



AN ASSOCIATION OF LGBTI PEOPLE IN ZIMBABWE

An Assessment of the impact of state sanctioned and unsanctioned raids on GALZ premises and gatherings.

2015

Acknowledgements

Completion of this report would not have been possible without the participation and assistance of many in the LGBTI community whose names may not all be listed. The community that has endured unjustified raids from the Zimbabwe Republic Police and other armed unidentified individuals: your contributions are sincerely appreciated and gratefully acknowledged.

GALZ, through its Director would like to express deep appreciation and indebtedness to the following for their support:

Nelson Muparamoto, Caroline Maposhere, Martha Tholanah, Mary Chard, Dambudzo Mashoko, Natasha Msonza and the staff teams at ZLHR, GALZ, CSU and Island Hospice.

To all relatives, friends and others who in one way or the other shared their moral, financial and physical support with the LGBTI Community, Thank you.

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Executive Summary

The assessment focused on documenting the nature and extent of the state sanctioned and unsanctioned raids on GALZ. The assessment brings out the opaqueness of the raids, which demonstrates the precarious environment that GALZ operates in. GALZ has been attacked by different kinds of adversaries including but not limited to uniformed police officers, officers in plain clothes, state security agents, youth militia and unidentified groups. GALZ members have been subjected to verbal and physical assaults, confiscation of personal belongings, detentions and arrests. This has had negative ramifications on GALZ and its members and affected the fulfilment of organisational objectives. Fear has been instilled and inculcated amongst its members to the extent that even when they were entitled to receive legal protection, they have preferred to abstain from reporting abuse or injustices perpetrated against them. GALZ's programming has been hindered as mobilisation, implementation and evaluation of programs hang on the balance, because beneficiaries fear the volatile environment and fail to access basic services that they are entitled to receive. The raids in particular, have alienated GALZ staff members from the communities that they seek to serve. The nature of the organisation's operations have led to a lot of speculation among some members, who then blame GALZ staff for the raids. However, despite the volatile operational environment, the organisation has continued to thrive and has been innovative about serving its members. Despite the

fact that some members have distanced themselves due to the fear instilled by the attacks, others have soldiered on and are determined to claim their space in society. The membership of GALZ also keeps growing. Notwithstanding the challenging operational environment, the organisation has soldiered on and hopes for a better future. It is also encouraging that some programs are still running and members are still able to access essential services, particularly those related to HIV & AIDS.

Introduction

GALZ has over the years experienced unjustified raids from the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) and other armed but unidentified individuals. This is despite its legal recognition under Zimbabwean law as an association or a universitas. The police have on different occasions raided offices of GALZ as well as events hosted by the organisation. In the year 2012, the ZRP carried out two raids in two weeks, arresting, harassing and assaulting members of GALZ. These raids seemed to be fuelled in part by the state-sanctioned homophobic utterances made by politicians. Many of the utterances have been unjustified and signify the continued and sustained efforts by the state to clampdown on organisations that are playing an important role of empowering citizens to be more informed and to seek and demand justice. The 2012 raids were not the first. In May 2010, the GALZ offices were raided, and computers and publications were confiscated. It would take a very long court case before these things were returned. GALZ employees and members frequently get detained or arrested, the most recent and significant of such experience having occurred on the 11th of August 2012 when 42 got arrested. Besides these raids being an attempt to derail GALZ organisational and programmatic efforts, they have had some intended and unintended consequences. Thus the assessment sought to examine the impact of the raids on various components of GALZ programs, mainly focusing on mobilisation, sensitisation, affiliation, provision and uptake of its services.

Organisational Background

GALZ is a membership based organisation representing the collective interests of lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgenders and intersex (LGBTI) people who are a sexual minority in Zimbabwe. It is therefore an interest group focused on playing a catalytic role in promoting the rights of the marginalised sexual minorities. GALZ works to lobby for the rights of LGBTI and to influence reform through proposed changes in legislation. GALZ works as an intermediary representing the interests of its membership, since it has greater capacity to influence change, versus individual members.

The objectives of GALZ are:

- To establish a democratic and accountable association in Zimbabwe that strives for the fullest participation of all members of the community in influencing policy making, achieving equity and attaining full and equal human, social and economic rights in all aspects of life for LGBTI persons;
- To establish, maintain and administer in a democratic collective and accountable manner, an LGBTI Community Centre that will provide venues for social, recreational, and educational activities, for legal assistance and for counselling services for members;
- To provide practical support, guidance and assistance to the LGBTI community in relation to various matters, including (but not limited to) law, security, health and general wellbeing. Supporting and exercising direct

action, when required, to protect vulnerable members of the LGBTI community;

- To collect materials and resources of relevance to LGBTI communities, to make such resources and materials easily available by establishing a resource centre or centres, and co-operating with other associations whose objectives are to establish such centres;
- To make known, publicise and promote the work, aims and objectives of GALZ;
- To do all such things, which are consistent with the carrying out of the aims and objectives, listed above

Purpose (Task) of evaluation

The aim of this assignment was to conduct an assessment of the impact of raids on GALZ's existing and potential members as well as the operations of the organisation. The specific objectives were:

- To document the nature and extent of the raids on LGBTI people in Zimbabwe.
- To increase awareness of LGBTI issues and challenges in Zimbabwe.
- To examine the impact of the raids on service uptake and participation in the community's activities such as the pride week, educational workshops etc.
- To examine the impact of the raids on GALZ's ability to fulfil its objectives
- To make recommendations for strengthening the organisation in light of the current challenges.

Methodology

A multi-method approach employing a triangulation of qualitative and quantitative research methods was used. The mixed method approach was adopted to ensure that evidence from multiple sources would be cross-checked for irregularities. The approach was intended to generate information relevant in answering the evaluation questions linked to the objectives. The data collection methods utilised in this evaluation are presented below. A focus group discussion revealed insights that would otherwise not have been accessible without the interaction found in a group setting. The process of listening to each other's experiences stimulated memories and ideas among the participants. The qualitative in-depth interviews undertaken enabled an understanding of informants' perspectives on their lives, experiences or situations as expressed in their own words. The interviews were carried out with relevant GALZ staff, GALZ stakeholders and members. Different interview and discussion guides for these different categories of interviewees were developed to generate specific information answering the evaluation questions. Questionnaires were administered with the assistance of the GALZ officers and peer educators. The questionnaires enabled quantification of the results and some statistical analysis.

Findings of the Assessment

Introduction

Findings are thematically presented and discussed in relation to the set objectives. The results start by a presentation of the profile of the research participants focusing on their sexual identity, age and affiliation to GALZ. It proceeds to present the nature and the extent of the raids, as well as a presentation and discussion of the impact of the raids.

Profile of participants

Figure 1 below summarises the sexual identity of respondents from their own interpretation. The majority (53.4%) of the respondents identified themselves as gay, whilst 1% of the respondents identified as straight. Other categories included lesbian, transgender, bisexual, queer and intersex, which demonstrates the diversity of the group of people that GALZ works with. The self-identification of the participants provided a nuanced understanding of how people define their identities from their own experiences. These identities however exclude those of stakeholders (partners) and staff members who also took part in the assessment.

