



Prepared by Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender organization 'Labrys'
(Kyrgyz Republic)

SHADOW REPORT

DISCRIMINATION AND VIOLENCE AGAINST LESBIAN AND BISEXUAL WOMEN AND TRANSGENDER PEOPLE IN Uzbekistan

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LGBT Organization ‘Labrys’ is a non-governmental organization in Kyrgyzstan that works to empower Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender people and protect their human rights since 2004. ‘Labrys’ provides services for over 400 lesbian, bisexual women and transgender people (LBT) in Kyrgyz Republic. Since 2008 Labrys started to work on documenting the situation of lesbian, bisexual women and transgender people in other countries in Central Asia. This report is based on interviews with lesbian and bisexual women from Uzbekistan and secondary sources research. The large part of the report was written by the Uzbek lesbian women themselves and translated from Russian and edited by Labrys.

Introduction

Uzbekistan signed a number of international conventions and expressed its commitment to protection of women’s human rights on different occasions. This report covers groups of women that have vulnerable status in Uzbek society because of their sexuality. It highlights the issues of forced marriages, family violence, lack of protection from discrimination in employment,

Overall the situation of lesbian and bisexual women reflects issues women generally face in Uzbekistan. As most of women’s activities are tied to their natal or husband’s family, women who are disowned by their family because of their sexuality, lose social privileges of financial support and presence in social networks necessary to support their wellbeing and living expenses.

Article 2a

Invisibility and institutionalized discrimination

The Constitution of Uzbekistan provides a good legal framework for addressing women’s issues. However, the legislation does not mention the issues that women experience based on their sexuality. None of the government official sources mention sexuality-based discrimination. Independent media sources report that homosexuality is one of the topics forbidden for the media¹. violence against women based on their sexuality

Article 2 d

Uzbek government through its official media outlets and state-funded media outlets has expressed its disapproval of alternative sexualities and called for censorship of information related to them.² Uzbek press agency ‘Press-Uz.info’ which provides an overview of international news to Uzbek audiences, expressed its support of the police raid of Labrys office and criticized international organizations for perceiving homosexuality as a normal sexual orientation in a series of news items that use foul language to describe lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people.³ Given current environment of fear that non-governmental organizations function due to government restrictions on their activity, the statements above may hinder any type of action related to addressing violence, discrimination and sexual harassment of women based on their sexuality. Lesbian and bisexual women are not able to organize in Uzbekistan due to fear of government persecution.

Recommendations

- Take necessary measures to address statements by state officials, media and religious institutions that encourage discrimination of women based on their sexuality

¹ <http://www.ferghana.ru/article.php?id=2982> (accessed 25 November 2009)

² Article by Ildar Mudarisov ‘Against inspirituality’ by 19 January 2006 <http://old.narodnoeslovo.uz/cgi-bin/index.cgi?a=cult&c=show&id=170> (Accessed 25 November 2009)

³ ‘Americans Protect Pederasts’ <http://press-uz.info/index.php?title=home&nid=544&my=042008&st=0> (Accessed 25 November 2009)

- Educate the public and government officials about sexual orientation as an integrated part of people's identities
- Provide a friendly environment for NGOs working on the issues of sexuality and women's rights;
- promulgate a law to regulate the activities of civil society organizations that is in full accordance with international human rights standards as ratified by Uzbekistan;
- Develop awareness raising campaign about social vulnerability of women based on their sexuality;

Employment discrimination

Article 2e

In 2008 a lesbian woman had to leave her job at a private medical clinic because the clinic refused to pay her a three-months salary that put her under severe financial burden. She was not able to address this case to court because of the fear of repercussions because the owner of the clinic belonged to powerful 'Adolat' party. This case illustrates the overall situation for women in employment. Lesbian women are more likely to experience discrimination and be fired from their jobs without proper compensation. State-run institutions are reported to have even fewer options for addressing discrimination and inequality in salary or work environment claims. Instability at work and inability to address their concerns contributes to poverty that many young unmarried women live in. Cases of sexual harassment at work particularly towards lesbian women who were open about their sexuality have been reported. Similarly, there is no mechanism to address sexual harassment claims.

There is a documented case of a 24-year-old ethnic Russian lesbian woman who experienced sexual harassment from a government official (State Department of Visas and Registration) while performing her employment duties. She came to the State Department of Visas and Registration office to register a client of her company and was informed by the staff member that he would only perform his duties in return for sexual services. The woman informed him that she was not interested because of her sexuality. But the harassment continued, the official tried to push her against the wall and kiss in his office. The situation continued for a while until the woman was promoted and did not have to communicate with this official anymore. Now this woman wears a fake wedding ring to avoid further harassment. Married women are perceived as the property of their husband's family and, therefore, may face less harassment.

