to seeing her someday. I want to thank all those with whom I shared my story and grief.

Case Number 03

Name of the SO : A. M. Swarnalatha
Reporting Date : 2011.03.25
District : Anuradhapura
Pseudonyms : Nayana and Rohini
Age : 40 Years
Interview date/time : 2011.03.11 / 8.00 a.m.

Nayana is from a village close to Anuradhapura. She was originally from Kandy. Nayana had her education from a school in the vicinity and had been a bright student in school. She is the second in the family with an elder brother and a sister.

Since her school days she had interest in associating with girls and many times attempted to get friendly with girls of her age. She had not been able to pass the Ordinary level exam and had to say goodbye to her school career. The financial situation at Nayana's home got worse as time passed by. Nayana had then started doing sales jobs and odd jobs to supplement the family income. In the meantime she started a relationship with her best friend Rohini and the relationship went to the extent of being a sexual relationship and they could not bear to be apart. Nayana's parents had started suspecting them as they noticed the two of them being together often and staying at Nayana's house often.

Nayana's mother had once questioned her why Rohini was visiting her so often and Nayana had told her that she visits her because of their friendship. Her mother began to suspect however, that there was more to the relationship than just being friends. She told Rohini not to come to their house any more. After this incident Rohini did not come to Nayana's house and Nayana could not bear this anymore and went to see her. She explained that she cannot wait without seeing Rohini. Later in 1998 they both left home and came to Colombo and stayed at a boarding house in Colombo from where they traveled together for work. Later the others in the boarding House had got to know about their affair and they had to leave the place and return to the village. A few months later, Nayana's father died in an accident and her brother got addicted to alcohol and faced many problems one after the other. The entire burden was finally on the shoulders of Nayana.

Nayana's sister, Lasanda joined a garment factory and Nayana eloped with Rohini to Colombo. They were together again for 1 ½ years and dutifully sent money home. Since the family did not see her for a long time, her brother came in search of her in 2003 and took her back home. She was given in marriage to her cousin. She could not live with him and came back home. In 2003 again she went to her husband and later that year he died in the war while serving in the Army. She was expecting her son when her husband died and the two of them are now staying with their in-laws. Rohini has not got married and Nayana does not wish to re-marry. Throughout Nayana's marriage and her subsequent move to her husband's family home after her husband's death, Rohini has visited Nayana consistently.

Case Number 04

Name of the SO : A. M. Swarnalatha
District : Anuradhapura
Pseudonyms : Soma
Age : 49 Years
Interview date/time : 2011.04.07 / 12.00 a.m.

The SO received information of Soma through a mutual acquaintance and the SO personally went see her several times and obtained the following information. Initially Soma was reluctant to share anything and gradually after making several visits to her home Soma got friendly with the SO.

Whilst revealing her family details she said that she lost her mother when she was very small and her father had brought in a step mother to the home. The step mother had treated her very badly and never sent her to school and instead had assigned her all the house work such as cleaning, washing and cooking. As a consequence Soma cannot read or write, not even her name. The father also had joined the step mother and always used tell Soma that is it her "Karma" that these things happen to her. Soma had wanted to commit suicide due to all these mental and physical stress.

At the age of 16 she had been raped by her cousin brother and after that she refused marriage. At the age of 20 her father died leaving the step mother with two other children from him. Finally Soma had to look after the two step siblings as her stepmother too fell ill. All in all due to financial difficulties she had found a job to work in a house as a maid in another town.

There she had found another friend (Kamala) in the house she worked at. They became very close and started a sexual relationship. Whenever she came home for the holidays Kamala too accompanied her. The stepmother did not suspect them as Kamala is not from Anuradhapura. Soma could not think of a life without Kamala. One day in 1998 Kamala went home to her village. After 2 years she returned (in 2000) and then went back again to her village. Later Soma found out that Kamala had got married and gone abroad. Soma could not stop thinking about Kamala and to date Soma still thinks about her. In the meantime Soma's step siblings got married and began living separately and the stepmother also passed away leaving her all alone at home. She now leads a lonely life attending to religious activities. She plans to go to a home for the aged when she is older. She revealed her story hoping that we would keep it as a secret.

