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UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES

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CHALLENGES FACED BY AFRICAN SEXUAL MINORITIES IN HELSINKI

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2013 Otaniemi



Laurea University of Applied Sciences
Otaniemi

CHALLENGES FACED BY AFRICAN SEXUAL MINORITIES IN HELSINKI

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Degree Programme in Social Services
Bachelor's Thesis
November, 2013

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Challenges facing African sexual minorities in Helsinki

Year	2013	Pages	42
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The purpose of this study was to chronicle the life situations and challenges faced by African sexual minorities living within Helsinki with a bias of lesbians, gays and bisexuals (LGB).

This study utilized qualitative research approach with semi-structured focus group interviews as the method of data collection incorporating discussion with 7 participants and transcription of the tape recorded data to identify key themes. It involved two group discussions to cater for both orientation and consistency. The data was analyzed through concept analysis to search answers to the question: what challenges do black LGB individuals face while living in Helsinki?

The study found common emergent themes of racism, abuse and violence were evident leading to discrimination. The subjects faced difficulties in interacting with authorities hence their reluctance to come out to express their plight. Due to such underlying issues the study found that psychological stress was experienced by this group owing to their marginalization. The study was limited to a small group in Helsinki due to unavailability of a large sample and was carried out with the incorporation of the largest rights watch body in Finland (SETA) relating LGB individuals, through their litigation and advocacy activities, legal support, training and rehabilitation, this findings will play an important role in designation of improved policy that governs such sexual minorities.

Key words: black sexual minorities, rights equality, sexual identity, sexual orientation, anti-oppressive theory

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Keywords row 54

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1 Introduction

Lesbians, gays, and bisexual people exist as a large heterogeneous group that is represented in all scales on the spectrum of ethnicity, age, social class, disability, religious and spiritual orientations, and sex and gender roles. LGB ethnic group membership and sexual orientation are only two of the multiple identities that group members have; and in the general studies of these groups, these have been the main parameters that have been explored. However all of their identities will influence their experience of being gay, lesbian or bisexual in a racist and heterosexist society. Parallels can be drawn between them and their heterosexual counterparts, about how both their identities are shaped by assimilated cultural imperatives, unique to their relationships, as well as the cultural practices and values associated with the groups they identify with. A well-reviewed research and scholarship on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGB) will often yield limited research in Finland. Indeed, scholars lament the lack of research on LGB in general (Bieschke, Eberz & Wilson, 2000). Most people rely on intuition, emotion and popular knowledge when addressing concerns regarding sexual orientation and gender identity. It is with this in mind that this study is inspired as it is imperative that there is need for more work in this limitedly studied topic in a country where discrimination of assorted form has been a hot topic. In Finland for example where other cases of discrimination have been evident on the basis of race and religion, the parameter of sexual orientation differing with what is considered normal would most likely end in more hostility and disagreement. Other studies concerning racial discrimination have been done (Virtanen 2006) but they have not been directly dedicated to deal with discrimination as a result of sexual orientation and more so being African in nature. This study has the key prerogative of evaluating the specific challenges which LGB Africans undergo in their contemporary lives. The driving factor for the study is the limited research existing on the specific subject of African LGB. Through this, the expectation is to create an impact and offer another perspective to the general view of the LGB people in the common citizens' eyes. By involving SETA which is the umbrella advocacy organisation on LGBT groups in Finland we hope to create a credible approach in progressing the existing situation in the country on issues of sexual minorities, more so African LGB. Based on these technicalities, the interest of this study is to seek more insight into lives of African LGB living in Helsinki, Finland. This is because there has not been a wide coverage in the past on their lifestyle and their everyday struggles. The interest of this study is not to exhaustively explore all the details and intricacies surrounding African LGB in Finland, but to portray the existence of an underlying problem that needs to be addressed. It is my feeling that it has become a pertinent issue calls for attention.

2 Background information

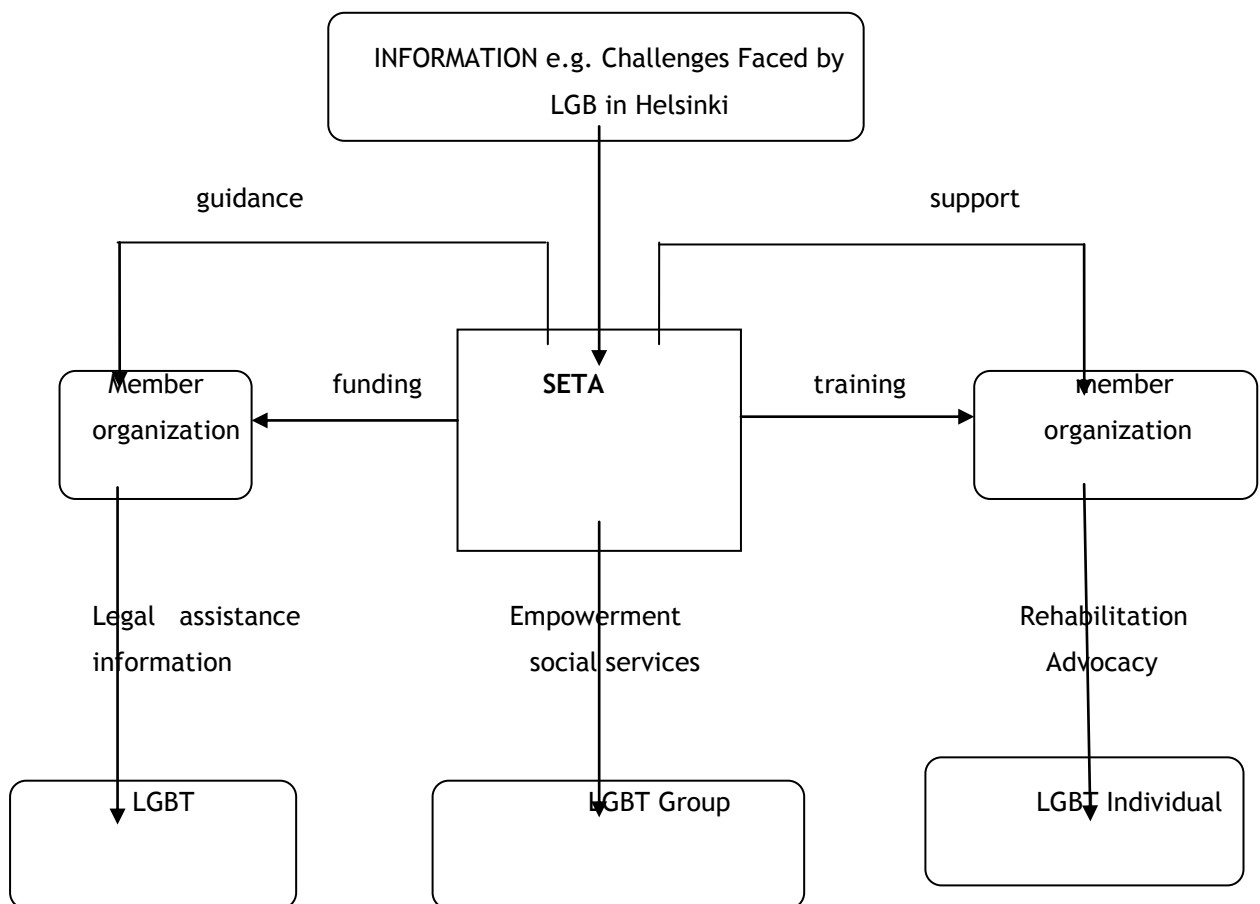
Social equality is among the major challenges of the 21st century. Achieving it will necessitate changes for many. It will involve changes in structures, institutions, and the transformations of daily lives whereby the practices of diversity can more readily flourish on a day to day basis in all actions and aspects of human existence. There have been reports of discrimination on the basis of racism in Finland (Virtanen, 1996) but little literature exists on the specificity of the reports based on ethnical backgrounds. As such this study will create a platform for future research and documentation of the material topic and hopefully inspire more scholarly work on discrimination arising from LGB individuals from other ethnicities.