Figure 1: Sexual identity of respondents

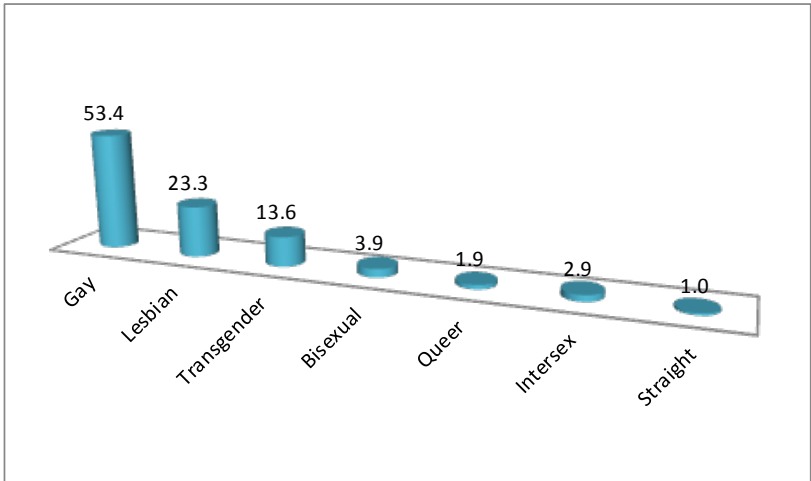


Figure 2 summarises the ages of the respondents who participated in this study. Thirty-one percent of the respondents fell within the 21-25-years age range, which is a highly active and mobile group. Young people are more likely to be involved in activities than older people. One's age also has an impact on whether one decides to stick with the organisation after the raids or not. GALZ has also made significant inroads in attracting younger members than those who are older.

Figure 2: Age of Respondents

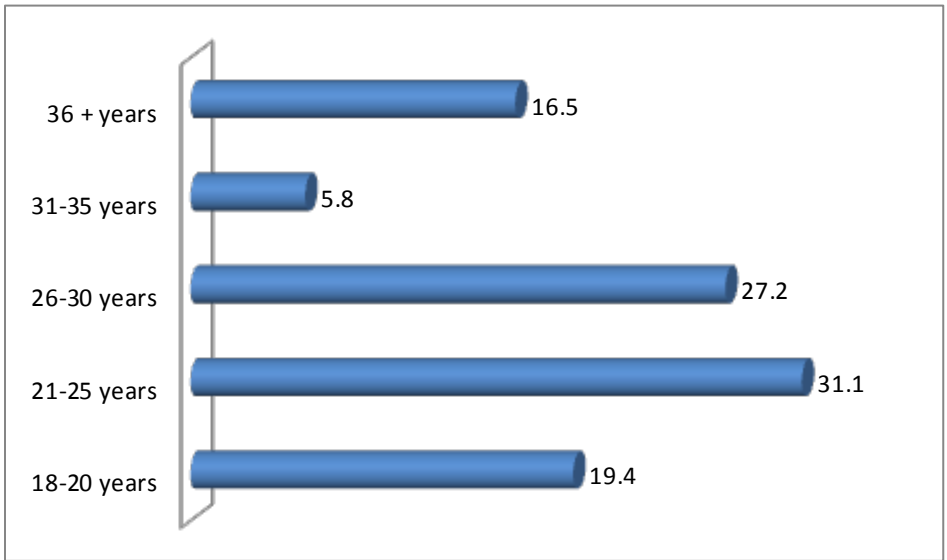
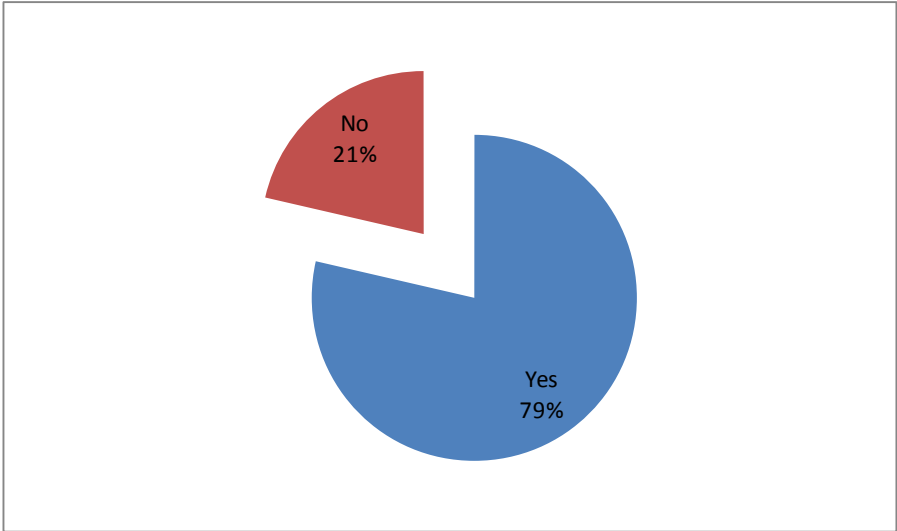


Figure 3 below highlights the membership status of the individuals who participated in this study. 79% of the respondents were members whilst the remainder were not members of GALZ. The raids have affected both members and non-members of GALZ. Participation or attendance to events organised by GALZ is not restricted to members only. In the event of injuries obtained during the raids, GALZ has a policy of extending assistance to anyone affected while taking part. GALZ expressed the concern that sometimes the process of following up and locating individuals injured at their events proves difficult as many tend to immediately disappear in the ensuing chaos of a raid and thereafter do not want to be associated with the organisation. A chi-square test was conducted in order to test the level of difference in attendance to GALZ events between members and non-members, and it

emerged that there was not much significant statistical difference.

Figure3:Membership Status

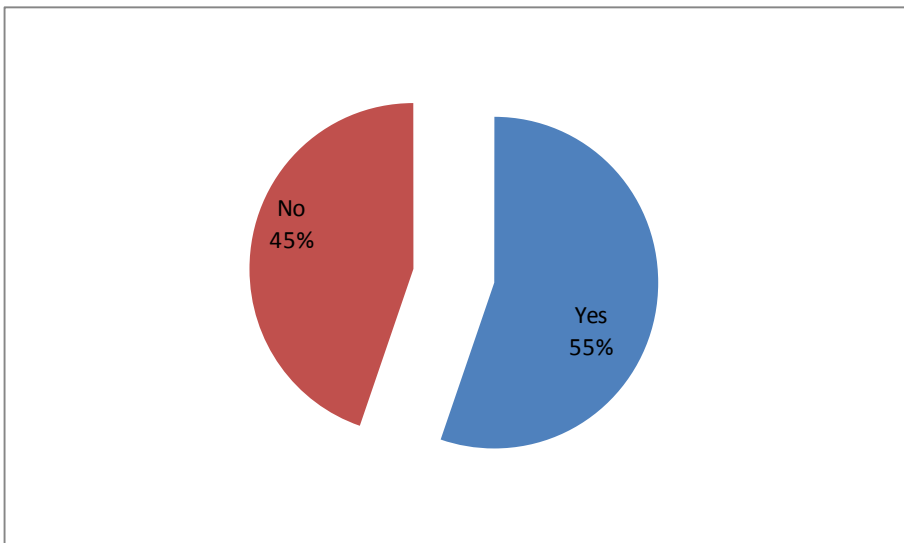


Nature and Extent of Raids

Figure 4 shows that 55% of the respondents had experienced a raid whilst attending an event organised by GALZ either at its premises or at another venue. GALZ has experienced several incidences of raids and threats to the organisation from the period 2009, which have been perpetrated by police, state agencies, youth militia and unidentified individuals. The staff indicated that whenever it has been the police implementing a raid, they would often identify themselves and produce search warrants, however this was not always the case. For example, a few years ago there a raid in which two staff members got arrested. The police produced a search warrant for drugs and pornography. They seized computers and any reading

materials that had the word 'gay' in them. After the office raid, they proceeded to the director's residency in his absence, and took valuable personal belongings, including birth certificates, photos, DVDs, tapes and files.