Case Number 05

Name of the SO : Jacintha Ekanayake
Reporting Date : 2011.01.07
District : Nuwara Eliya
Pseudonyms : Sumanawathi and Chandra
Age : Both 53 Years
Interviewed date : 2011.01.09
Location : At the residence of informant

Sumanawathie is a Sinhala Buddhist lady who lives in the village of Shanthipura. She is a bi-sexual. Her husband is a businessman.

At the age of 14, due to financial difficulties in the home-front Sumanawathie had been sent to a Convent for further education by her mother as she was the only one who was doing further studies out of all her brothers and sisters.

She would return home for every holiday and used to play with the village boys and girls. Gradually, on her visits home for the holidays, she stopped playing with boys and kept away from all and the others as well. She started coming home with another girl. During this period she also lost her father.

Sumanawathie's family members married and began living separately. Eventually it was only Sumanawathie and her girlfriend who was left at home with Sumanawathie's paralyzed mother. They did all the house work, supporting themselves by cultivating rice and vegetables and they lived together for many years like this. They also worked abroad as housemaids to strengthen their finances. They both appeared in public walking hand in hand in the village and that made the villagers pass remarks at them and spread stories about them. It was known to everybody in the village that they get annoyed and would yell at people who passed remarks at them.

Amidst all this Sumanawathie's eldest brother brought in a marriage proposal for Sumanawathie. She was threatened by the brother that if she refuses to the proposal that he would take back all the property in his name. Sumanawathie insisted that she could live alone, however her brother then started ill-treating her and insulting her. Her brother used to scold her in filth every day. Finally when Sumanawathie could not take it anymore she decided to agree to the marriage proposed by her brother.

Although she was married to a man she managed to keep her relationship going with her girlfriend. Later on Sumanawathie's husband started suspecting them and he prevented both of them from seeing each other. Sumanawathie's girlfriend Chandra lost control of herself and fell sick. Sumanawathie too led an unhappy life.

Suddenly one day, Sumanawathie received a telegram with a message of Chandra's demise. Sumanawathie was shocked and went to the boarding house where Chandra stayed and found out that she has taken poison and committed suicide.

The Funeral was undertaken by Sumanawathie's husband and a few others. Sumanawathie is still shocked and depressed about Chandra's suicide and although she continues to cultivate and live with her husband she pines for Chandra.

Case Number 06

Name of the SO : Lakmali Kothalawala (Field Manger – EQUAL GROUND)
Pseudonyms : Chaturi
District : Galle
Age : 22 Years

Chathuri is 22, living in the Galle district. She has never felt the idea of having a boyfriend in life and on the contrary desired to dress and behave like a boy. She had many female friends and out them one had been special for her. Chathuri had been very friendly with her and had fallen in love with her. Their relationship had been so strong that they could not live without each other.

Chathuri always visited her friend at home and nobody objected as they were not suspected at any time. Unfortunately later on Chathuri's parents had felt suspicious of them and found out about the relationship they were having. This resulted in a severe set of rules and regulations set by her parents, which included not being given permission to work, only being able to go out with her mother to Church, being chaperoned constantly by her mother and not being able to go out on her own at all. Chathuri was traumatized due to her punishments. She was not allowed to see or talk to her girlfriend. She was harassed and suffered day by day.

Chathuri indicated that she is willing to change physically into a boy, but what prevents her is due to insufficient funds. Hence she tried to go overseas with her girlfriend.

Case Number 07

Name of the SO : Inoka Lakmali
Reporting Date : 2011.02.04
District : Nuwara Eliya
Pseudonyms : Janet and Renuka
Age : 42 Years
Interviewed date : 2010.10.25

Janet is a 42 year old lady who lives with her brother and sister. She preferred a life in isolation since her childhood. She does dressmaking as her occupation while doing errands and earning as time permits.

On a survey visit to Janet's village on 3rd October 2010, a voice of another woman was heard in the vicinity of Janet's house. It was realized that it is Janet's female partner Renuka who has been living with her as the husband. Almost 20 years ago, Renuka had come from Colombo to Nuwara Eliya and had purchased the house where they are currently living and had also been making a living out of cultivation. Renuka likes to wear men's clothes and liked to appear like a man. She has enough money in hand all the time to spend on liquor and cigarettes too. Finally, it was found out that Janet was given in marriage to a man whom her parents proposed without her consent and who she is now divorced from. She has a child from this marriage who is living with her now. Janet's partner Renuka takes good care of Janet and her child as well. The child is sent to Colombo for better education at the expense of Renuka. It was brought to light by the village people that this couple has been living together in this manner for quite sometime.