In 1974 SETA (seksuaalinenTasavertaisuus ry.) was set up to pursue and protect the rights of sexual minorities in Finland. 27th of July in 1974 Seta organized the first sexual minority protest, it was organized to resist the Helsinki Old Church's youth worker Seppo Kivistö's firing. After this SETA has organised "Pride days" and from the year 2000 Helsinki Pride has continued this tradition. Their main principle that they base their work on, is the right to equality in the society no matter what your sexual orientation is or what your sexual identity is. SETA services are available to homosexuals, lesbians, bisexuals, transsexuals and transvetities. SETA is a private organization that operates through donations and their service fees. Most of their workers are volunteer workers, and they are the force that keeps the organization going. Still up to this day the organization is going on strong. They provide the support and acceptance that many struggling with their sexuality need. SETA is made up of a decision-making body; the annual Representatives' assembly (edustajakokous). SETA has a chairperson, two vice-chairpersons, five board members and two substitute board members.. Members of the board participate in Seta's advocacy and act as representatives of the organization in numerous bodies and conferences. Board members also participate in Seta's internal working groups. SETA has 21 member organizations throughout the country with Some operating nationwide and some on a local or regional level. Seta is a major member of the following organizations: ILGA-Europe, Transgender Europe, IGLYO, SOSTE, Finnish Youth Cooperation -Allianssi, Family Federation of Finland.

SETA is mandated with the task of providing training and support to volunteers to work in this field through their member organization. SETA involves itself with gathering information about issues concerning LGBT COMMUNITY IN Finland. They then use this information and device framework to find amicable solutions in a program that involves rehabilitation legal and social services. They provide support networks to LGBT through telephone hotlines and peer support where information can be disseminated. SETA also offers funding and guidance into developing work programs to its member groups to deal with LGBT related issues. With this in mind it's my hope that this study by evaluating the specific challenges faced by African LGB

people in Helsinki region will contribute to SETA as the life working partner in furthering their endeavor on the matter. The suitability of this study to SETA is because it touches on both issues of racial identity and gender identity of which are the pillars by which SETA operates. It is therefore my sincere hope that the information in this study will create a point of reference for SETA to proceed from, or offer insight to any existing one as linked to the subject. The significance of this document to SETA can be summarized in the diagram below.

Figure 1



Seta is an expert on the diversity of sexual orientation and gender. We keep ourselves updated with the latest knowledge in the field, run development work and operate a comprehensive training service for professionals in health and social services, students, youth and others about issues concerning the lives of people belonging to LGB minorities. Organized and supported by Seta, the member organizations also offer training by volunteers in the regions. Through a comprehensive data base that holds crucial data on the subject, dissemination of information that aided this research in terms of the current situation in Finland was obtained.

The contact made in Seta assisted this research to identify the key areas to zero in. And hence the choice of black sexual minorities as the context of this thesis. SETA provided all the necessary materials including articles and advice needed. Seta and I arranged frequent discussion meetings on the progress of the research and were in constant communication. This research was written in close conjunction with SETA national Transgender Support Centre which provides individual legal and social services to LGB , transgendered and intersexed people and their intimates. In many regions, the member organizations offer telephone hot-lines and peer support groups for LGBTI people. Some of the member organizations also provide social worker reception.

Seta also works closely with the Ministry of Education in Finland which Finances its youth work. This focuses on training youth work professionals and others to enable them to take into account the diversity of youth and their families at schools and in all public services involving youth. It is crucially important that every young person gets positive and adequate information about the diversity of sexual orientation and gender by all institutions bodies carrying rearing responsibility. Seta serves its member organizations by the means of training, guidance and development work. It also supports member organizations in their youth work, volunteer work and their role as employers through an elaborate funding system. The significance of Seta in this research is a give and take scenario where by utilizing the findings and new information in this research, the organization updates its data on the subject, in proviso that limited sources for this kind of sensitive information exists. (www.seta.fi)

3 Literature Review

3.1 History of LGB Development in Finland

According to the Finnish Constitution everyone is equal before the law. The equality before the law is enacted in the section 6 as well as the general prohibition of discrimination. Gender is mentioned in the actual law text. Sexual orientation falls clearly under the “other reason” as clarified in the documentation of the constitutional reform in 1998.

Discrimination is further prohibited in several Acts of which some such as criminal law clearly mention sexual orientation and gender.

Two key pieces of legislation governing discrimination based on sexual orientation is the **Equality Act (2004)**. Discrimination based on gender identity and expression is partly governed by the **Act on Equality between Women and Men (1986/2005)**. **Both acts have disadvantages.**

The Act on Equality between Women and Men mentions only transsexual persons. The law should be rewritten to specify to what extent it and the work and powers of gender equality body (Ombudsman for Gender Equality) covers transgender people other than transsexuals.

The Equality Act provides different level of protection for different grounds. In terms of ethnic origin (or nationality) the scope of the law and the practical tools to prevent discrimination are wider than in terms of other grounds such as disability and sexual orientation. In the field of sexual orientation and disability the law only covers employment and education; in the field of field of ethnic origin it also covers goods and services. Moreover, the work and powers of the equality body (Ombudsman for Minority Rights) only covers ethnic origin and not sexual orientation.

Effective anti-oppressive policy can only be based on adequate information on discrimination in society. In Finland, lack of information is often related to the lack of sufficient support systems and prevention programs. A national study of *Discrimination in Finland 2006* also re-gencies the problem: "In reforming the Non-discrimination Act, it is essential to assure that an authorized representative or responsible authority is clearly defined for every ground of discrimination. Whatever the manner in which the monitoring is executed, it is essential to guarantee that the supervisory body or bodies have an independent position and sufficient resources to operate, as well as thorough expertise in every ground of discrimination." (<http://www.finlex.fi>)

The sponsors of such legislations are usually LGBT rights movements. Again the significance of this study to SETA comes out clearly here. Since the study is seeking to find out challenges faced by African LGB living in The Helsinki region in Finland it will consequently provide information to SETA on areas of interest in terms enactments of legislation in favor of this group. Also it will highlight areas in the social system in Finland that needs review so as to offer Social services to African LGB.

3.2 Definition of Sexual Minorities

Society generally believes that most of the people are heterosexual in nature and differentiating from this belief is often seen as abnormal. Sexual minorities are those who have a sexual orientation that is different from social standards. Heterosexuality means that one feels romantic, erotic and sexual affection towards the opposite sex. Homosexuality on the other hand means that an individual can feel romantic, erotic and sexual affection towards his/hers own sex (Lehtonen 2006, 12; Sateenkaariyhteisötry 2006- 2011).

In this paper, the term 'sexual minorities' will be used to mean the people who are in various stages of development in their psychosocial, gender, sexual and cultural identity.(Harris 1997,

31). Therefore African sexual minorities will refer to sexual minorities with an African background.

Sexual minorities include gays, lesbians, bi-sexual and transgender people. Gays are males who identify with a same-sex sexual or affectional orientation. Lesbians are females who identify with a same-sex sexual or affectional orientation. Bisexuals are males or females who identify with both a same-sex and opposite sex sexual or affectional orientation. Transgender are individuals who are physiologically one gender but who are psychologically the opposite gender (Pope 2000, 32). Sexual orientation refers to each person's capacity for profound emotional, affectional and sexual attraction to, and intimate and sexual relations with, individuals of a different gender or the same gender or more than one gender.