Figure 4: Raided while attending a GALZ event



Sometimes the police came to perform raids at private events, invoking or citing the Public Order Security Act (POSA), which requires organisations holding public events to obtain police clearance. There were incidences where GALZ would not have sought police clearance partly because they would be holding private events and also because generally, it is next to impossible for them to get it anyway.

Sometimes the raids and attacks come from youth militia popularly referred to as Chipangano. Chipangano is believed

to be a paramilitary wing used during political campaigns to forcibly advance the interests of the ruling party. One such incident occurred when the youth militia raided the GALZ centre. They threatened the security guard and took advantage of a car that was going out of the premises to force their way in disturb a meeting that was going on. They took laptops, mobile phones and other valuable property they could carry. However, when such incidents happen, GALZ officers call the nearby police station who at times responds quickly to arrest the culprits. However, when they start handling the issue and discover that the complainant is GALZ, the matter dies a natural death. The accused are also often released without having their day in court.

There have also been incidences where unidentified people call, threaten and shout from outside the GALZ premises, threatening to close the place, burn it down or other heinous activities. The most recent attack by unidentified people happened in December 2014, when GALZ was having an end of year party and Miss Diversity pageant. A group of about twelve unidentified men came in armed with logs and other objects, and started assaulting the patrons for no reason. The attackers also searched and took away valuable items from the patrons. The assailants have never been caught or identified. Some speculate that since the attack had been well timed and coordinated, it could have been state security officials who took advantage of the prevailing homophobic environment to perpetrate violence on GALZ and its members. Others seem to believe that it was the youth militia. Figure 5

highlights the views expressed by the staff members at GALZ on the source of the raids. 24.4% of the participants reported having been raided by unidentified people. 44% were raided by the police on the instigation of their superiors, whilst 31.2 % of the respondents experienced raids by both the police and unidentified individuals. This shows how precarious the situation for GALZ is as any group can take advantage and perpetrate violence on the LGBTI community.

Figure 5: Source of Raid

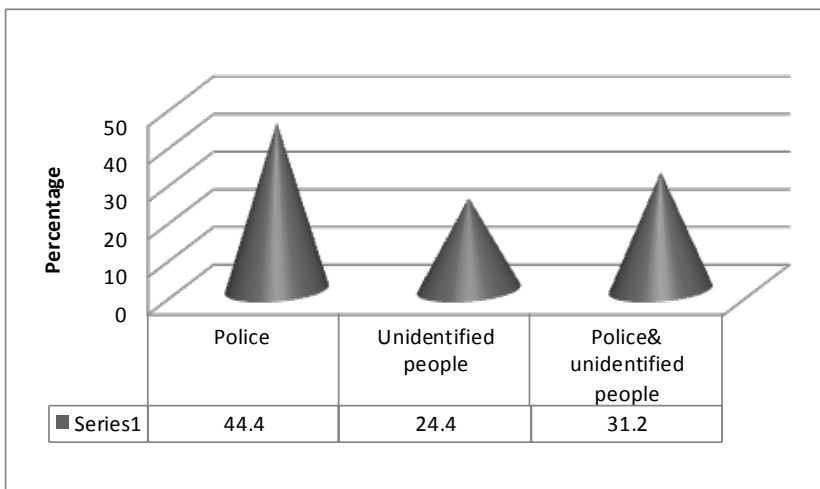


Figure 6 summarises what the individuals who have experienced raids were subjected to. About 73.1% of the participants were subjected to physical harm and other injustices. Other injustices experienced by the LGBTI community include verbal abuse, detention and loss of personal belongings. Individuals behind these raids often come with logs and other objects that

they would use to strike the participants. The raider also often steal electronic gadgets, wallets, money and other valuables from patrons fleeing for their lives.

Figure 6: What people were subjected to during the raids

What were you subjected to during the raids	%
Physical Harm, Verbal Abuse, lost personal belongings and detained	23.2
Physical Harm, Verbal Abuse and lost personal belongings	17.3
Physical Harm and Verbal Abuse	13.5
Physical Harm	11.5
Physical Harm and lost personal belongings	7.6
Verbal abuse	15.4
lost personal belongings	7.6
lost personal belongings and detained	3.9

Some members of the LGBTI community have experienced serious injuries due to these attacks and have been hospitalised. Figure 7 shows the objects that have been used to inflict harm on the individuals. The objects vary from logs, sjamboks, baton sticks, clenched fists, and bottles. There have been incidences where the victims have been asked to beat one another.

Figure 7: Object used in the assault

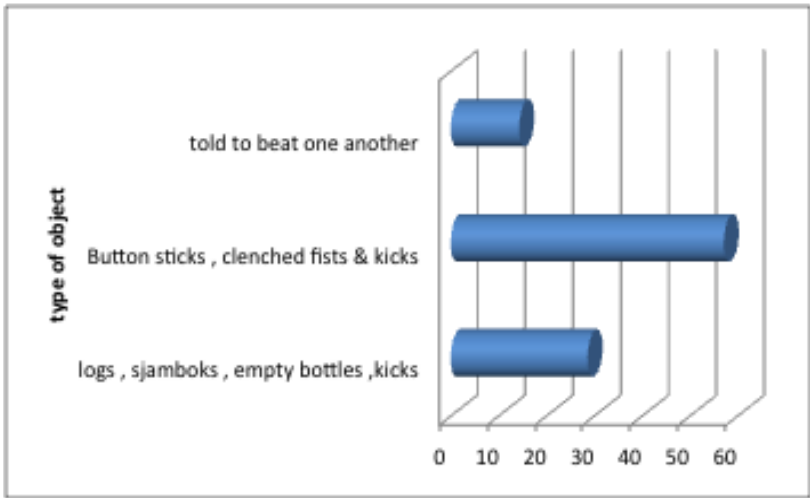
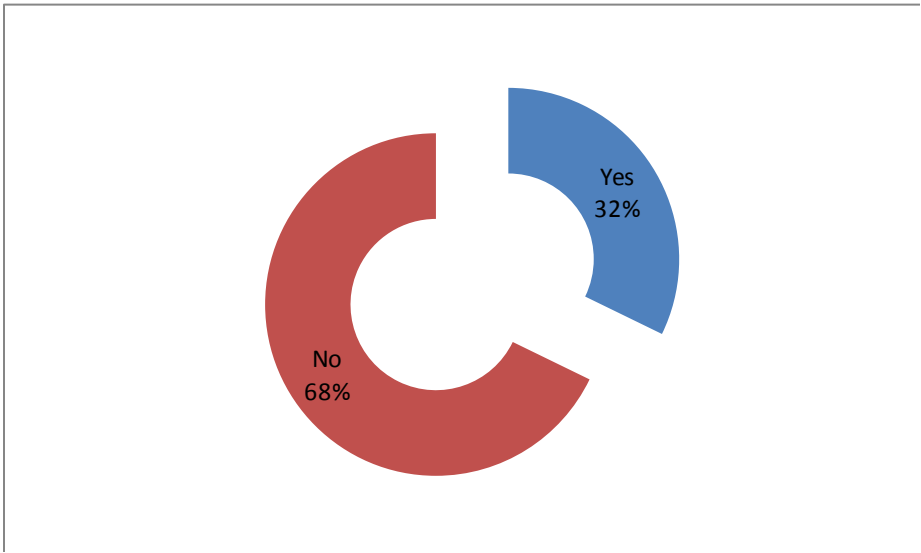


Figure 8 shows that amongst the respondent, 32% had been arrested during a raid. During these arrests and detentions, police would record personal details including the individuals' residential addresses, which they would later follow up. When the police would visit the individuals' homes, they would inform whomever they found that the individual was homosexual and had been arrested while attending a party at GALZ.