Case Number 08

Name of the SO : Shyami Ayesha
Date of report : 2010.11.15
District : Kalutara
Pseudonyms : Saroja and Karuna
Age : 53 years

Saroja is employed in an office in the executive grade. Saroja had got her first appointment at this office. Within a short period Saroja had started a relationship with Karuna, the madam who employed her and they had spent a lot of time together with affection. Karuna has gone to the extent of offering Saroja accommodation at her place and they travel together in Karuna's vehicle daily.

Eventually, the news of the relationship of Saroja and Karuna was heard by Saroja's parents. They had got Saroja to resign immediately and taken her back home. Saroja became very helpless and grieved with insults and harassments from her family. Karuna also had gone through a lot of problems and accusations thereafter and had obtained a transfer to a faraway office.

Saroja had gone through a lot of mental trauma due to this matter and is still unmarried and leading an isolated life.

Case Number 09

Name of the SO : Inoka Lakmini
Reporting Date : 2011.01.26
District : Nuwara Eliya
Pseudonyms : Vineetha and Anula
Age : 43 Years - Vineetha
Location : Neighbor's house (Shiromi)
Time : 12.00 a.m.

Vineetha is 43 years of age from the village of Raja Ela, Kothmale. Vineetha is the second of the family with two brothers and a sister. Her parents did not have stable employment and led life with a lot of financial difficulties. Vineetha had studied only up to the 9th Grade due to their poverty.

To support the family and strengthen the finances she had been doing several odd jobs and finally joined a garment factory. Her responsibility was to iron clothes. While here she met a girl who was called Anula who had joined the garment factory from another area and had become her best friend.

After some time these two became very good friends and could not live without each other. They were together always and loved each other very much. At times when they could not get any privacy to be together, they would rent a room elsewhere and stories soon started spreading around the village and the garment factory about their relationship. This ultimately became a problem in the working environment as well.

Everybody was insulting them including their family members. They both got fed up of staying at home going through all these incidents.

In the meantime, Vineetha's parents decided to give her in marriage without her consent. Her marriage had not lasted long and she had returned home ending the marriage. For this reason she had been chased out of the house and she had decided to go back to her husband as she did not have any place to go. Vineetha is now a mother of two children, but her girlfriend Anula still lives unmarried.

Case Number 10

Name of the SO : Inoka Lakmini
Date of Report : 2011.01.13
District : Nuwara-Eliya
Pseudonyms : Pushpa and Chandani
Age : Pushpa 37 years & Chandani 42 years
Time and location : between 11 – 11.00 am in a house

Pushpa is 37 and is the eldest in a family of 3 girls and had been brought up without a father. At the time of this incident she had been 22 years of age and lived in the village called Blackpool. She had been employed at a garment factory in Nuwara Eliya for a period of 2 – 3 years and had met a girl called Chandani who was 27 years then. Chandani had always wanted to talk and crack jokes with Pushpa and finally had got friendly with her. Chandani is from Ginigathena and prior to this had worked in several garment factories in Colombo. It was a known factor that she is a lesbian.

Pushpa has had many friends prior to the friendship with Chandani. Gradually the rest of Pushpa's friends avoided her company because of Chandani. They had started taking meals and traveling together and gone to the extent of staying together for 2 -3 days at Pushpa's place. This had led to the other friends around them insulting and harassing both of them. One day when Pushpa visited Chandani's place, she had been abused and assaulted by another friend. The news of their relationship had been spread around the whole factory where everyone had started abusing Pushpa and Chandani. After the above incidents, they both had not reported to work for a few days. After 3-4 days while checking with Pushpa's house they were informed that Pushpa had eloped with Chandani with all her belongings.

Later on it was found out that Pushpa had returned home after living together with Chandani for many years and had got married. Chandani is still staying unmarried.