Gender identity refers to each person's deeply felt internal and individual experience of gender, which may or may not correspond with the sex assigned at birth. In relation to sexual orientation, abbreviation LGB (lesbian, gay and bisexual) is used. In relation to both grounds abbreviation LGB (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender is used (Harris 2000, 32)

The fact that someone is an LGB is not always as simple as many might think. The Conventional distinction between heterosexual and an LGB is something that is quite recent and contains a complex diversity of attitudes, activities and feelings. Howard L. Hughes (2006) argues that "to some extent a gay or lesbian identity is a matter of choice." In a world where homosexual norms rule, identifying as homosexual and living a homosexual life often require reference points that are only available in so called gay space (gay scene). Gay space has important role in giving an environment and accepting the gay identity (Hughes 2006, 4)

3.3 Rights Equality

Social attitudes toward sexual minorities have undergone many changes (Virtanen, 2000, 37). In the past, sexual minorities had to cope with active anger, religious hatred, psychiatric labels, and occupational discrimination. For today's sexual minority youth, there are many positive sexual minority role models available. Today, LGB individuals appear in virtually every aspect of daily life. They are more "out" to their families and co-workers, visible in their neighbourhoods, assertive in demanding equal rights, and have moved beyond the fear and shame that used to keep most of them invisible. This change can be seen in all aspects of the media, gay-positive-statements from national and local political candidates, and in the debates within virtually all Christian denominations about the role of gay men and lesbians within the Church (Barret& Logan, 2000). A study on employees in 2003-2004 clearly shows evidence that discrimination based on sexual orientation is a substantial problem in Finland (Lehtonen, Jukka&Mustola, Kati (2004). According to the study, 12 % of more than 700 LGB respondents had faced direct bullying at work place because of their sexual orientation. 6%

had been called insulting names. In addition to that, almost half of the LGB respondents had faced insulting joking at the work place. Half of the respondents had not talked openly their orientation or same-sex relationship.

As it is seen from the above, there are overwhelming challenges faced by Africans living in Finland as has been documented. Also it is clearly evident of the existence of discrimination in terms of sexual orientation. From this knowledge then it is easy to hypothesize that the challenges outlined briefly would be compounded if an individual was both African in ethnicity and also a sexual minority.

The question therefore is emergent: what kind of challenges does an African individual living as a sexual minority face as they live in Finland? It is in trying to answer this question that the basis of this study lays, and the incorporating of SETA as the core life working partner in the project because of their articulation in both issues of in the umbrella of equality for all. Social work and activism have been the forefront determinants for change in legislation to suit the LGB people and SETA has been vividly instrumental through its advocacy and lobbying for the legislations to be formulated and implemented. This has consequently led to the improvement of legal status and protection of the LGB group. The Equality Act 2004 contains some key legislation based on sexual orientation and also ethnic origins. Yet it has not fully addressed the former to a satisfactory extent as it only covers the fields of employment and education ([Act on Equality between Women and Men \(1986/2005\)](#)).

Probably the most recent global debate is the issue of sexual minorities and their position and rights in the contemporary society. As mentioned earlier there exists a universal belief of heterosexuality as the 'ideal' way to identify sexually (D'Augelli 1994, 331). But it is also emergent that sexual identity cannot be limited to such a simple classification. Other forms of identity have been vastly documented and people who do not regard themselves to be heterosexual in nature are 'coming out' slowly with a vivid message to seek recognition as a valid group (Dawson, 2009). Much legislation does not have provisions in regard to sexual orientation and identity. If such legislation exists, it is scanty in nature. For instance in Finland such issues has been a national debate for over 35 years. The human rights situation of the LGBT people in Finland has been improving in particular during the last 35 years. Homosexuality was decriminalized in 1971. Ten years later it was removed from the illness classification list. In 1995 discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation was prohibited in the penal code. In 1999, the Criminal code was revised so that there is no difference in age limits for sexual acts and the prohibition of "promotion of homosexuality" was removed from the law. In 2001, the law on registered partnership gave same-sex couples almost same partnership rights as couples of different sex. Most significant difference relates to adoption, which is not available for same-sex couples. In 2004 the new Equality Act improved LGB people's protection against discrimination. In 2006, the law on assisted insemination was passed in the parliament. The

law allows treatments also for single women and female couples. Before the law a number of clinics had already provided treatments for female couples. (Equality Act, Finnish constitution) On the other hand, the law makes surrogacy illegal. In terms of gender identity, development has been slow and more recent. In 2002, the law on the gender confirmation of transsexual individuals came into force. Generally, this law has been seen as a modern and advanced. The reviewed act on gender equality (2005) now also covers discrimination of transsexual persons.

3.4 Anti-Oppressive Practice and LGB

A study carried out in the USA showed that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender violence victims show reluctance of reporting their cases to the relevant Authorities. This tendency can be aggravated by factors including ethnicity; immigration status, location, and income are held constant. Also the assumption of universal heterosexuality by public education campaigns reinforces this habit. This is due to the internalization of the belief that everyone should be heterosexual hence many community members do not recognize violence even when it is happening to them. Even if domestic violence is recognized as the problem, there may literally be no place for a battered lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender person to seek assistance. (The National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs, 1998)

This has been the main barrier that obscures LGBT persons to seek assistance when faced by a problem. Southall, (2002) states that such people are discriminated against during the process of seeking social service intervention therefore leaving them with a feeling of powerlessness and oppression. Oppression is the dominance of one entity over another that consequently brings about hardship and injustice to the 'lesser group' (Thomson 1997, 34). The final effect of oppression is a negative image to the victims. They are left feeling inadequate, inferior and excluded. The remedy of this situation is the empowerment and rehabilitation of the oppressed group and it is on this basis that the anti-oppressive theory works (Dalry and Burke 1995, 15). Anti-oppressive principles offer an approach to negate the impact of oppression and therefore create a balance for existence of both the oppressor and the oppressed. Social care services employ such principles to rescue service seekers from the inadequacy brought about by oppression, therefore restoring confidence and a sense of belonging to the victims (Southall, 2002). The first step in this process is the evaluation of a presented situation for insight on the extent of seriousness followed by employment of the necessary counter measures to reverse such a situation. In implementing these measures and with a focus on their outcomes, a means of empowering oppressed individual is reached. Disparity of power between dominant and dominated groups is the main cause of social differences (southall, 2002). Such differences have in general terms been classified in terms of ethnicity, gender,

social class, religion, physical ability, mental health, age and sexual preference. Such parameters in relation to and individual and viewed against social systems such as family, communities, peers and organizations will often complicate the experience of oppression. The foundation of anti-oppressive practice is to address issues social division and inequalities concerning the seekers of the service or rather the oppressed persons (Clifford, 1995). By doing so a structured interaction between the service provider and the seeker is established. This creates a platform where the negativity brought about by oppression is addressed through such an interaction. Concerns that have a high frequency of address are anti-racism, anti-sexism, anti-ageism, and anti-heterosexism. There has been more prevalence of oppression by use of color as a system of reference to people. For example since the formation of the USA, white color was viewed to be the dominant one. Therefore anyone not professing that color was seen as not to represent the deliberation of the white people and this ended up in racial oppression. Many countries have tried to embrace a culture of equality of race and ethnicity but cases of oppression have continued to occur (Hepworth and Larsen, 1993).

Another prevalent kind of oppression is sexism; the acting out of male power, or being literally chauvinistic. There has been internalization traditionally that male people are the dominant of the sexes which have been differentiated into male and female. However with emerging issues on the classification of gender recently, the rule of biological sex difference does not apply, but rather the social significance and the assignment of roles accordingly. Traditionally, men were supposed to be the rulers, head of families, the decision makers, while the females were supposed to play the subordinate role of a mere housewife. It has been a social prerogative to render such stereotypes void in the recent times. Anti-oppressive practice has been instrumental in negating such myths that trace their source to tradition through addressing women issues and sensitization of the importance of each gender in the society (southall 2002).

Anti-oppressive theories encompass its values to promote the pursuit of equality and justice (Doel&Shardlow 2005, 214). The goal of anti-oppressive encompasses the values of social justice, personal caring, compassion, respect for the individual, valuing uniqueness and diversity, promotion of user self-determination and challenging discrimination and oppression(Lynn 1999, Banks 1995, Burke and Harrison 1998 in Dalrymple 2006, 84). Therefore social justice is one of its major values and so it incorporates all the same principles within its core. In other words anti-oppressive practice gives a guideline for social workers how social work can aim to diminish or abolish discrimination and oppression in all levels and forms present in society.