Figure 8: Ever arrested during raids



Assistance given to Members by GALZ during and after raids
Whenever a raid would take place, GALZ would do the best it could to locate injured members and offer assistance, ranging from medical attention to counselling and legal support, depending on existing needs. Because of its good relations with many strategic civil society actors, GALZ is in a position to acquire multiple services for members.

“Support organisations have been quick to assist us well, and tend to respond quickly when we get in touch with them. The last time we were raided, we were able to secure medical attention from one of our partners for those in need within an hour or two. Unfortunately, in the immediate chaos following a raid, some members would disappear too quickly without receiving necessary medical attention, which they would have

received for free". – Staff Member.

"When there has been need for bail, GALZ also takes care of that, including counselling and other psychological support, including follow-ups at home to to check how one is doing to cope with the effects of the raids." – Transgender Member.

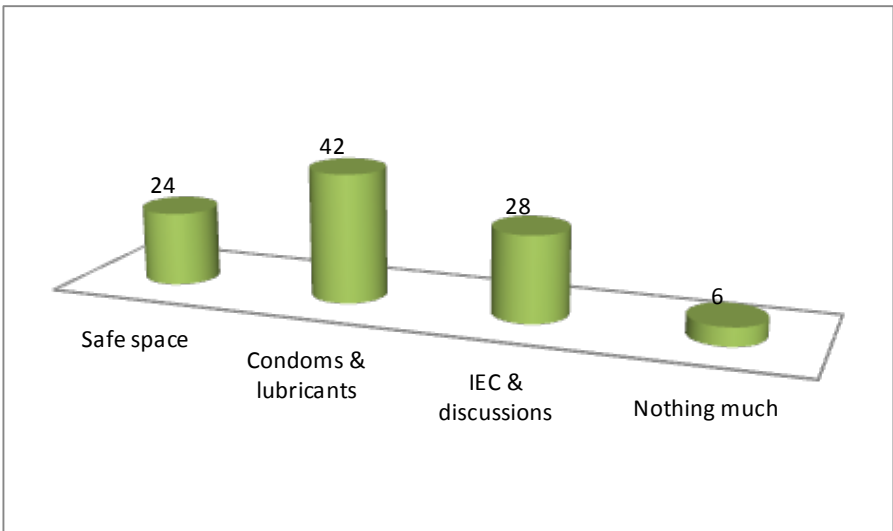
Majority of the respondents praised the support given by GALZ to members and individuals who get injured or arrested during the raids. Apart from the immediate assistance given to members in need, GALZ also does a follow-up visits to those affected. The researcher had a first-hand experience of witnessing a team of GALZ staff members visiting the individual members who had been affected by the raid on 20th December 2014.

Impact of Raids

The impact of raids is two dimensional: some of the effects can be measured while others cannot. The impacts are also at both individual level and organisational level. Apart from the physical harm, verbal abuse, lose of personal belongings experienced during a raid, there are other effects that are internalised by the individuals affected, which cannot be easily measured. The organisation has also been affected in terms of programing, which subsequently affected the ability to fulfil work objectives. Staff members noted that before the raids started, there used to be an influx of people visiting the centre everyday. Some would come for counselling services, referrals just to hang out and interact with other members because it

felt like a safe space and home. However, ever since the raids started, visits to the centre have significantly diminished. Figure 9 shows some of the services that members are missing out on due to their fear of being raided at the centre.

Figure 9: Services that members stand to lose due to fear of raids



Safe Space: Assembly and Association

The Centre is one area that had been considered a safe zone for the LGBTI community before the raids. 24% of the participants bemoaned the encroachment of the safe space that GALZ offered to them. The Centre offered a safe space to allow for group interactions amongst members, which were important

for enabling members to interact and share experiences. The LGBTI community has some peculiar challenges that can only be better handled by sharing experiences with others in similar situations. Some of the challenges experienced include but are not limited to health issues (in particular STIs), family acceptance/rejection, relationship issues, coming out and many others. The Centre also offered opportunities for affirmation of a member's sexual orientation and identity.

"Some of the struggles encountered by our community are not necessarily written in books, even though they may experience them on daily basis. Having the opportunity to share issues related to coming out, religion, acceptance etc with others in similar situations can be very therapeutic, allowing exchange of coping strategies. However, members are now increasingly and justifiably too fearful to access the space."

The Centre was previously considered as home by many, and it offered a space for expressing one's identity, which could not be done anywhere easily in Zimbabwe.

"Some members would just want that moment to hang out; put on their dresses and heels and drag for some time. They needed to just freely express themselves, while mixing with others. The importance of being able to be oneself to affirm one's sexuality cannot be underestimated. But they can't do that now." - Staff Member

As a result of raids, the organisation now has limited safe spaces

if any, that they can use to hold any of their events. This has significantly affected the organisations programming in this regard, as finding safe spaces for their members to congregate is no longer a simple thing. Even some of the spaces that were perceived to be safe have been raided, thus finding venues for any activity is now a constant worry on the part of the staff as they battle with concerns about the safety and security of members. Even in smaller towns such as Mutare, Masvingo, Chinhoyi where GALZ used to have vibrant affinity groups, people can no longer meet freely as they used to do, because of fear of raids. Attendance and participation in affinity groups has declined significantly, thus affecting important discussions on relevant issues.

“.. but now if we cannot create a safe space for our community, it defeats the whole purpose of having the organisation. Why are we here if we are unable to provide a safe space for the LGBTI community” – Staff Member.

Thus GALZ is concerned that if they cannot provide a safe social space for its members, where else could they go. Even though there are some other spaces that accommodate LGBTI people, there are no guarantees of security and violence has broken out at several such centres. Sometimes, their members are denied entry because they are considered to be “too gay”.

Access to Information

GALZ used to develop and stock pamphlets, booklets, leaflets and magazine that contain gay themed information to empower members of the community. Before the raids, the Centre used

to stock literature relevant to the LGBTI community (both social and educational) in diverse formats. Members could come to the Centre to watch informational DVDs. When the Centre started to experience raids, some of the key literature had to be moved away for safe keeping, which affects the ability of members to easily access all the information they would require. Given that they are basically the sole provider of LGBTI informational services in Zimbabwe, GALZ is concerned about the fact that their members can no longer easily access critical information. Without viable options of information, members become disempowered. However, technological advancements and the internet now make it possible to access and disseminate information widely and securely. But not all members can access such services due to limitations ranging from costs to technical know-how. The organisation is also no longer at liberty to continue producing materials that they know will be raided and confiscated by the state agencies. More over, because of the fear that has been instilled into the LGBTI community, people also do not want to be found with anything associated with GALZ as they fear being victimised. The centrality of GALZ as a repository of IEC materials relevant to the LGBTI community was emphasised by a participant in an FGD, whilst he was trying to challenge fellow participants to come to the centre.

“If I’m available, I attend all events, but I’m sure that the guys who fear coming to GALZ events will be missing a lot. Most of the workshops and discussions done by GALZ help us LGBTI people, because the information we get there cannot

be imparted elsewhere. Normally, out there the information is about heterosexuals, so you only get it here not out there." - Gay Member.

Reaching Out: Membership and Mobilisation

The impact of raids on the membership and mobilisation has been complex, with both negative and positive impact. Whenever raids have occurred, they get a lot of prominence in the newspapers, which scares some members away but also attracts new members.

Membership Retention

The GALZ staff noted that there were mainly two types of membership. The first group consists of younger people (above 18 years) who are still living with parents or guardians, professionals with careers, those in heterosexual marriages, older gay men and lesbian women who tend to distance themselves from the organisation when it starts making the headlines, in order to safeguard their interests. The younger ones fear being 'outed' to their family members and being chased away from home at a stage that they are not yet capable of taking care of themselves. Because of their insecurity they tend to shy away from the organisation.