Case Number 11

Name of the SO : M.A.F. Safron
Pseudonyms : Rani and Shanthi
Age : 39 Years & 29 Years
District : Kalutara
Date : 02.08.2011

The girl named Rani has been engaged in tailoring as a livelihood. Rani is not married although she is 39 plus. During her free time she helps her sister and cousin who run a small restaurant. Rani is pretty and looks younger than her original age 39. She is economically better-off. Though born with four sisters and a brother, Rani now resides with her elderly mother, a brother and her bosom friend Shanthi. Rani's four sisters are married and live in different places. She is a good tailor and has a good family background.

Rani is the eldest in her family. As her father died when she was small, Rani lived with her mother and siblings. As an A/L student unable to bear the family burdens, Rani went abroad where she meets and becomes bosom friends with a woman from Kandy, who is Shanthi's mother. Shanthi's mother having married at a tender age and become a mother to a girl and abandoned by her husband, had gone abroad in search of greener pastures. Shanthi's mother had been earning there for about 15 to 17 years.

Shanthi's mother sent some gifts to her daughters through Rani who returned to the country after having earned abroad for 3 years. Rani went to Kandy in search of her friend's daughter to give her these gifts. After that Rani and Shanthi visit each other as frequently as they could and their friendship became very strong.

This friendship became so strong that they felt physically and emotionally attracted to each other and could not live separately. As a result Rani, with the permission of Shanthi's mother had Shanthi move into her house with her. Shanthi helps Rani in her domestic affairs ranging from tailoring to household chores and they live under the same roof.

In the course of a few months, the relationship between them appears to be more than a normal relationship and sisters of Rani understand that it has turned out to be that of a lesbian relationship.

Due to problems cropping up at the domestic front Rani and Shanthi were separated. Now Shanthi lives in a rented house in Rani's village but they go out together constantly.

Case Number 12

Name of the SO : Y.H.S Dissanayake
Pseudonyms : Madusha and Sunila
Date of documented : April - 2011
District : Anuradhapura

I am Madusha from a rural village in Anuradhapura. I studied at an ordinary school in town. During this time I always worked with boys and my friends used to ask me why I behave like a boy. Naturally my behavior was similar to a boy. After sometime, I felt that I am getting an interest towards girls. During the time of the school sports meet we had to stay overnight in school teachers' quarters with other friends in class. One night I and another 3 girls had to sleep together and my friend by the name Gayani slept next to me. While sleeping we had an extraordinary sexual satisfaction.

This is how I started associating with girls. After sometime I stopped my school career and stayed at home in isolation. The thought of Gayani never went away from my mind. During this time I met another girl in the village and her name was Sunila. One day she visited us only when my mother, brother and sister were around. I treated her well and offered her tea. That was the first day I fell in love with Sunila. I was helpless and sad I could not express my feelings for Sunila. I did not give up hope and got the chance to go to her house when Sunila's mother fell sick and was admitted to hospital. Sunila wanted me to come to her house and sleep as she was scared to sleep alone. This was a great opportunity for two of us.

We had a lot of sexual satisfaction to the extremes where I could never forget these few days. In the meantime we found an overseas employment to work in the garment factory and we worked together abroad while enjoying ourselves with the maximum freedom for 3 years. The employment contract ended and we had to travel back to Sri Lanka together. We first thought of staying in a boarding house in Colombo and finding a job in the free trade zone, but we thought of our families and our responsibilities towards the family. By this time, a marriage proposal was brought in for me and I became helpless and had to give my consent to the marriage. Sunila too faced the same situation and had to get married to a man who was proposed by the parents. Months passed by, I became a mother of a child and my husband was a farmer. I had to live in peace with my family.

The thoughts of Sunila were still haunting me and made me very unhappy. Sunila too became a mother of twins. We meet each other occasionally but no time or space for any affection. Our relationship became a secret between me and Sunila. I am glad that we were able to share this with you who could understand us.

Case Number 13

Name of the SO : Shaymi Ayesha
District : Kalutara
Pseudonyms : Rajini and Indika
Date of Reporting : 2010.11.05
Age : 40 years (Both)

Rajini is a graduate living in Kalutara. Her mother is employed in a government office. Rajini had met Indika at the office where she first got her appointment. Gradually Rajini and Indika got very friendly and had started loving each other and had not been able to part under any circumstances. They had spent time together all the time taking meals and going about places. After sometime their behavior had been a question for others in the office and they have started passing remarks at the two and made fun of them.