Anti-oppressive is therefore based on the belief that social work should make a difference, so that those who have been oppressed may regain control of their lives and re-establish their right to be full and active members of society by taking into account the clients agency, knowledge and skills (Dominelli 2002, 185). Thus, one way of achieving greater social justice

for example in the Finnish context would be to put forward the principles of anti-oppressive practice. The ways in which these anti-oppressive principles can be utilized will be further analyzed within the next chapters of this document.

3.4.1 Multiculturalism within Finland.

To achieve social justice, it would mean that the different stakeholders such as the Finnish government and the different social welfare agencies would adopt methods to challenge “negative discrimination, unjust policies and practices; recognizing diversity; distributing resources equitably according to need; working in solidarity” (Ethics in Social work). It would also require that sexual minorities would be given more opportunities to act as stakeholders in services and issues related to them and that the Finnish society would adopt a more multicultural approach to integration of sexual minorities of an African background.

Reaching multiculturalism within the state would mean a peaceful co-existence between the ethnically and culturally different individuals living in Finland. It would mean, “human beings with ethnic, cultural and religious differences would decide to live together in mutual respect and understanding” (Garnt and Brueck 2010, 16 In Grant &Portera). This would also mean that the Finnish government would have to adopt a more interactive approach to intergartion through which “people with different ethnic groups, sexual orientation and cultures can live together and interact with each other, with a constant exchange of ideas, rules, values and meanings” (Grant &Brueck 2010, 16 In Grant and Portera 2010.)

3.4.2 working with anti-oppressive principles

As stated previously, to promote social justice social workers and social welfare agencies should aim towards working with anti-oppressive principles. To achieve this aim social welfare agencies should be “political, reflective, reflexive and committed to promoting change” (Dalrymple& Burke 2006, 48). This reflection happens through open dialogue and through building a cooperative relationship with sexual minorities. In other words the interactive intergration approach would be the first step towards reaching equality. The next step would be to allow an open dialogue and a change within government policies. One way to achieve this could be to have a political party dedicated to immigrant sexual minorities’ rights or having more immigrants sexual minorities in government positions. In this way they would be able to be the stakeholders responsible for their rights and they would be able to affect the way that services are delivered so that they would take into consideration both sexual orientation and cultural differences (Clarke 2006, 142).

One of the main driving forces of anti-oppressive practice is that it actively challenges inequalities and through this challenges, opportunities for change are created. These challenges can happen at both micro and macro levels in the society. (Burke & Harrison 2004, 133).

3.4.3 making changes

On a smaller micro scale there are multiple different changes that can be made to promote AOP and therefore equality. For example there are already multiple low threshold events for sexual minorities and Finns that happen at least once in a year. However, there is need to increase the amount of these types of events. For example one micro level for AOP is normally implemented every year within the city of Helsinki . The project is called “Helsinki pride”.. It is organized by human rights organisation Helsinginseudunseksuaalinentasavertaisuusry (He-Seta). It culminates into weekend’s Pride parade and Party in the park. The week’s program varies from panels and stand-up comedy clubs to sports events and nightclubs. The goal of the event is to bring the gay community together to celebrate sexual diversity and equality.

Pride’s goal is to adduce the culture of the LGBT community, create an opportunity for the rainbow-people to meet other sexual minorities and also to bring up important equality questions. In the Pride parade the LGBT community make themselves visible and celebrate what they have accomplished. Keeping in mind, of course, that there is still a lot to do (Helsinki Pride-brochure 2012). Helsinki Pride’s overall goal is to make a difference. The event’s purpose is to rise a conversation about human rights issues especially what it comes to sexual minorities’ rights. Other purposes of the event are for example to bring the LGBT together and to do youth work. Each year the organisation has a goal to create a nice, joyful event where especially the LGBT community could attend. Every year the event has a theme and the topics around the theme are highlighted during the event.

The reason why projects such as “Helsinki pride” are needed is because sexual minorities face discrimination within the Finnish society. One way to apply social justice principles especially in the case of sexual minorities is to give them a forum where they can share their experiences. This type of forum is a step towards a more interactive intergration, since it stems from appreciating the sexual orientation that the LGB come from and listening to their biographies.

On the macro level there should be more efforts to make sure that the Non-discrimination act is followed in all the different work fields.

4 Methodology

4.1 Overview of the purpose of the study.

The call to conduct this study is to explore the major challenges facing African homosexual and lesbians Finland based on a case study of Finland major city: Helsinki. The research scope was limited to study of Helsinki city which has a considerable number of African residents. Also in the area are establishments of Gay bars, clubs and a forum where the LGB group meets. Due to limitation of documentation on this subject, and the sensitive nature of the topic, it was not possible to mobilise the required resources needed for more extensive research. My intentions are to make this a prototype document for will be the blueprint of further research on the subject.

The main aim or purpose of this research is to evaluate the challenges faced by African sexual minorities in the specified study area. The study will attempt to answer the question: **what challenges does an African LGB face as they live in Helsinki?** The study seeks to create a platform for further research due to limited information regarding this topic from previous work. In the course of the study surveys were conducted on the challenges of African LGB persons through focus group discussions and analysed the data collected and make conclusions and recommendations to the working life partner.

4.2 General Problems in Studying LGB

Lack of representative samples is the most fundamental problem in qualitative studies on gays and lesbians. Self-recruited samples from an unknown population have been and still are very common in studies of homosexuals. Respondents are, for example, recruited by snowball methods, from the readers of particular magazines, from members of organizations for gays and lesbians, or more recently using those who are willing to fill in questionnaires presented at the Internet. Critical voices have also pointed out that much of the research on family life of gays and lesbians is done by studying white, well-educated, American middle-class people (Patterson 2000).

Overall methodological design provides a key criterion to evaluate empirical studies. For most studies of LGB people statistical generalization is not possible. The convenience of the sampling method causes this.

Inherent difficulties exist in randomly accessing LGB populations in most establishments due to: Homophobia, fear of having sexual orientation revealed, lack of trust in research and researchers and harassment and violence towards LGB people

Therefore, substantive generalizability carries the bulk of the weight towards credibility and usefulness of qualitative analyses of the LGB experience. That is, researchers make the case for the honesty of their respondents and accuracy of the responses. However, within the

methodological framework of qualitative studies these approaches do not inherently create limitations. The sampling is convenient and it provides a richer, thicker source of data for the qualitative researcher.

4.3 Participants

For the purpose of this study, a criterion had to be imposed to ensure that only qualified participant took part in the study. The participants qualified for sample selection were people who fell in the LGB group, or rather were African sexual minorities. Also the participants must have lived or interacted in Helsinki for at least one year and be able to speak level 1 English. To be sure that such a feature could be covered, a simple recruitment or invitation questionnaire was disseminated to the local management through the contact persons identified at the two LGB recreation locations that had been identified in Helsinki CBD. One location was a gay only bar while the other was an LGB night club. The contact persons on ground at these locations reached an agreement with the researcher on the maintenance of discretion about keeping the anonymity of their premises. With the support of the contact persons of these locations the recruitment questionnaires were disseminated to the target groups. The assumption made was that if the interested respondents were able to read through the invitation questionnaire and understand it, then the threshold level of language qualification would have been met. This qualification ensured that the participants understood the nature of the subject, making the survey items easy for them to accomplish. Age was not included as a parameter to deter any potential respondent to participate in the study. This ensured that diversity in response would be attained in the course of the study. The recruiting questionnaire also contained an element of snowballing technique as a way of attracting more respondents for the study. Snowballing involves invitation of other respondents through already recruited ones. Such invitations are made to friends, acquaintances, relatives and partners with a goal to also convince them to participate in a study. The employment of snowballing increases the size of a sample especially where the target group is small (Denscombe 2003, 16).

