



Cooperation of human rights defender organizations for LGBT rights protection in Armenia project implemented by “New Generation” Humanitarian NGO through the financial support of Open Society Foundations – Armenia and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Netherlands.



The Standpoint of Human Rights Defender Organizations about LGBT Issues in Armenia

Sociological Research

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Abbreviations

LGBT	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender
RA	Republic of Armenia
NGO	Non-governmental organization

Problem description

Today, LGBT people in Armenia have numerous problems in society, as well as in human rights organizations. Armenian society still does not perceive LGBT individuals as equal members. Therefore, the most significant problem for LGBT persons is the protection of their rights. This study evaluated the readiness of human rights organizations to help and protect LGBT persons.

With Open Society Institute funding, the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs and "New Generation" Humanitarian NGO is implementing a project called "Cooperation of human rights defender organizations for LGBT rights protection in Armenia," and this project includes sociological research.

The main aim of this survey is to determine the attitude of human rights defenders towards LGBT people's problems and the programs and activities implemented by them.

The survey has been implemented in the regions of the Republic of Armenia. The instrument of the sociological research is a nine-question questionnaire.

Sociological research goals and procedures

The study's aim is to identify human rights organizations' attitudes towards the problems of LGBT people and the programs and activities implemented by them.

The following tasks were necessary to achieve the main goal.

- ✓ Determine the problems of LGBT people from the view of human rights defenders in Armenia.
- ✓ Identify the causes of violation of LGBT persons' rights.
- ✓ Identify whether human rights defenders deal with the problem of LGBT people rights protection and whether they have achieved positive results.
- ✓ Determine the areas where LGBT persons rights are violated.

Sociological research results analysis and conclusion

The sociological study was carried out in the regions of Armenia, in particular the Lori, Shirak, Kotayk, Vayots Dzor, Armavir and Tavush marzes. The study was not carried out in Gegharkounik, Syunik, Ararat, or Aragatsotn marzes, because organizations in these regions refused to take part in the survey.

The survey participants belong to the age group between 20 and 50 years old.

The majority of participants are female (23 female, 17 male).

The survey results revealed that human rights organizations have gathered information about LGBT people's problems primarily from the internet.

Respondents answered that the main sources of information are:

1. Internet - 24 replies
2. Social networks - 14 replies
3. TV - 11 replies
4. Offices, NGOs - 8 replies
5. Friends, relatives, neighbors - 7 replies
6. Talk, news, gossips - 6 replies
7. Newspapers, media - 6 replies
8. Radio – 1 reply.

Terms and characteristics used to describe LGBT people

Generalizing the attitudes towards LGBT people by region, results in the following conclusion:

Positive attitudes are expressed in Vayots Dzor. Here we can notice positive and tolerant attitude towards LGBT people (90 % of respondents are complemented to defend LGBT people's rights).

- ✓ Negative attitudes are strongest in Armavir and Tavush marzes, and then in Lori and Kotayk marzes (60 % respondents refuse to defend LGBT's rights).
- ✓ Neutral attitudes are seen least in this survey (for the 20 % of respondents it is the same if LGBT people are being objected to the violence).

In Kotayk and Vayots Dzor regions neutral and indifferent attitude towards the problems of LGBT persons can be observed equally. In Armavir region, an indifferent attitude is also noted. Many respondents indicated that LGBT persons are also people. One respondent noticed that it is very bad, that there are LGBT persons in our society, but we have to understand them. Some defenders believe that the LGBT persons are brave. Others could not characterize them with specific terminology.

According to 2 human rights activists, LGBT people are people who have a different, but natural, orientation.

3 defenders think that LGBT people have their own personal attitude towards sexual life and because each person has his/her personal rights, there is no need to describe or find terms to characterize LGBT people. 5 respondents did not

want to describe them in any way because they felt that every person has his or her own life.

12 people believe that LGBT persons are unusual.

Negative opinions were expressed in terms of a “sickness”, or ordinary people with unusual characteristics. 9 respondents have suggested that these people are strange, and 3 of them even commented that LGBT people are dissidents, because they are different.

Based on these opinions, our society seems to accept LGBT people in mostly negative ways. 21 people think that it is an undesirable phenomenon in our society, but at the same time, they also have the rights.

Interestingly, 29 human rights activists think LGBT people are people who are not correctly oriented and regard it as a disease. There is a belief that LGBT people have psychological problems, or perhaps this is a vulnerable group and with a problematic sexual orientation. That is why they are ignored and not included. They have many problems to solve, and they are rejected by society.

Problems of LGBT people in the Republic of Armenia

Numerous studies have documented the hypothesis that LGBT people have many problems in our society, but there is a need to understand and to find out the opinion of human rights organizations. Human rights defenders are potentially the people whose understanding and support is of the greatest need for LGBT community.