After a while, Indika's parents had got the news of their relationship and had decided to give her in marriage. With the pressure of the parents and with great reluctance she had got married. Indika's husband had not known anything about the relationship his wife had with Rajini. However, Rajini and her friend continued their relationship while Indika was married. In the midst of all these Indika had got pregnant and soon reached motherhood. Rajini had treated her friend's baby with a lot of love and care.

Rajini had lived with the love of her friend and had not even thought of getting married. Rajini now says that she will never think of a marriage and will stay happily looking after her friend and her child while being a good mother to the friend's child. Her friend is now expecting her second baby. Indika's husband is not aware about this hidden relationship his wife is having with Rajini yet.

Case Number 14

Name of the SO : Abhilashini Devaraj
Pseudonyms : Arundathi
Age : 43 years
District : Nuwara Eliya
Date of documented : 2010.10.25

Arundathi received her primary education from the village school as her family was very poor. Later on, her family becomes somewhat economically better off as a result of her father finding a gem. Since Arundathi was the only female child in the family, she was admitted to a popular Girls' School in Kandy to continue her higher education.

Arundathi was not that pretty. She was admitted to a hostel. There were lots of girls in the hostel and they were from rich families. She stayed with them in the hostel. Having stayed 3 years in the same hostel and been promoted to grade 9. She said she was obsessed with the idea of same sex relationship and experiences it with another hostel girl called Yamuna, which continued for three years and at last came to light. The administrators called for the parents of the two girls and brought the matter to them and as a result Yamuna committed suicide by poison unable to bear the shame.

Afterwards, Arundathi having completed her education went back to her village. In her village also Arundathi searched for a suitable girl to suit her purpose but nobody obliged. Therefore Arundathi sought the assistance of a male to get her sexual needs satisfied. Arundathi's husband died and she married a second time due to her parents' persuasion. She also expressed her desires to continue her same sex affairs with a suitable girl.

Arundathi said that she doesn't derive any sexual pleasure from her husband but she keeps quiet and obliges her husband's sexual appeals. Arundathi also said still she badly needs love of a female partner. Arundathi also said she has been suffering unable to disclose her problems to anyone.

Case Number 15

Name of the SO : Y.H.S Dissanayake
Pseudonyms : Susima and Tharaka
Date of documented : March 2011
District : Anuradhapura

My name is Susima and I'm from a well to do family in Galle Town. I am the only girl in the family with two brothers and my parents are still living. I always desired to live like a boy since my childhood. I studied up to Advanced level in a famous school in Galle.

After my secondary education I followed a course in pharmaceuticals and successfully completed it. During this period I realized that I have a desire for affection towards my same sex.

One day I came across a vacancy in the newspaper for trainee pharmacists in the Anuradhapura district. I applied for this job without anybody's knowledge and started working in the Pharmacy while staying in an Annex for rent. I tried hard to find the right female partner for me, but ended up with no luck. I did not lose hope.

Whilst going on with the life in the pharmacy, one day I met a well-dressed lady who came to purchase some drugs and we got in to a conversation. I asked her where she lives and she replied without any hesitation. Also this lady invited me to her house on a holiday. Her invitation was so precious to me. One day I visited her for tea and enjoyed her company and returned home with constant thoughts of her.

Gradually we became good friends and so much so that we could not wait without seeing each other often. Her name is Tharaka and she holds a good position in a government institution. Now Tharaka too visits me often at my boarding place and we satisfy ourselves physically and enjoy. After sometime, Tharaka's parents started bringing in marriage proposals for her which she refused.

Tharaka bought a land with some money she had collected and built a small house with two rooms during which period she proposed herself to me. Tharaka said that she built the house for two of us and for me to stay with her. I informed my parents of our decision to live together and my parents bluntly disregarded us and told me not to sight them thereafter.

I too said goodbye to the job at the Pharmacy and stayed at the boarding place. After some time I too bought a small paddy field for lease and harvested. With the money I earned from paddy harvest we both occupied the house built by Tharaka. We faced many problems while living together under one roof, but we faced them with courage and solved many problems. Tharaka's parents and the family too knew our relationship and scolded us. We both live with a good understanding.