Of the 30 recruitment questionnaires that were disseminated for the study 10 responses were obtained. However after filtration of the respondents only seven qualified for the study. The other three were disqualified due to the fact that they had not lived or interacted in Helsinki for at least one year as imposed by the criterion for sample selection. Of the seven qualified participants, three worked in Helsinki Central Business District. Three of them were students while one was not employed or studying but lived in Helsinki. The two recruitments from snowballing were students. The overall number who took part in the first discussion was eight. The number of respondents who participated in the second focus group meeting was seven. On general demographics of the participants five of them were male while three were

female. Four of the male respondents described themselves as gays while one was bisexual. Two of the female respondents were lesbians while the third was bisexual. In summary four gay men, two lesbian women and a single man and woman bisexual took part in the study. The age of the participants was asked only to find out the diversity of the study sample and did not limit the respondents' participation in the study. Nevertheless the age bracket of the participants was 23-43 years.

Only one participant was born and brought up in Finland. The rest were all immigrants from African countries.

4.4 Data Collection

The data that was collected in this study was a personal experience of African LGBT living in the Helsinki region. Since quantification of such kind of data is difficult, the data was gathered through qualitative means. Qualitative methods seek to have primary data derived from the answers the participants gave during focus group discussion sessions in the research process. The respondents answered unstructured questions with elements of general issues touching on their everyday life. The role of the research was to identify emergent themes which needed more evaluation based on their frequency of reporting from the respondents. Qualitative research does not offer or produce description of events; rather it seeks to explanations to a specified situation (Mason 2002, 7). with this in mind therefore the suitability of this method for the collection of data was that the respondent had the opportunity to express opinion at personal level on how a particular situation affecting them is, and how according to them is supposed to be. In other words, they got to discuss a particular area that they were not satisfied with in their life, and at the same time attempt to offer remedial measures to such a situation if it were addressed. The advantage of this method as a collection of data over the use of study questionnaires is that the respondents take part in an open forum discussion of their thoughts and feelings, hence the creation of effectiveness in communication. Also, the kind of data is continuous in nature; lacks tangible physical qualities thereby making qualitative method an appropriate tool for this study. The method allows flexibility on the researchers' part, as it does not limit him to existing formulas and theories which are common in static studies that utilize quantitative means in data collection and processing. Contrary to this the method attempts to offer a truthful account of how situations occur and why they do so in specific circumstances (Webb and Westegaard 2004, 176-180). In that way the purpose of the method is not to justify existing theories as to be true but to offer space for new approaches and perspectives of the subject under study. This is achieved through employment of data collection methods such as semi structured interviews, keen observation of the respondent, review of documents and available text, and the reaction they impact to the researcher (Myers 2009, 73). The convenience of the use of semi structured questions as a guide for the focus group discussions for this study is that the researcher is not only able to

get firsthand information about a respondents experience but also follow deeply on the details of such an experience by choosing what line of questioning to pursue. In other words, it is possible for the researcher ask more questions according to the answer he gets from the parent question and steer the discussion to a direction that is relevant to the study question. To achieve this feature is quite difficult when a structured interview questionnaire is used as this limits the respondent and the interviewer to the pre-empted questions that are laid down. The researcher was therefore at liberty to formulate more questions during the discussion (Nieswiadomy 1998, 150).

The selection of a focus group discussion as a tool for this study over one on one interview had added advantages. First and foremost, it is a form of empowerment of the respondents with each other. By putting them in an open forum to discuss issues that are common to each of them, one is able to get a diversified exploration of their personal experiences. Secondly, a respondent is likely to refine or improve on a point expressed from a colleague in the group. By such interactions the researcher is able to get more information for the study (Marshall and Rossman, 2006).

For recording the sessions of the discussion, tape recorders were utilized as they gave maximum allowance for recording each and every activity of that discussion. An interviewer with knowledge of both English and Finnish was present to interpret any Finnish terminology that arose in the course of the discussion. This approach made the transcription process of the audio tapes into text easier and faster. Filtering the data during the process ensured that only the relevant data was retained without laying compromise to its originality.

Two focus groups meetings were conducted with the same participants. The purpose of the first meeting was to collect general experiences of African LGB as they live in the Helsinki region. This data was analyzed in order to find out their consistency in satisfying the purpose of the study. Also it enabled to identify emergent themes from the data and assist in refining the questions that were asked in the subsequent focus group discussion. Also the first discussion meeting acted as a reconnaissance to the respondents and make them more prepared for the second discussion. This improved the relevance of the data they gave and built up material for the identified themes (McNamara, 1999). The second focus group discussion took place 5 days after the first meeting. This enabled necessary refinement of the questions asked in the first focus group discussion and therefore improve on the relevance to the study. It also enabled the respondents to prepare more for the subsequent meeting. The data from the second focus group meeting formed the basis for the thesis report on the study subject.

The recruitment questionnaires were disseminated to the study locations as explained on Friday 15th June 2012. The essence was to leave the questionnaires over the weekend as more people are likely to visit recreational location during that time. The contact persons on

ground had already placed announcements on the clubs events notice boards to pass the information on the study underway. The researcher stayed around these locations to monitor the recruitment progress in the evening of this day. Another visit was done on the evening of Sunday 17th June. By this time 5 successful respondents had signed up for the study. By Monday morning seven persons had showed interest. This was considered as a suitable sample size by the researcher. After liaison with the management of the night club, permission was granted to use the premises hall as the venue for the focus group meetings. The necessary information was relayed to the respondents through the contacts that they had provided in the recruitment questionnaire. Therefore the first focus group meeting took place on Wednesday 20th June from 10 am. One respondent was not able to make to the discussion group. But as the others had been told to come with any interested friend, two more respondents were recruited this way. Therefore the number of people who took part in the discussion was eight. The researcher first engaged the respondents in a cup of coffee to enhance familiarity. After this the discussion commenced. Both contact persons were present in the discussions. The questions for the study had been pre-empted but were left open for the respondents to tackle them from a personal perspective. The interviewer maintained the upper hand in controlling the proceedings while seeking clarifications and probing in depth in potential areas of interest to the study.

4.5 Data Analysis

The data from this study through focus group discussions is continuous in nature, and as mentioned earlier was derived through the identification of key themes in the text. In previous studies utilising these methods, Bryman(2008, 598) mentions that a theme in context in an interview is analysed by grouping together of examples, derived from key words according to their frequency of use in the context. After this, coding of the data into universally comprehensible units is done. This involves creating an umbrella summary of different points bearing a common meaning (Denzin and Lincoln 2000, 782). This process gears towards coming up with visible patterns, sequences and classes as the primary data is explored and consequently reduce it for easier interpretation by the researcher (Punch 1998, 203). This was done during the transcription process of the interviews. By doing so the researcher having the objectives of the study in mind created a system that attempted to provide the answers to overall study question.

The aim of the analysis is to organize the data into a systematic and legible manner while retaining the originality of the data as much as possible. The data therefore has order, structure and flow at the end of the analysis (Hitchcock and Hughes 1995, 295).

Owing to the abundance of data obtained from focus group discussions, it was generally difficult to invent a mean to impeccably analyze the data into a completely meaningful manner.

By analyzing the data the rate of ambiguity and vagueness of the data is minimized, as it is the case in this study.

It is due to this that concept/thematic analysis was chosen as the most ideal for this study. The context of the transcribed data is explored in depth in order to identify recurring themes. This aids in reduction of the data, and classifying it under topics formulated from identified themes. A comparison of each respondent's feedback was carefully scrutinized in order to categorize the information under the identified themes. This as previously explained formed the basis for the discussion and presentation of the data in the thesis report. Therefore by using concept analysis, reduction of the data will be attained and categorization of the data into themes was achieved. The workings of concept analysis can be projected diagrammatically as follows.