The prominent individuals and career people tend to feel that the organisation is becoming too political and attracting too much attention, which they believe might have serious repercussions for them, thus they shy away. Generally, those who think that they stand to lose more tend to distance

themselves from the organisation as it becomes more and more visible due to the raids.

The second group consists of members that have accepted who they are and seem not worried about and are prepared to fight for the cause. These tend to stick with the organisation despite the raids that have been taking place. Some even insisted that even if they are raided and are called to come to GALZ the following day, they would avail themselves. The quote below from an FGD sums up the response of the so called “old usual members” who stick around the organisation even after the raids.

“Ini I think hangu basically chero musi wandakarohwa mangwana acho ndanga ndava pano , so I don’t have fear, so even ndikabatwa nhasi I will attend again, if I’m available I attend all functions”. Loosely translated: Personally, even if I’m beaten today, tomorrow I can still pitch up if a meeting is called. – Gay Member

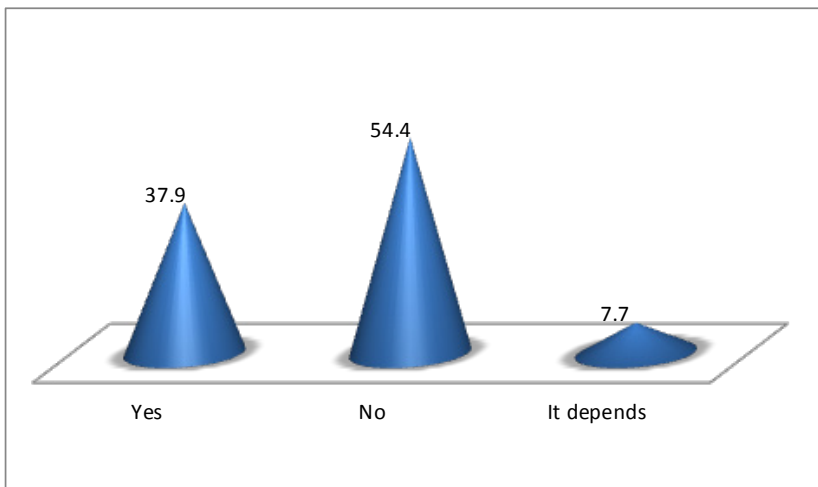
A staff member had this to say:

“Strangely, when these things happen and then you call members, they do pitch up, we call the people and some come. Sometime back after a raid, we had an AGM and we called members and the response was overwhelming”.

When asked about their thoughts on the safety of the Centre in light of the raids, about 38% as shown in figure 10 still consider

the Centre as a safe place. The statistical test conducted to determine whether there is a difference in safety perceptions of the Centre between those who have been raided before and those who have not been raided revealed that there is no significant difference. Thus, despite the raids that have been taking place, the Centre is considered relatively safe by some members.

Figure 10: Due to raids do you feel safe at GALZ



During the time of the assessment when the FGD was conducted, the perimeter wall at GALZ premises was being repaired after a vehicle had rammed into it. When asked whether the members felt safe in the premises, they all expressed different feelings. One said that she felt safe because at that time, there were not many people at the Centre thus it was relatively safe as nothing would attract attention.

“Ini hangu handifunge (personally I don’t think) that there can be any challenge, because there are not so many people, but the moment there are many people and the noise levels go up, that’s when attention is generated so I think I’m safe” – Lesbian, Member.

Another participant said,

“Well today when I was coming here, I extended the invitation to a friend to come with me and he said, aa kundoitei tindobhurwa zvedu ikoko, enda wega, (I can’t go there, I don’t want to be beaten) so they think it might happen anytime, I brave it when I come but I will be scared as well, they (friends) would like to come but they are afraid of what might happen.” – Gay Member.

Membership Recruitment

Though not intended, to some extent the raids seem to generate a lot of interest in the media, which then serves to alert some individuals out there about the existence of the organisation. The staff indicated that though surprising, they seem to get an influx of new people making contact and enquiries about the organisation whenever the raids are published in the media. One of the participants in the FGD was a new member to GALZ and had this to say when quizzed why she had joined GALZ even after hearing and reading reports about raids.

‘Because at times you need to interact with people who understand you, ndakangoti chero zvinenge zvaitika tichangozoon,’ (I just had to throw caution to the wind, I just

said whatever comes my way will just face it).

Having heard about the raid, she had asked for more information about GALZ from a friend whose relative worked at the organisation. It has to be noted that membership recruitment is often determined by the extent to which the organisation puts out information out there. This is generally a challenge as much of what gets to the audience through the mainstream media is usually negative and derogatory. Hardly do news reporters put across neutral or positive information about the organisation. Though the organisation has made inroads in recruiting new and younger members, the same cannot be said of older gay men and women.

Reaching out

As a consequence of the raids and the fear instilled among the members, it has been difficult to mobilise them to attend some social or educational functions. Sometimes members are invited for a focus group discussion to evaluate some on-going programs but a few respond, hence it has become difficult for GALZ to evaluate the effectiveness of some services offered to members. The focus group meeting for this evaluation had to be rescheduled several times and the second one could not be conducted.

In order to reach out to LGBTI people, 'buddy groups' have been organised to cater for members who cannot easily congregate at the Centre due to safety and security fears. Despite the efforts that have been made to reach out to members who are

afraid of coming to GALZ, there are still a number of challenges being experienced. Some people remain secretive as they do not want people in their neighbourhood knowing who they associate with.

“We are reaching out to our members on a one on one basis through peer educators, but this is less effective versus when they voluntarily congregate at the Centre. Now that you are dealing with individuals scattered all over, it is very difficult to follow up on interventions, and we do not know where everyone lives and not everyone wants people to know where he or she lives”. – GALZ Staff Member.

Health Issues: Lubricants and condoms

GALZ has been central to addressing the health concerns of the LGBTI community as they provide IEC, condoms, lubricants and referrals to health centres considered ‘gay friendly’. Together with partner organisations, GALZ has run a series of workshops and discussions on health issues with the LGBTI community and has also extended training to some health service providers. This initiative has been crucial in the prevention, treatment and management of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections, and staff noted that they had realised some significant achievements. They have also witnessed a decline in new infections of STIs, significant behaviour change and positive living among those infected. However the staff fears that all the progress that has been made may be eroded because of the immediate and long term effects of the raids.

Behaviour change

“The absence of a safe space for members to interact has contributed to some reckless and shocking behaviour as some individuals begin to feel that nobody cares and they are unwanted, hence they go on to do whatever they want without looking at the consequences of risky behaviours” – GALZ Staff Member.

Without access to information on behaviour change, some members of the LGBTI community are predisposed to risky behaviours that expose them to infections. Some may not fully appreciate the risk factors out there. The staff noted that some of the new cases that are being reported now could have been avoided had the clients had access to critical health information. Historically, the organisation recorded new cases of infection predominantly among the new members in the community who might not have accessed the information that was given to others.

“Some do not even understand the risks out there. We are recording new cases almost every day, but previously, we had reached a stage where we would get 2 to 3 new cases of STIs over a long period and usually these were new members joining the community who had not previously accessed information. Those who were positive would live positively and the negative would maintain their status. But with the raids have changed everything, because we now have more cases, and some are repeat cases because people are no longer accessing information”. – GALZ Staff Member.