In 2008 26-year-old ethnic Tatar lesbian woman who worked as an electrician was dismissed from her job after two months of work. She was the only woman in the electricians' team and the official reason for firing her was downsizing but five male electricians were hired afterwards. This case illustrates how gender stereotypes affect the situation of women who choose areas of employment traditionally performed by men. This has a negative impact on lesbian women that prefer traditionally male jobs for a number of reasons, sometimes because of their masculine appearance, sometimes because there are fewer questions asked about their sexual orientation.

High rates of unemployment, sexual harassment and discrimination in employment lead a number of lesbian women to unwanted marriages or relationships with men for financial reasons. The same reasons lead to high levels of migration and trafficking to richer countries among lesbian women.

Article 6

A lot of lesbian and bisexual women are forced to migrate to other countries either to afford living independently specifically to secure housing. Trafficking reportedly may involve high level

government officials. Most lesbian and bisexual women would want to leave Uzbekistan because of their vulnerable position in Uzbek society. Due to this, they are likely to be trafficked because they are actively seeking employment abroad.

Article 11.1 C

According to surveyed women, it is unlikely for them to be promoted at work unless their family member occupies an important post. Nepotism and gender stereotypes limit women's ability to secure employment and seek better jobs.

Recommendations:

- Uzbek government should develop legislation and mechanisms of its implementation to prevent discrimination of women in employment both in private and public sectors.
- Uzbek government should take special measures to secure employment for both married and unmarried women that provides sufficient income for them to be financially independent.

Uzbek traditions and sexuality

Articles 5a and 5b

Forced marriages

As indicated earlier, women in Uzbekistan are expected to belong to a family. The families make decisions for women and as a woman especially of young age you have no choice but to obey your family. Relatives of lesbian women as young as 20 pressure them into entering unwanted marriages. The usual scenario for ethnic Uzbek women is either to enter a marriage with a heterosexual man and then leave it if her family accepts her back or marry a gay man.

In 2009 20-year old ethnic Uzbek lesbian woman was pressured into a marriage with a man due to her mother's older sister's intention to make sure that she is not an 'old maiden'. After a week following the marriage the woman came back home because her mother is accepting of her sexuality, yet insisted on following the marriage tradition in order to avoid family pressure. Being a lesbian is considered to be shame for the family and when relatives found out about it, they were shocked and put a lot of pressure on the mother. Some relatives sexually harassed the 19-year-old woman. She does not see her future in Uzbekistan and wants to move to another country.

In rural communities the situation is worse because the communities are smaller and extended families live in the same area which helps them maintain control over their 'misbehaving' young women relatives. If a young woman does not conform to her relatives' expectations and pressure specifically in relation to getting married and being obedient, she becomes an outcast which immediately throws her into poverty. Some of the ways out for lesbian women are to be an 'old maiden' and be harassed by both married and unmarried men because the common assumption is that women need to have sex with men to feel as women even if it is by force.

Another option is to move to the capital city and not keep in touch with their family and rely on yourself for financial support in a society where women's income is considered to be secondary because usually they are supported by their natal family or their husband's family. Finally there is a possibility to opt out of marriage by becoming a traditional healer. However, majority of lesbian women in rural areas get married because of the pressure from their family. These marriages may lead to suicide because women are unhappy because of their sexuality and general dynamic of family relations in Uzbek families that involve coercion, pressure and guilt.

Out of 30 women mostly living in the capital city who were surveyed for the purposes of this report, two ethnic Uzbek women were completely rejected by their families, in about twenty cases (mostly

ethnic Russian women) the parents accepted their daughters' sexuality after a while and in 8 cases the families ignore their daughters and exert control through psychological and financial pressure. There are no documented cases of self-immolation among lesbian and bisexual women but it is very hard to reach these women in rural areas, therefore, the cases are never reported or documented.

Out of the surveyed women three-fourths experienced sexual violence either at home or on the street but most commonly at home which is almost considered to be a norm. Almost all women mentioned being sexually harassed by men at some point in their lives.

Recommendations:

- Uzbek government should conduct public campaigns to raise awareness about gender stereotypes specifically in relation to marriage;
- Uzbek government should investigate the discrimination and harassment of women based on their sexuality and take appropriate measures to prevent further cases of violence and discrimination along with duly punishing those responsible for inflicting them;
- Develop and take measures to address social norms which contribute to prejudice and