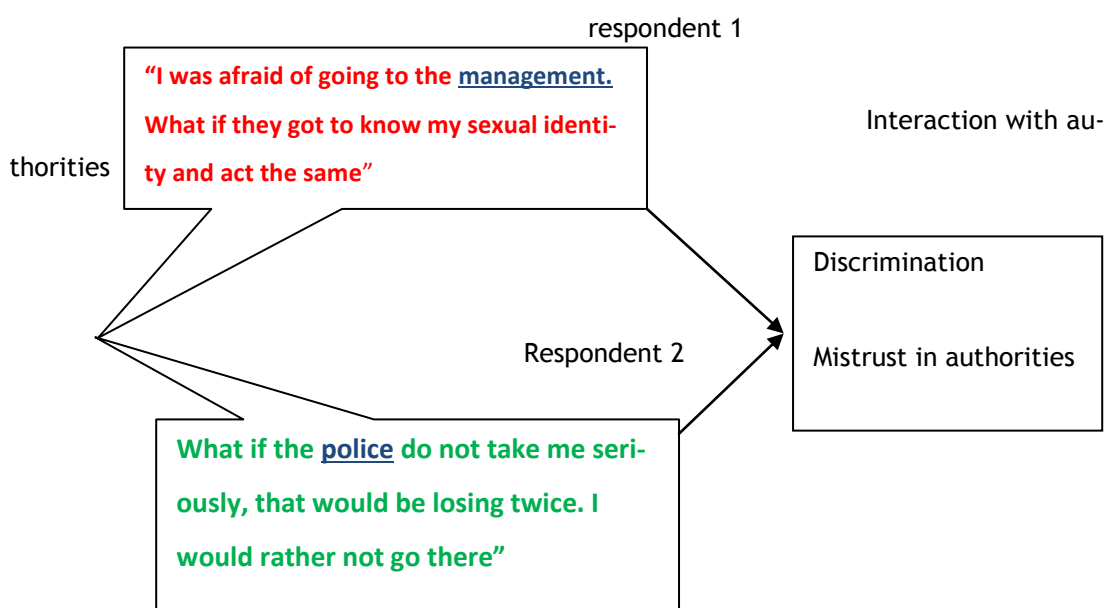
Figure 2

Verbatim quote from the respondent	Key words	Theme identifier cues	Occurring theme
<p>"I once went for shopping in a local supermarket and the cashier was a person I know from campus. She knew that i was gay. I noticed her funny glances and cross response when I was at the till. She made me go to the back of the line twice. While she treated the whites differently. I was afraid of going to the management. What if they got to know my sexual identity and act the same"</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knew I was gay • Cross response • Go back of the line twice • Treated whites differently..... • Afraid..... 	<p>Gay , treated, differently, afraid</p>	<p>discrimination</p>

<p>“I get afraid to hold hands with my partner in the bar. I feel unsafe. What if some dude noticed? What if the noticed coz I’m black? Or could it be coz of that it brings up my gay quality?”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Afraid • Black • Gay quality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Racism • humiliation
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Alternatively the inner workings of concept/ thematic analysis can be presented by the following projection of the original feedback by the respondents.

Figure 3



The core workings of concept analysis is simple in nature when comparison between two context for a recurring cue is employed as shown in the above figure. The underlined cues on the verbatim quotes by the respondent point to the identification of authorities in the subject, while the rest of the response points out to the subject of the theme. This kind of analysis was utilized to process all the responses in this research.

5 Study Findings

5.1 Results

The above instance is a model of concept analysis that was employed in data analysis of the respondents transcripts to come up with the following major themes, more so the challenges faced by these respondents. From the study the items of concern which came up included but were not limited to homophobia, discrimination and harassment, racism, distrust in authorities, safety, fear of homophobia and challenges in accessing social services related to LGB groups, and psychological stress. These concerns arose as the respondents answered questions regarding personal experience with themselves, the public, law enforcement officers, immigration officers, social workers and legal personnel. The concerns are described broadly under the following themes.

5.2 Discrimination

In analyzing the respondents' answers to questions asked on issues of discrimination, there was clear evidence that this was a challenge that was part and parcel of their lives. The theme in context gave rise to occurrences of multiple discrimination, but to satisfy the scope of this study, only issues of sexual orientation and ethnicity were dealt with. In discussing their personal experiences on discrimination, the respondents cited at least a situation in their lives that touched on the theme. The personal perception of discrimination was more related to ethnic minority than sexual minority status. Discrimination was experienced in all rounded aspects of life with instances including securing jobs, healthcare, accommodation, social services, shopping and the like. A respondent reported of been denied a rental for a stall in the local market. Her perception of the experience was because she was black. The general truth of such allegations cannot be substantiated fully, but an element of possibility is still eminent from the feedback she gave.

“... the landlord just looked at me with scorn. Could be he thought I had nothing to offer. I felt that he was not interested with my concern from the way he shrugged off my request. I just hope he had a better reason...”

General studies in relation to discrimination indicate that a person is more likely to be discriminated against if they come from a disadvantaged background. In most cases been an ethnic minority is a high risk factor to end up as a victim.

There was an overwhelming feedback on the extent on such discriminatory as the one above. The respondents are targets of prejudiced verbal and physical expressions of prejudice that

tend to earmark them as an abnormal group. The most direct consequence of these directives are withdrawal of the group from the public, curtailing their free will to express themselves. These forms of discrimination is aggravated by stereotypes such as the universally acclamation of a heterosexual community as a social definition of being normal or following the 'natural order' and 'fundamentals of tradition'. While answering a supplementary question on the subject about their willingness to participate in peaceful demonstrations to advocate for anti discrimination, the respondents showed strong reluctance to want to do so. They cited the fear of counterdemonstration from the heterosexual community that would admonish their efforts of plea owing to the stereotyping of LGBT groups. They doubted that their outcry would be taken as a priority by the relevant authorities. The fear for reprimand and retribution in form of rebuke, violence, exclusion, hate crime owing to their sexual identity was the key motivator to want to remain silent.

“...What if I needed a job and somebody remembers seeing me there (the demonstration) you know things happen. I would not put my life at risk like that...”

Adoption of anti-oppressive culture as a universal guide to end injustices in regard to all rounded discrimination has been the agenda of many nations. As mentioned earlier, there has been ongoing legislations in the last thirty years or so in Finland that have marked milestones in such developments. The efforts made thus far are to criminalize discrimination in any form to anyone regardless of social, economic or physical status. For instance the FRA 2008 report was key to noted that “...defining incitement to hatred, violence or discrimination against LGBT persons as a criminal offence can coexist with the respect of freedom of expression”. The report explored provisions that make a criminal offence to incite to hatred, violence or discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation. Although the legislations of this nature have shown wide adoption in most countries, specificity to the extent of discriminatory items has not yet been realized in most cases. For example, under some adoptions, it did not include anti-LGBT expressions not “...Amounting to incitement to hatred or discrimination. Thus in Finland for example, incitement to hatred, violence or discrimination against LGBT people is not explicitly defined as constituting a criminal. There have been indications of change of trend towards attitude towards LGB individuals. Respondents felt that although the development of the legislations has been slow and painstaking to a larger extent, a feeling of safety and acceptance was becoming a realization. The respondents felt that more anti-discrimination policies should be formulated to effectively address the underlying problem. They felt Policies meant to end discrimination improved to combat this phenomenon aimed at combating discrimination and elaborate complaints procedures be launched and the groups be educated about their existence so as to effectively report discrimination encounters.

5.3 Homophobia

There was general concern in both focus group meetings about their general safety wellbeing as a result of impending violence against them. The description of such violence was inclusive of other parameters that embrace issues of gender and ethnical identity. The respondents agreed unanimously of the feeling of vulnerability in terms of their social class. One respondent quoted:

“I know of a friend of mine who was a victim of ridicule and assault at school due to his gay status. I think that if he was just black and straight, the extent of such aggravation would be to a lesser extent.....” [Julius]

“We had planned to initiate a forum for lesbians at campus and recommended the idea to the administration. One morning we found a big placard at our venue of meeting with homophobic content. That was the end of our dream. No one was ready for the repercussions of our venture. This rude intervention was enough to scare everyone involved” (Jane).

In utilizing the recreational facilities around Helsinki one respondents feedback was as follows..

“I would rather go to the bar from 1 AM when I know it’s less busy and everyone is tired. I feel safer that way. As in what if I met someone who knows me.....I would not be ready to have my dental formula disarrayed. I am too young and I need to chew my food...” (Dave)

It was a general agreement in the discussions that practice of restraint while displaying public affections with their partners was called for. During the discussion the general feeling was that it would be more acceptable if two white persons displayed public affections. It would be more inadmissible if two black men did the same in a similar set up.