Referral to health centres

In the past, members with health issues would approach the Centre without any fear and would be referred to the relevant health centres to handle their cases. However, the fear of being raided after visiting the centre, has made some members to suffer in silence. They find themselves without anyone to refer them to friendly centres and face discomfort of visiting public health institutions where they experience blatant discrimination by health service providers. Without the opportunity to meet and discuss, it has been difficult for staff to identify individuals in need of a service. The inability of GALZ to offer referrals was also echoed by a stakeholder in an in-depth interview:

“As a result, some members have not come to seek the services that they need. At times I meet some LGBTI community members presenting health issues to me during interviews but when I ask them to come to the Centre for proper referral they say ‘aah ku office aunty, kurikutysia mazuvano (the Centre is a no go area these days)” .

Another respondent, who is a member had this to say:

“So sometimes some people who are infected with STIs may think of coming here, but then they ask themselves; what if I get raided there? So in the end they stay with their STI without getting the assistance”.

Counselling

Amongst the many services offered at the Centre that members are now having limited access to is counselling. Members come and receive counselling at the Centre on whatever problems they are experiencing which are connected to their sexual orientation, family issues, relationships, employment and discovery issues. They could spend time with the counsellor but now with the fear that has been instilled in the community, few of them are accessing the service. For example one respondent had this to say:

“At a personal level, some are struggling with their sexuality in a homophobic environment, and the law is beating you up, as in uniformed police officers. This means that who you are is wrong. Some have gone into hiding, where they cannot be reached even by peer educators. It means that such individuals are going to be lonely, yet this is a safe place that can enable them to meet other people in similar situations. This is a place that normalises sexual diversity, and they would begin to feel normal if they came here”.

When individuals do not get their sexuality affirmed, they do not access counsellors who may understand their issues thus they continue to struggle in silence or end up taking part in risky behaviours.

Access to condoms and lubricants

The Centre provides condoms and lubricants at no cost to people in need of the service. However, due to the raids, research participants (42%) noted that an important service that members risk losing by not coming to the Centre was access to condoms and lubricants, which allow them to have safe sex. Although condoms are provided at no fee or a small fee by other HIV organisations in Zimbabwe, the water based lubricants are not easily available and come at a relatively high cost in the pharmacies. Some individuals may also not feel comfortable with buying the lubricants as they may fear that people will suspect that they are homosexual.

“For most people, the Centre is perceived as not safe, because they are still fearful. Because of that they stand to lose out. I think that GALZ is the only place where the LGBTI community can have access to information relating to them, as well as access to condoms and lubricants. Most people may not be comfortable with buying condoms or KY gel (lubricant), so they rely on the Centre. Their not feeling comfortable with coming to GALZ therefore deprives them access to critical services, which then puts them in a position of vulnerability and risk of STIs.” – Transgender Member.

Another participant in an FGD emphasised the importance of the HIV and AIDS discussions conducted at GALZ, that those not attending were being deprived of:

“Last week we had a good discussion on STIs, which is

something I needed, because I got to learn more information about problematic wats (STIs). But if one does not come, they wouldnt get that information, yet people are out there having sex without knowledge. Well kana ukaita STI kuseri uko mal, wakutotya kuenda kuchipatara kwacho. (When one gets an STI in the anal area, they would scared of going to the clinic, because of fear to reveal one's sexual orientation)." – Gay Member.

HIV Programs

Despite the raids that have affected the organisation, GALZ has kept the services connected to HIV running by adopting some innovative approaches. HIV services have been running through 'Buddy Groups' and peer educators. Peer educators are trained to keep their ears open to check for those in need of the service, identify needs, and distribute condoms and lubricants. These have been assigned at different service areas. They are also stationed at areas identified as 'hotspots' where there will give the condoms and lubricants to those in need. If well implemented and monitored, this strategy has potential to bring significant results within the community. However at present, the efficacy of the model has not been assessed effectively. The organisation relies heavily on what the peer educators report.

"We rely on what they say, but we may not be certain that they are meeting the people they claim to meet. We are unclear about the service they are providing, and of course we rely on trust." – GALZ Staff Member.

Whilst this initiative should be applauded for enabling the organisation to reach people who can no longer come to the Centre due to security and safety concerns, it should be evaluated and strengthened. There is need to put in place a monitoring mechanism and also look for strategies of reaching out to some of the individuals who do not want to be known where they stay or to be seen with members associated with GALZ. The situation is compounded by the fact that when GALZ calls people to come to the Centre for an evaluation, few people turn up. Thus the effectiveness of the model is difficult to ascertain.

What is encouraging however, is that of late the government has, under the Global Fund, principally agreed to provide condoms and lubricants to key populations. Thus GALZ has to find certain spots throughout the country that are friendly to their community, which will become distribution centres for condoms and lubricants. This will enable members to choose where they are most comfortable in accessing the service, either from peer educators or the trained health care workers.

Attendance to functions

The raids have instilled fear amongst the LGBTI community regardless of the fact that the work of GALZ is legal, and many times they have gone to court and won their cases. However this does little to bring comfort to frightened members. This is a result of the prevailing homophobic environment which attaches criminality to being gay and lesbian. The attendance patterns to events organised by GALZ clearly show the effect of these raids. As Figure 11 demonstrates, 46.9% of those who

were raided before indicated that their attendance to GALZ events has declined. Amongst these are also individuals who said that they no longer attend GALZ functions. 44% of the respondents said nothing had changed for them. Others attend but leave early before the event is over, while some indicated that they leave at a point when they sense that things might just get volatile, for example when some patrons start showing signs of getting drunk.

Figure 11: Attendance pattern in response to raids

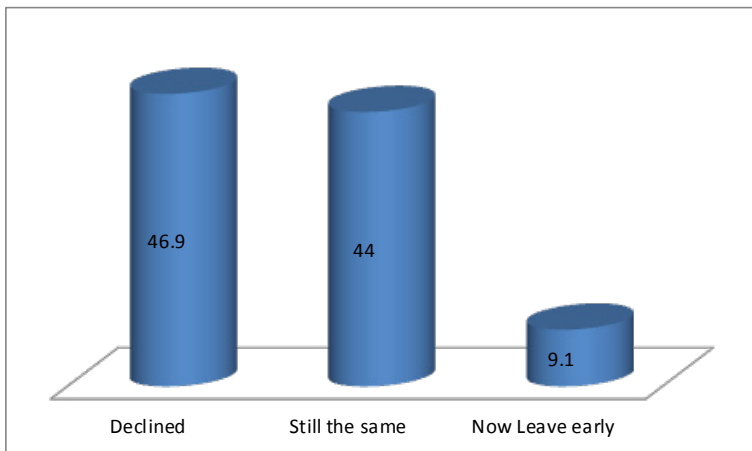


Figure 12 shows some of the fears that the LGBTI community now have because of the raids. 53% expressed concern that they may be “outed” to the public if they are arrested during the raids. Their fears were that their names and pictures would be published in the newspapers, in particular the notorious tabloid, H-Metro. In this way, their parents and relatives who did not know about their sexual orientation, would then find

out through unsavory means.

“There are fears that I have, even with this focus group discussion. I’m not comfortable right now, even as I’m speaking. I’m not comfortable because I don’t know what may happen, even if we are not at GALZ. As long as I am in the company of someone whose sexual orientation is LGBTI, I’m not comfortable. I would like to attend events, but because of the raids dzatinonzwa tinoty (that we hear about, we are scared). Firstly, I’m protecting myself from my family. There are some who know, and some whom I never want to find out. So it brings a question iwe wairohwa wairohwerwepi, zvambodii, zvakutonetsa. Saka even ndichida kuparticipate I can’t because hauzivi kuti zvinoperera kupi.(if there is a raid and I get beaten and arrested, it is going to open a can of worms with all kinds of questions like why were you beaten, and where were you when that happened)” – Gay Member.

