

# ZERO VIOLENCE

1000  
LEGAL CASES

SEX WORKERS

553

513

LGBT PEOPLE

MORE THAN DOUBLE  
THE PREVIOUS YEAR

## Transforming access to justice for marginalised communities facing domestic violence

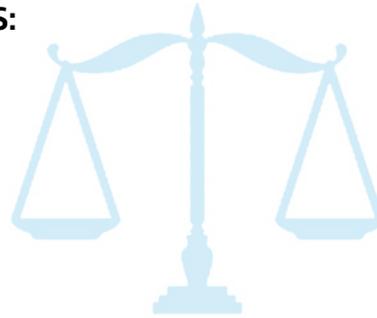
Domestic violence is still prevalent in Uganda, despite laws and policies to protect victims and survivors of domestic violence. The Uganda 2016 Demographic and Health Survey found that over half of married women reported ever having experienced violence from a spouse, and 39.6% had experienced it within the past year. Yet only 13,196<sup>1</sup> reports of domestic violence were handled by the Police in 2019 – showing that domestic violence is severely under reported.<sup>2</sup> The situation is even worse for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transexual (LGBT) people and sex workers because of criminalisation and the ensuing stigma and discrimination. COVID-19 and Uganda's national elections further exacerbated violence against LGBT people and sex workers. For example, in 2020, HRAPF's legal aid clinic received and handled over 1000 cases of violence (553 sex workers and 513 LGBT persons) more than double the number reported in 2019.<sup>3</sup> As a result, many people suffered in silence with no one to turn to for support or even share their stories with.



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AS EDWARD MWEBAZA,  
DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF HRAPF EXPLAINS:

“ *Our approach has changed from focusing only on cases of arrests and violence outside the domestic setting to handling cases of domestic violence amongst LGBT persons and sex workers as well. This has taught us that there are so many cases of domestic violence that happen within the LGBT and sex worker community and many of them are suffering in silence. This realisation has led us to incorporating psychosocial support and counselling into our legal aid approach as many of these cases come with trauma and emotional stress.* ”



HRAPF set up its legal aid clinic in 2010 to protect the rights of these marginalised communities. Until recently, the clinic had focused on responding to violations that happen outside the domestic sphere because these were the most visible cases, and the ones that received most attention. But since taking part in the Zero Violence Project<sup>4</sup>, the legal aid clinic has transformed its ability to tackle domestic violence cases among sex workers and the LGBT community. Altogether, 102 community based paralegals have been trained on the legal framework governing domestic violence and how this applies to sexual minorities; 311 sex workers and 357 LGBT people have also gained knowledge on the laws and policies related to domestic violence through awareness sessions, which have led to more clients opening up to lawyers and paralegals about domestic violence incidences.

SEX WORKERS

311

357

+ LGBT PEOPLE

HAVE ALSO GAINED KNOWLEDGE  
ON THE LAWS AND POLICIES  
RELATED TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE  
THROUGH AWARENESS SESSIONS

Musa Bukenya sensitising  
group of 80 LGBT members  
of Kuchu Shiners Uganda on  
domestic violence in March  
2021. The group is mostly  
transgender people



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Thanks to the knowledge and skills gained through the training, some paralegals have already reported success in handling domestic violence cases. One paralegal working with sex workers for example described how she was able to sensitively handle a case following the training:

“ ***I was able to help my fellow sex worker who had been a victim of domestic violence for over two years. She was living with her boyfriend who would deny her and her children food and other basic needs. When the boyfriend learnt that she was engaged in sex work to provide for her children, he started beating her repeatedly but she could not report because she thought there was no way out until I shared some knowledge with her and colleagues after the HRAPF training. Last week, he beat her so badly that she sustained serious injuries and she was able to open up to me. Using the knowledge obtained from the training, I was able to advise her to report the case... I also counselled her and advised her about how domestic violence is a cycle that might even lead to death and why she may need to move out of the relationship if it persisted. Although she later shied away from prosecuting the case further, she has been able to make a decision to end the relationship with the violent man. Because of the knowledge gained from HRAPF's domestic violence training, I was able to understand the case better, offer better legal advice and take the right legal steps for the sex worker.*** ”

The paralegal Musa Bukenya (front row, right) with his fellow LGBT paralegals upon completing the domestic violence training



Sarah Nanfuka, the paralegal who handled the above case presenting her group's findings on the role of paralegals in addressing domestic violence cases during the domestic violence training

Another paralegal working with the LGBT community who attended the training disclosed that were it not for the training he attended, he would never have known that he was being violated by his partner:

“ ***The domestic violence training was of perfect timing in my life because I was personally undergoing a domestic violence situation where my partner was psychologically torturing me but I did not know that this was violence. Realising that many of my colleagues might be facing similar situations, I utilised the opportunity at a function to share the knowledge that I had gained with fellow community members. The HRAPF training helped me to realise the forms of domestic violence and the solutions available to victims of domestic violence like myself.*** ”

These stories illustrate how widespread and under reported domestic violence is amongst LGBT people and sex workers. They also show how the Zero Violence Project has shifted HRAPF's approach to better handle cases of domestic violence and how these communities themselves have become more alert to such cases, armed with greater confidence and skills to tackle them effectively.

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- 1 <https://www.upf.go.ug/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Annual-Crime-Report-2019-Public.pdf?x45801>
- 2 Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS) and ICF. Uganda demographic and health survey 2016: key indicators report. Kampala, Uganda and Rockville, Maryland: UBOS and ICF; 2018
- 3 In 2019 431 cases in 2019 (226 sex workers and 205 LGBT persons) were reported to HRAFP, compared to 1066 in 2020.
- 4 Zero Violence was a six-month project (October 2020 to March 2021) that built and strengthened sustainable legal capacity to address and reduce violence and discrimination against women and girls and LGBT people across the Commonwealth. It was a joint partnership between Frontline AIDS and ActionAid, and was funded by the UK Government Conflict, Security and Stability Fund (CSSF), under the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.