I have experienced two whites (men) kissing at the corner of the bar. I wondered if it would be the same if I did that with my partner. The answer that came into my head was a big NO.....”

It is vividly clear from this discussion that there are established codes of how black sexual minorities should handle themselves in regard to their sexual identity. Free association among themselves has been obscured by such codes whose emphasis lies along ethnic and racial ori-

entation. The mere appearance of a black person amidst a white company would raise suspicions by itself.

The overall feeling among the participants was that one had to practice restraint in their associations as a way of ensuring their safety.

There were two cases in the group who had been victims of violence in this regard. The interviewer probed more by posing a question that touched on their handling of the matter with relevant authorities. Among the questions asked was whether they had filed a report with the local police regarding the incidences. The feedback from most of the participants was that there were reservations on how effectively the police would deal with such matters. Due to the frequency of reporting of such reservations by the participants, this feedback was discussed as entirely a different emergent theme from the study that will be dealt with separately.

It is a tenet of anti-oppressive practice to formulate an elaborate system that negates the consequences that derive from social difference. In a rendering of discrepancy of power distribution that is a consequence of such differences, a model that addresses concerns of racial and ethnic conflicts is imperative. The debate of racism and ethnic minority is global in nature and lacks a framework for competent advocacy at grass root. There is a need to build structural changes through the involvement of necessary stakeholders in the realization of such advocacy. The Finnish Government has attempted to create such models in its policy legislation, but as seen from above the underlying problem is still inherent. The path that the lives of Africans sexual minorities take is dependent on specific concerns of the environment they thrive, and the measures taken to make those environments their safe haven. This introduces the argument of anti-oppression that a need to address the differences to bring about equality in a contemporary society is urgent (Doel&Shardlow 2005, 214)).

There was major concern for most respondents in their discussion of violence and homophobia. As in all other areas of the lives of black LGB people, the way that homophobic is perpetrated has close links with racial identity. Therefore in the formulation of such models a clear understanding on the root causes of such kind of violence is imperative in countering it in an all-inclusive manner.

5.4 Interaction With Authorities.

As was afore mentioned relevant authorities that African LGB encounter with includes the police, immigration officers and social service providers. The discussion of challenges that African LGB face yielded information about their experiences when interacting with such authorities. The most pertinent concern was the reluctance with which the respondents showed in reporting of occurrences of their concern to the authorities.

“...he got mugged at the exit of the mall and there were witnesses. The police were called to come and investigate the matter. Their job was shoddy and hurried. So I ask myself if the police cannot investigate a simple mugging case, how diligent would they be in investigating a homophobic crime. I think they would not even consider investigating a case where a black person is the victim. So what the f* I'd rather go leak my wounds...”**

There was a respondent who said that they had gone to visit a police liaison officer about a homophobic attack. Notwithstanding the fact that they gave elaborate evidence concerning the matter, they learnt later that no follow up was made. Her general feeling was that she would likely not consider making a future approach to the authorities owing to her misgivings that the case would be given priority.

As a matter of interest to the researcher the respondents were asked whether they were aware of alternative channels that they could voice their concerns. Only two respondents knew in scanty details what relevant authorities to consul.

It was a general agreement by the respondents that they lack of confidence to the police to deal with such concerns was that first of all they thought the police practiced bias in their dealing with black persons. The need to conceal their sexual orientation was another factor that contributed to this reluctance for fear of further homophobia and ostracization (The National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs, 1998). They felt that the police would not take their concerns seriously, or that they would make them an object of ridicule if they exposed their LGB status.

Interviewer: what efforts did you make to report the homophobic attack to the police?

Respondent: I did not report the matter. What if the police do not take me seriously, that would be losing twice. I would rather not go there (the police).....

As mentioned earlier the fear for repercussions against LBG individuals after revealing their status is the main reason why there is a build up of mistrust with the authorities. By virtue of this, a need to center more attention in to work with LGB population and the relevant authorities. An unbiased platform that addresses their concerns should be put in place to ensure the course of justice prevails. Perhaps this is an indication that elaborate social service framework should be made available in each police precinct to deal with such concerns. While the respondents in the study also reported racism as one of their challenges, there has been a remarkable history in Finland as regarding interaction of anti-racism groups with the authorities. Tarrow (1994) outlines that segregated groups resolve to violent demonstrations as a platform to wage their grievances to relevant authorities. Since the demonstrations are supposed to be peaceful, the organisers have to seek consent from the authorities in order to proceed. More often than not, such demonstrations often end up violent and in chaos, thereby giving the authorities the mandate to pacify a violent crowd. Due to prevalence of such

chaotic demonstrations and friction with the authorities (police) the respondents disagreed strongly that they would get involved in one as a form of voicing their concern, especially because it would involve racism and homophobia: touchy issues in Finland. All the respondents except one were quick to point out that rather than enter into any association with the authorities concerning their challenges, they would rather stay put. There has been documentation in Finland of the police scrutinising foreigners and more so those who appear black. There exists a possibility that a black individual would be labelled as suspicious by the police (Witte, 1996). Consequently bad blood has existed between the police and the black community in Finland, with the earlier on record for perpetrating violence in form of unwarranted force (Friedrich 1997).

5.5 Psychological Stress

Studies have shown that ethnic minority LGB occur in any diverse society and experience oppression and discrimination accordingly as regards their status (Green 1993). Since they possess both statuses of being ethnically and sexually minor in the face of their respective environments, they experience a kind of dual nature ostracization, starting from the individuals closest to them and extending to the contemporary society. The exposure to demeaning stereotypes in the course of their development compromises their progress from self acceptance and identity development. In their quest to overcome the shortcoming derivative of their existence in the integrated society, with a prevalence of homophobia, psychological stress is more of the rule in such situations. A keen insight into the response from this study yielded a general feeling of despair, vulnerability, sadness and racial insignificance. The struggle to seek a sense of belonging which will normally render unsuccessful encourages withdrawal of ethnic LGB into themselves (Morales, 1992)

“...it would feel ok for me to at least have someone to talk to in school..... At least feel like I really belong somewhere and I matter...”

“...I hate feeling insignificant all the time. I'd want to feel appreciated too. That I have needs which need to be met too...”

Such experiences of racism, sexism discrimination, hate crime and exclusion combine into a complex anxiety creating problem. The overall effect to the group is psychological symptoms that can eventually lead to depression and self distractive activities such as drug abuse, alcoholism and even development of psychopathic diseases.(Green, 1993). Such an experience a high risk factors to occurrences of even strengthened isolation, estrangement and exclusion that make it harder for the victims to cope. This confirms the study by Diaz, Ayala, Bein and

Barbara (2001) which concluded that experiences of homophobia and poverty influences mental health, due to the its effect on important processes of the brain, thereby causing low self esteem and social isolation to the victims. In view of such findings, it's vividly notable that the claim of psychological stress by the respondents is not a mere assertion but a fact that call for urgent resolution.

6 Trustworthiness and Ethical considerations.

The aim of trustworthiness in a qualitative research is to justify and to support the argument of the study. (Lincoln &Guba, 1985,290). This consequently provides validity of finding and results and shows relevance of the study. Pillars that govern trustworthiness in qualitative research are credibility, dependability and confirmability. Credibility seeks to create a clear link between data used in the study and the results obtained. (Lincoln &Guba, 1985,296). Dependability is an evaluation of the flow of processes involved in the study. This includes data collection, data analysis, and theory generation. Confirmability is a measure of how well the inquiry's findings are supported by the data collected. Credibility in this study was achieved through use of two focus group meetings instead of one. This approach helped to create more refined data through familiarization of the participants and the research questions. Frequent liaison with the supervisor of the project provided insight as the path to follow with the project. As an experienced practicing professional supervisor was able to assess the dependability of the chapters comprising the theoretical background, data analysis and presentation and gave guidance on the path to follow with the study.