Another respondent in the FGD had this to say:

“I would like to attend all events, but on my part, I can’t attend, because if I attend and get arrested, my parents would say musiyei arimujeri imomo (leave her to rot in jail), they know who I am but they can’t just accept it” – Lesbian Member.

Another participant also expressed the following fears in a focus group discussion:

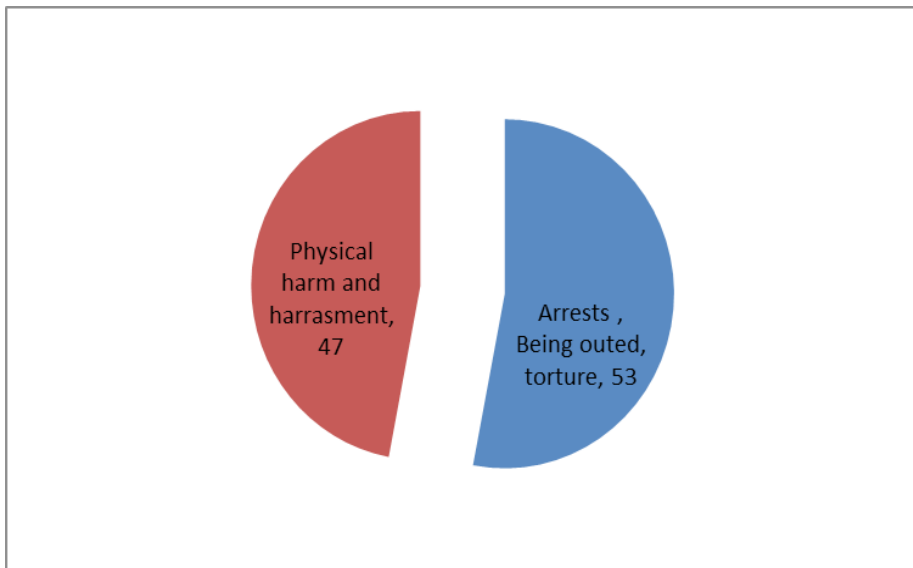
“When someone gets raided, beaten and injured, it’s a perilous situation. You may have lied to your parents saying that you

are visiting a friend, or going somewhere, maybe an all-night prayer. Your parents will want to understand, then they will hear what actually transpired.” – Gay Member.

Another participant in an in-depth interview had this to say about attending GALZ educational and social functions in the context of raids:

“In the beginning it affected me in a way, even just coming for a meeting. I would be hesitant to come because I imagined that I would get arrested. As much as I am ‘out’ at home, I was just not comfortable with having my name in police records, or them coming to our home. So in the end I could only wish to participate, but could not muster the courage to visit GALZ offices. This also affected my interaction with some key people within GALZ, because I feared that my association with them would get me in trouble. So I sort of disconnected myself from those people.” – Member.

Figure 12: Fears of the LGBTI community



Stakeholder cooperation

Another impact of the raids is how they affect the ability of GALZ to formulate or sustain strong partnerships with other organisations. GALZ as an organisation, cannot achieve everything on its own, however it is becoming increasingly very difficult to create partneships in light of the raids. Some partners indicate that they no longer want to be associated with the organisation, as they deem it to have become too political and dangerous for their operations. When GALZ attempts to invite other organisations to sensitisation workshops, very few of them are keen to come. When follow-ups are made, some openly mention that they are afraid of being raided.

“Some organisations say that we have become too political,

hence cannot associate with us. Others make the process of meeting with them too cumbersome, for example saying that they have to obtain board approval for a simple meeting. It's frustrating when other organisations don't want to meet or work with you. However, there are few all-weather partner organisations working in human rights, that tend to naturally align with our cause." - GALZ Staff Member.

The raids have had some long term impact on some of the stakeholders and partners who now have fear of being associated with GALZ. To deal with some of the challenges, GALZ has resorted to partnering with organisations willing to issue out event invitations in their name. Apart from the challenges of getting partner co-operation, the raids have also affected GALZ in that they have to dedicate more resources towards defending their existence.

"The raids impact on us as an organisation, as half the time as staff we are trying to defend ourselves in order to continue carrying out the work than furthering the objectives of the organisation" - GALZ Staff Member.

Members Perceptions of the raids

After every raid, a lot of perceptions are shared by members as they try to come up with explanations. Among other things, some members shared the belief that staff members or some board members initiate the raids so that GALZ gets attention, which would then lead to increased funding. There is widespread speculation amongst the members that whenever

a raid takes place and people get beaten, there is money that is received from donors.

“...GALZ organized the raids. At least this is what we as members think, that they do it to get money. That way, they can also get enough funding to enable them to assist the members. Most members have beliefs that GALZ has connections with state security agencies with whom they arrange to come at a certain time and do such and such. For instance, when someone is arrested and GALZ handles the case, the member gets released. So most members have the idea that GALZ has connections with the police”. – Member.

This perception is buttressed by the fact that when most of the raids happened, key staff members of GALZ would have already left the venue. Thus according to this line of thought, they are responsible for tipping whoever comes to raid the venue. The members also argued that the GALZ staff never get hurt in these raids, therefore it is possible that they would have known in advance that it was going to happen. A participant in an FGD had this to say about the issue:

“Usually people talk about this informally. For instance, we can talk about this in our community, one could say that for the last raid, the director (name given) was responsible. How come when he left, that’s when we were beaten. He may not have even known about it, but these speculations would be amongst the members. This is worsened by the fact that sometimes there is no communication between staff and the members.”
– Gay Member.

However there is evidence that when raids took place, both the members and GALZ staff members have been victims. In the December 2014 raid, a staff member and some volunteers working at the office got seriously injured as they were all beaten. A stakeholder confirmed this in an interview:

“The last raid that happened in December 2014, I almost broke down. I received a phone-call from a staff member who had been badly beaten, and this is a staff member who has been a pillar of support to many in the community, the one who is strong and has gone through thick and thin. He narrated what had transpired and how he was attacked whilst warning others to disperse. I could hear that his voice was cracking, and it was painful listening to him almost in tears. He was beaten by a system that has institutionalised violence. I was trying very hard to hold back my own tears. We cannot even put a measurement to what harm has been done, and there are some members whose stories we do not even get to hear, and they do not come back after such an experience.”

The staff members were at pains to dispel the speculation that they organise raids, which is a thing that worries them much. In the beginning it used to affect them much that they were accused of instigating such raids in order to attract funding. The staff members said that they issue out statements after every raid, but some allegations will always stick.

“I actually now just laugh it off when people make wild claims that we get paid for being beaten. Eish. There is of-course some urgent funds that you can apply for, but it is not as

simple as people think. Perhaps we are not doing enough to raise awareness with members in sharing information on how we get funding, for instance proposal development.” – GALZ Staff Member.

The effect of this speculation is dire for the organisation as it leads to staff members being isolated from the community they seek to serve. Some members in the community assume that the staff is already ‘out’ there, and because they are already known, they have nothing to lose but will be risking others. This has created mistrust within the community and some members vent their anger on staff that they do not like. A respondent in an in-depth interview had this to say:

“But some personal relationships have been strained. We have people at the office who are also part of the community, and when something bad happens and people throw tantrums, it strains relationships. Some say that GALZ organized the raids and when the staff try to defend themselves, relations become strained. You end up with situations where some members point out certain individuals at GALZ they don’t want to be there.” – Member.