In the meantime, Tharaka's parents too died and her brothers and sisters came to live with us too. Revealing our relationship with the family was a great relief to us and we lead a good family life. We constantly face many obstacles and insults from the society.

Case Number 16

Name : A. M. Swarnalatha
Reporting Date : 2011.04.25
District : Anuradhapura
Pseudonyms : Daya and Thusitha
Age : Daya 48 Years
Interview date/time : 2011.04.06 / 10.00 a.m

Daya is married, 48 years of age and a mother of four children. Her husband is no longer living and two of her children are married and the other two are employed in Colombo leaving Daya home alone. The children had been very small at the time of her husband's demise and she had been 28 years old then. After all these incidents had taken place in the early stages of her life and due to financial crisis her life too went astray.

At the same time Daya's best friend's, Thusitha's husband too died suddenly and she was left alone with a child. Their friendship strengthened while Thusitha's son too went away for employment. When they felt lonely Thusitha came to Daya's house and they slept together and gradually started a sexual relationship. Later on they could not live without each other. Their relationship still continues to date. They feel bad and frightened that their children and the village people will get to know about their relationship. Daya leads a troublesome life and she suffered a lot when her husband was living and started suffering in the aftermath of his death. She lives with anxiety of what the society will do. Daya feels ashamed if her lesbian relationship is revealed to the children and her parents.

Case Number 17

Name of the SO : Y.H.S Dissanayake
Pseudonyms : Samantha and Chandra
Interview date/time : March - 2011
District : Anuradhapura

I am Samantha living in Eppawala in the district of Anuradhapura with my parents and five brothers. I am the only girl in the family. Paddy field harvesting is my father's occupation. I always liked to wear male clothing whenever my father and brothers are not around. Within two to three years of my father passing away, all my brothers got married and settled down with their wives. Me and my mother were left alone at home.

Time passed by and one day we organized a "Paduru Party" at home and one girl by the name of Ireen came to the party. Ireen stayed the night that day and we slept together in the same bed. That night we physically enjoyed with her consent. After that we had sexual satisfaction whenever we got the chance. This was only for a short period and Ireen did not show up after sometime. I found it very boring and lonely when I am at home and I had physical satisfaction with 5 others – Kamala, Latha, Soma, Renu and Jayanthi. I had a sexual relationship with them very often and was limited to a short period.

A few months later, my brothers brought in a marriage proposal for me and I was compelled to give my consent to a person born in Nittambuwa and living with us in the same village.

In the meantime, the wedding took place with my reluctance, but I was helpless in front of my family. After the wedding we settled down at his house. My husband had a sister by the name of Chandra who is unmarried. I liked her. Whenever my husband is not at home I go with his sister to bathe and I really enjoyed those moments. One day while we were bathing I volunteered to apply soap on her back. While doing so I felt her breast just to check whether she would react positively. Her response was positive and we hugged each other in the water with love.

I could not sleep that night; lost in two worlds between my husband and Chandra. I could not get Chandra off of my mind thinking about her and pursuing a relationship with her. One day my husband left for Nittambuwa for work and was going to stay at his sister's place for 5 days. Chandra and I were thus left alone to enjoy each other's company for this duration. Before my husband was due back from Nittambuwa, Chandra and I decided that Chandra should be boarded at a friend's house on the pretext that she has gone for work to a garment factory. This we hoped would give us the freedom to meet each other without encumbrance. After that we would keep seeing each other on the sly, even after my husband's return.

Later on I confessed to my husband that I married him because of the pressure from my family and without my full consent. I made him understand that I dislike men and I am attracted to women only. I decided to tell him the truth because I wanted to get away from him. My husband understood my situation and put a stop to our marriage with a mutual understanding. Now I am happily staying at home meeting Chandra often. It is almost two years for our affair now and I bring her home for a couple of days and send her back. Gradually when I bring her home she did not go back but stayed with me. Chandra is my wife now and does all the work of a housewife and looks after me well. I am Chandra's husband and we make our living by paddy field harvesting. We lead a happy family life.

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Women Defining Peace



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