Reliability of the research means the accuracy of the research and the repeatability of the analysis. The goal is to produce results that are not random. The reasons that lower research's reliability are mostly mistakes made when collecting the data. There is always need in a qualitative research to follow certain guidelines before execution of the research (Heikkilä 2008).

When the interview is recorded no data is missed although un-spoken sides of the interviews are not recorded and mistakes can be done when transcribing the interviews. The use of many different semi structured questions affects the reliability of the research in a positive way; the information, statistics and data are up-to-date. I also managed to be in control of the discussion sessions and created a neutral ground make it more reliable.

Validity means the research method's ability to measure what is being measured and avoiding systematic errors. A systematic error can be avoided by careful research planning and carefully chosen interviews. If the goals of the research are not set preciously and followed to the endthen errors will occur during interviews and this willhinder correct results (Heikkilä 2008, 29-30).The validity of this research is not as good as it could be. By interviewing more people the validity of the research would increase however the interviews made do support the validity of the research in question.

Studies in which human participants are involved in require that certain ethical issues be addressed. Such considerations are imperative in ensuring privacy and safety of both the researcher and the participant. Before the commencement of the study an explanation on the purpose of the study was done to the respondents. Also consent matters were to the participants, so that they would not feel coerced to take part. Among the significant ethical issues considered in the research process include consent and confidentiality (Kothari 1985). The consent of the participants was secured by explaining their role in the study, and the option that they can opt out at any stage of the study, without any impending disciplinary consequences on their part. In order to secure the consent of the selected participants, the respondents will be made to understand the importance of their role in the completion of the research and also advised that they could withdraw from the study even during the process. With this, the participants were not forced to participate in the research (Fritz, 2008). The confidentiality of the participants was also ensured by not disclosing their names or personal information in the research. The respondents signed a consent form at the start of the interviews in order to formalize this undertaking.

For assurance of the following of ethics in this research, liaisons were made with the relevant authorities, where the reporting and handling of respondents data was unclear.

This study made use of a focus group discussion as an instrument that was developed as part of the survey project that seeks to investigate African experiences, practices and attitudes related to their LGB status, experience of discrimination against themselves and their colleagues. To reflect the trustworthiness and accurate analysis of the study, verbatim excerpts from the informants' transcripts on the discussion were utilised in the thesis report (Shenton 2004, 67).

Credibility from the employment of this method as an instrument for the study was achieved by use of unstructured study questions, posed in interviews as an invitation to discuss openly personal feelings and how they are perceived at that level. Also since only a small number of participants engaged in the study due to the problems highlighted earlier, the findings of this study only portray the nature of the situation only in the Helsinki region, and not predict the overall situation in other locations of Finland (O'Leary 2004, 62-63).

7 Conclusion

Diversified immigration is quite a recent phenomenon in Finland yet it is increasing every year due to the opening of borders to many immigrants from the developing nations. These changes in the demographic have caused major challenges for the Finnish welfare services which are heavily based on universal service provision. There hasn't really been any major shift or attempts to include new immigrants in the policy making processes or practices. In fact there are only a few migrant workers in decision making positions (Clarke 2006, 147). For

Finland to become a more multicultural and equal society based more heavily on social justice principles, quite a few changes have to take place. The ability to attain these social justice principles relates heavily to the societies ability to adhere to social change. In other words to achieve social justice the Finnish society has to find ways to change to be better equipped for the more multicultural society (multiculturalism).

Ways to achieve social justice would be to incorporate anti-oppressive practice especially in social welfare fields. Social workers should be trained in cross cultural competency and they should be taught to be more reflexive in their work. The government should make more effort to follow the non-discrimination act in all fields and make sure that everyone is treated with equal rights while in Finland.

There should more celebration of different events in all areas of influence in the Finnish society. For example there should more sexual identity programs in the media that aim to increase awareness in the Finnish citizens. There should also be more events where heterosexuals and LGB can meet such as the "Helsinki pride". In these events both groups the heterosexuals and LGB can find ways to understand each other better. They would also allow for an increase in awareness of both parties and a richening of understanding for different sexual orientations.

More research should be done in this field to see if services offered really do apply universally to all permanent residents or should they may be transformed to be more multicultural. More African LGB should be given decision making positions so that they can become "movers and shakers in the social welfare field" (Clarke 2006, 141).

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Recruitment Questionnaire

Recruitment questionnaire for a focus group discussion to find out the challenges faced by African gay, lesbian and bisexual people living in the Helsinki region

SURVEY SUMMARY

My name is JAMES MWANGI from (university name). We are looking for people who have lived in the Helsinki region for at least one year and identify as Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual. We hereby kindly request for an insight about the various challenges you undergo through as you live here and what you think should be done to improve the present situation. This study forms the basis of my bachelor degree thesis.

All of the information you give us will be treated with complete confidence. We also will appreciate if you could encourage other Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual friends, family or workmates who live, work, study in Helsinki participate.

PART I: GENERAL DETAILS ABOUT YOU.

1. Have you been living, working or studying in Helsinki in the LAST YEAR? (Tick one).

- No
- Yes go to question two

2. How old are you? _____ Years

3. What is your gender? (Tick one)

- Male
- Female

4. What term do you usually use to describe your sexual orientation? (Tick one)

- Lesbian
- Gay
- Bisexual
- Heterosexual

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION.

PART II (if gay lesbian or bisexual)

a) TAKING PART IN A DISCUSSION GROUP

We would like to talk to you about your experiences of being Lesbian, Gay or bisexual and Living in Helsinki.

Would you be prepared to take part in a two hour discussion group concerning such experiences? (Pleasetickone)

- No
- Yes(go to part III b)

b) DETAILS ABOUT JOINING THE DISCUSSION GROUP.

We appreciate your interest in participating in a discussion group and fill in the following part so that we inform you where this group will meet for the discussion so that you can avail yourself. We will appreciate if you also bring along other African LGB you may know to take part in the study.

THESE DETAILS WILL NEVER BE USED FOR ANY OTHER PURPOSE. After data analysis of the survey your answers will NOT be connected to your contact details.

Your name: (optional)_____

Your telephone number: (_____)

Your email address: _____

TO PROTECT YOUR CONFIDENTIALITY, WE ARE GOING TO TEAR OFF AND DESTROY THIS SHEET AFTER WE CONTACT YOU.

Appendix 2: Interview Guide

The aim of this study is to find out the challenges African LGB face as they study, work and live in Helsinki.

In formulating the research questions, we simply laid out some thematic questions that were relevant to the study. Refinement of the questions was done as described in the research design.

The questionnaires acted as a principle of guiding our informants however, depending on the situation some of the questions were edited or dropped. Supplementary questions were added during the interview.

TOPICS FOR INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

A. Experiences at work

1. In regard to your sexual identity nature, what are the challenges you face at work and how do you overcome them?

B. Experience at school

2. As you interact with others in school, what are your experiences in regard to your sexual identity? What challenges come with it?

C. interaction with the community

3. What are the challenges you face that come as a result of your sexual identity and your interactions in the contemporary society?

4. Are there certain stages in your life when you feel powerless and compromised? Please describe what makes you feel that.

D. GENERAL

5. Is there anything else you would like to mention as pertains your experiences as an African LGB?

Appendix 3: Consent Form

INFORMED CONSENT (ENGLISH)

I _____, agree to take part in the interview for thesis on challenges of African LGB (lesbian, gay and bisexual) living in Helsinki. I understand my role in this study and therefore grant authorization for the use of the information I give throughout this interview.

I grant my consent with the understanding that I am to remain anonymous and the information I give in the course of the study research will be treated with utmost confidentiality and trust.

I give my consent to the use of the information I give during the research in any form including recorded tapes and transcripts will be destroyed after the end of the research.

I do so with the understanding that no disclosure in any form will be done regarding my names and contact details in the course and after the end of the research.

I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw the Permission to participate in this study without explanation at anytime and will not be met by any consequences by so doing.

Participant'sSignature

Date

Appendix 1