The other dominant speculation within the LGBTI community points to infiltration by state security agencies at all levels, starting with staff members, the GALZ board and then the members themselves. The board and staff members are accused of being part of the state machinery that seeks to suppress the LGBTI community in Zimbabwe and thus provide

information to the state. This belief is quite rife within the community and the following quotes from in-depth interviews could not dispel the speculation:

“I don’t know everyone enough to believe that all the people are innocent. But I don’t think that it’s correct to say the raids are organised by GALZ. It might make more sense to say that there may be some informers within the staff or the board. The security agents in Zimbabwe work with people from all walks of life, thus they may have planted someone. But that does not mean GALZ organises the raids; there may just be a rotten apple. In a system where blackmail and extortion are rife, anyone can abuse their position”. – Stakeholder.

There is also speculation that some of the members are part of state machinery thus they are the informers. The membership for GALZ comes from diverse backgrounds and that cannot be denied. There are calls to filter and screen all people who become members, but this has been dismissed as it is tantamount to discrimination.

“Our membership is so broad that we get members across the board, and you cannot refuse individuals membership. Though some may encourage that we filter who gets to become a member, for me that constitutes discrimination on the basis of employment.” – GALZ Staff Member.

Another stakeholder also dispelled the speculation that GALZ staff members could be behind the raids as a ploy to seek

attention and funding:

“I wouldn’t think that the Director and Operations Manager could get down to do that just to get attention. I seriously doubt that. Currently, MSM issues are topical, so there is no need to attract media attention as the Global Fund has already identified them as a key population. Also, outside the raids, the existing levels of homophobia in this country are enough to draw attention worldwide, thus there is no need to stoop so low and sacrifice the membership.”

There are also some views that among the membership are some people who just do not want the gay community to get together, so they tip their friends or relatives. Others also believe that that in the community there are people who date members of the state security thus they divulge information unintentionally. There have also been incidences where people assume that members were being very open when attending an event. There are some members who are so flamboyant or walk in groups such that they easily attract the public’s attention.

However, some members of the community expressed that GALZ has not done enough to dispel the rumours and exonerate themselves from the allegations levelled against them. The members’ concerns were that a simple text message or Facebook post do not do much to convince the members that they were not behind the raids. Also sometimes, communication is not immediately circulated following a raid,

but is only done some months later.

“I would say that GALZ has not done much, or they have not been really convincing, other than just issuing a statement that they are sorry about the raid, and they are not behind it. But even if the staff said look, we were also raided, the members would say they arranged it that way so that it could be convincing”.

A respondent in an FGD said that the misperceptions that members have will continue, even if the staff members tried to exonerate themselves.

“I think hazvigadzirike (it cannot be solved) because; it might be a coincidence that when one leaves something then happens”.
– Member.

Another participant in an FGD echoed what a significant number of respondents had also suggested: the idea of incorporating the police to provide security when there was a function.

“When the raids take place, I’m not sure who is behind them, but from what I understand, it is not a crime to be gay; it’s only criminal to be caught in the act. Hence I think that we should get the police as our security. We can seek clearance and the police can provide the security.”

The staff though acknowledging that position noted that in

the past, they used to have the police at their events, however this seemed to scare away many of their members and they stopped coming for the events. Thus in order to create a conducive environment for all, they had to stop inviting the police. However, the staff were also concerned that with the now highly charged political environment where gay issues have become highly politicised, it will be difficult to get such support from the police.

Responses by GALZ to raids

GALZ has initiated security and safety training among its members, which helps them in their general day to day life as it pertains to their sexual orientation. Whenever GALZ holds an event, they do not reveal the venue beforehand. At times people do not know where they are going but are just given a transport pick up point. All this is done to protect the members. However with the advancements in technology, the venue may be unwittingly revealed by the members themselves. Whenever there are security concerns, GALZ sends message alerts to their members, not only when there are fears of raids but even general security threats.

Members have also been informed that it has become a security issue for GALZ to hold an event with 50 or more people. The event that took place in December 2014 where a raid was conducted was fully organised by the members and not GALZ staff. When raids do take place, GALZ does report to the police since they have the mandate to investigate and get to the bottom of the issue. However the response at times has not been very encouraging.

“There has not been much success. I think it partly has to do with us on how we respond to crises. As an example, last year we all got injured, went home and only reported a week or two after we had received treatment. The police said that we should have brought the issue to them immediately. But we were all worried about the next person’s welfare. In any case, many people are afraid to report to the police, hence only a few do” – GALZ Staff Member.

Generally, since the LGBTI community has been beaten and harassed by the law enforcement, they have now lost faith in the justice system. They question why they should report injustices when the system is actually oppressive to them too, thus they believe that there is no chance of their concerns being addressed. They even fear to be quizzed and be judged because of their sexuality by the system. This means that unscrupulous people in the society can extort money from them and treat them unfairly with impunity.

“We still have spaces that we think are relatively safe. But we also realise that there is nothing like safe, because this is limited at times. Some of the things are beyond our control and we can only do what we can. That message has to cascade down to the members. We therefore include them in discussions and planning. We have also tried moving offices, working from home or other places, however the political volatility means that we have no full control over. During election periods and other national events, the gay issue become topical, and we have to lie low. However at times we are forced to come out, e.g.

during the constitution making process, we found ourselves caught in between, and our submission was hijacked and it ended up being something else, so there are issues beyond our control”.

Conclusion

The assessment unearthed the nature and extent of the raids that have been directed at GALZ and its members. The assessment brought out the opaqueness of the raids, which indicates the precarious environment that GALZ is operating under. The attacks at times come directly from the law enforcers and at times ill composed groups of individuals who just take advantage of the prevailing homophobic context. Other raids seem to be orchestrated by people who are well organised, raising speculation that they may be state security agencies working either on official or unofficial capacity, thus making it difficult to find out their intentions. The opaqueness of the raids has served to instil fear in the LGBTI community as they are at the mercy of anyone. Notwithstanding the challenging environment, the organisation has soldiered on and hopes for a better future. The organisation has managed to attract new members as well as retain some old members, though many have distanced themselves. It is also encouraging that some programs are still running and members still access essential services particularly those connected to HIV & AIDS. Despite the challenges they experience, staff members have soldiered on and enjoy doing their work in anticipation of a better future for the LGBTI community in Zimbabwe.

Recommendations

Utilisation of Electronic platforms

GALZ could facilitate the creation of a secure, accessible, easy to use online platforms, e.g chat rooms, to hold discussions about HIV and other pertinent issues. The GALZ website could also be used to churn out more information resources, in particular that which used to be distributed via printed IEC materials.

Improve efficiency of information dissemination

The organisation needs to improve the efficiency of information dissemination after raids have taken place. This would go a long way in addressing some of the speculation that is rife within the community. Delays in releasing information only further fuels the speculation, creating animosity within the community

Crises Committee

GALZ needs to establish a crises committee that would help in coordinating responses in the event of raids. Usually, individuals panic and people scattered in the confusion that some members fail to get assistance.

Media engagement

GALZ needs to be aggressive about engaging the media to report objectively and positively on LGBTI issues, rather than fuelling homophobia. They also need to engage the media on sensitisation of the society on violence.

Partner Civic Organisation

Given the volatile environment for human rights organisations in Zimbabwe, let alone LGBTI advocacy groups, the organisation should try to strengthen its partnerships and also engage other partners for collaborative efforts.

Evaluate Current Programs (Buddy group and peer educators)
This will enable the organisation to check on the progress and impact that they are making through the program. It will also demonstrate whether the peer educators are adequately equipped and capacitated.

Utilise members to encourage others

Since GALZ has a core of members that stick with the organisation always, those members can be tapped into to help reassure the others that the centre is still safe.

Improve security at events

Entry should be exclusive to GALZ members and those with invitation cards if there are security concerns. The venue selection should also be thorough.



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