



LESBIAN AND BISEXUAL

WOMEN'S HEALTH: COMMON CONCERNS, LOCAL ISSUES



ILGA is a worldwide network of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender organizations working for human rights and against sexual orientation and gender identity discrimination

FOREWORD

It gives me great pleasure to introduce the ILGA Report on Lesbian and Bisexual Women's Health. A great deal of hard work and dedication has gone into making this publication; and we take this opportunity to thank Novib and Hivos for supporting our vision and the Belgian Foundation against Cancer, Astraea and Mama Cash for sponsoring the project. Our thanks also go to the many individuals and organizations that have contributed to make this publication possible.

Most LGBT and women's health research does not take lesbian and bisexual women's specific issues into consideration. ILGA has collected material from organizations and individuals worldwide to share this information and to describe what is being done for the mental and physical wellbeing of lesbian and bisexual women.

The report contains a compendium of information ranging from health-specific topics, such as HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections, to addressing the political and social problems of forced marriage, rape, and domestic violence. Of particular interest is the interview of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Health, Paul Hunt, who underlines how organizations can address their concerns to the various UN agencies. Also included are an overview of the results of the ground-breaking LGBT health survey conducted by ILGA-EUROPE and the Modidi Survey of Italian women.

Recognizing that the organizations using this report may be searching for financial and organizational support themselves, we hope that the list of funders supporting women and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender projects throughout the world will be useful.

ILGA will disseminate the information contained in this report to organizations and professionals who are concerned with the lives of lesbian and bisexual women.

We wish for the future to further develop the project on lesbian and bisexual women's health. In the meantime, we hope you will enjoy discovering the present report.

Sincerely,

Rosanna Flamer-Caldera
Co-Secretary General
ILGA

ILGA's Women's project is funded by

n(o)vib
OXFAM NETHERLANDS

The International Lesbian and Gay Association is also supported by

HIVOS **IBM**

ILGA, Rue du Marché au Charbon, 81 - B-1000 Brussels, Belgium
Tel/Fax : +32 (0)2 502 2471 - ilga@ilga.org - www.ilga.org

Index

LESBIAN AND BISEXUAL WOMEN'S HEALTH: COMMON CONCERNS, LOCAL ISSUES

Foreword

Index

Introduction

UN Human Rights Mechanisms: putting women's health on the agenda	06
- An interview with Special Rapporteur on Health, Paul Hunt	
- United Nations Population Fund and their work on women's health	
Control over Women's Bodies	12
- Rape as a form of control over women	
- Women's control over their sexual lives	
- Forced marriage	
Sexually transmitted infections and HIV/AIDS	18
- Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)	
- HIV/AIDS and gender-based violence	
- Material from local organizations	
Breast and Gynecological Cancer	26
- Getting the care you deserve	
- A war against women	
- Material from local organizations	
Violence against Women	34
- Taking same sex domestic violence seriously	
- Material from local organizations	
Mental Health	40
- The slippery nature of lesbian health	
- Material from local organizations	
Health Care Provision	46
- A survey conducted by ILGA-Europe	
- The first broad research on the health of lesbian and bisexual women in Italy	
- Material from local organizations	
Sexual Pleasure	54
- Sexual education	
- Women's body and pleasure: a chancy encounter	
- Material from local organizations	
Funders	58
Findings and Recommendations	66
Acknowledgements	67



Introduction

Lesbian and bisexual women's health is a concern for many women worldwide, but the information available on the subject is not as widely spread as one would expect it to be. When, in June 2005, I issued a call for material on ILGA's website and disseminated it to LGBT and women's organizations, I did not imagine that I would receive such a response.

It was a positive surprise to receive so much material: prevention campaigns, training seminars, studies, publications, articles, leaflets, postcards from countries all over the world, some of which I would not have expected, challenged my own stereotypes.

The present report reflects the material we received and does not claim to be exhaustive. From the material gathered, we highlighted issues that seem to be of concern for a majority of lesbian and bisexual women's organizations, issues such as breast and uterus cancer. We also tried to address subjects that are still a taboo, such as same sex domestic violence.

It was especially important to me to give the opportunity to women in each region who sent some outstanding material to illustrate their initiatives and speak about a specific health issue, either by replying to an interview or by writing a text. Some are university researchers, others activists or women's project coordinators. All of them are committed to the fight for lesbian, bisexual and - more broadly - women's rights to health and wellbeing.

Though some of the material and articles are of interest for transgender women, their specific health problems would deserve a separate report in itself. We decided, this time, to focus on lesbian and bisexual women's health; and we hope to have the opportunity to issue a similar report for transgender women in the future.

When doing this project I searched in vain for an international platform that would gather the work done for lesbian and bisexual women's health. It is a pity, considering the great value of the results achieved by women locally for their community. This report is meant to act as a platform and facilitate the dissemination of the information collected.

I hope that LGBT and women's organizations will use ILGA's report as a reference and that they will communicate with each other to learn, share information, experience and, why not, replicate and be inspired by the valuable initiatives that have been undertaken by others locally.

I personally learnt, enjoyed, dropped some stereotypes and, above all, strengthened my faith in women's capacity to be creative in order to fight for our own wellbeing. I hope you will get as much pleasure in reading the texts as I did, and that you will realize that local health issues are indeed common concerns for all of us.

Patricia Curzi

Women's Project Coordinator
ILGA