According to the survey, the human rights defenders pointed out that LGBT rights are being violated in every aspect of life. They are isolated from our society; they are exposed to labeling; they receive a negative attitude from society, and they are even rejected by society.

They meet in everyday life:

- ✓ Discriminative treatment
- ✓ Rights violation
- ✓ Negative public opinion
- ✓ The public's inaccurate perception
- ✓ They perceive themselves as sick people
- ✓ Intolerance
- ✓ Exposed to violence and discrimination
- ✓ Ignored by society
- ✓ They can't profit from their rights and state institutions
- ✓ The problem of being full member of society.

As a result of all these problems, LGBT people have to disguise themselves from society, which is another problem. In addition to the above-mentioned problems, 26 respondents have pointed that they have following problems:

- ✓ **Restriction of expression**
- ✓ **Communication difficulties**
- ✓ **Inability to establish themselves (which is very difficult and undesirable in reality)**

13 people believe that LGBT people have a problem:

- ✓ **Within themselves**
- ✓ **In society**
- ✓ **In arranging their own lives.**

75% of human rights defenders have pointed out, that, of course, LGBT people have many problems in Armenia, but these problems will always exist because they believe that LGBT persons can never be full members of our society. They feel that the best way to deal with these issues is trying to cure LGBT persons.

Two of the respondents say they have never encountered such people, and they do not want to say anything about them.

Violation of LGBT people's rights and the obstacles to defending their rights in Armenia

Our society is still not ready to accept LGBT persons as full members of society. The research results from human rights organizations have also emphasized this fact.

According to the survey, there are stereotypes in our society, which are a reason that LGBT people experience violation of their rights. The public opinion, intolerance, prejudice, and national traditions heavily influence the lack of protection of the rights of LGBT persons.

There is also misinformation. Organizations and individuals have distorted understandings about LGBT people and issues

In addition to the fact that public opinion does not allow society to accept LGBT person as full members of society, the laws are weak, incomplete, or even completely missing.

One of the respondents noted that LGBT persons have no rights.

24 respondents believe that the main obstacle of the protection of LGBT persons' rights is that they do not raise their voice.

The 90 % of respondents say that our society is not yet ready to accept LGBT persons. Our customs, traditions, limited thinking, intolerance, and society's negative attitudes towards the LGBT community are the reasons of rights violations. According to the respondents, there are still no human rights organizations in the Republic of Armenia, which can mostly defend LGBT people's rights.

The importance of NGOs in defending LGBT people's rights

This study has attempted to determine if LGBT people can turn to enforcement agencies, particularly NGOs, in order to protect their rights.

All organizations surveyed except one have answered “no.” Only one organization answered “yes;” however, the respondent refused to answer whether they have defended that person rights or whether they have achieved success.

To the question about whether NGOs are willing to engage in an LGBT persons' advocacy coalition,²¹ respondents said - “yes,” 12 of them answered - “I don't know,” and 7 of them answered - “no.”

Conclusion

By surveying human rights organizations attitudes towards LGBT people and their problems, we can draw the following conclusion: our society, including human right organizations, believe that LGBT persons have congenital or acquired disease. This is despite the fact that the American Psychiatric Association excluded homosexuality from its list of mental diseases in 1973. Also, the World Health Organization removed homosexuality from classification as a disease in 1992. However, our society still perceives this phenomenon as a disease. 65% human rights defenders find that they have incomplete information, and this could be a reason that the picture is distorted.

80 % human rights organizations consider LGBT people a vulnerable group, since they have many problems in legal and social-economic fields. Acts of violence efforts prevent LGBT persons from serving as full members of society. According to human rights activists, LGBT persons often do not know their own rights and are not familiar with the laws that protect their rights. On the other hand, this survey has shown that there are many lawyers who are not informed and do not have a clear understanding of the legislation and the issues. The stereotypes do not allow the person to operate as a full citizen and prevent the protection of the fundamental rights of every citizen.

Recommendations

Considering the findings and conclusions, we believe that there are many “gaps” or deficiencies in the law enforcement agencies, and it is necessary to carry out the work to resolve these issues.

The most important recommendation is to increase the awareness level of law enforcement agencies and law enforcement entities through seminars, discussions and other programs. These activities should explain to them that the LGBT community has equal rights, and they are full members of society. LGBT persons do not need to prove their rights, and the institution must accept LGBT personhood and try to solve their legal problems.

In addition, there is a need to introduce human rights defenders to the legislation, to help every NGO or human rights defending organization to be able to protect LGBT people’s rights. The NGOs or other organizations should not have a problem defending LGBT people’s rights.

The LGBT community also needs educational programs. Seminars and educational programs can inform them about their rights and show the path and mechanisms that promote their rights. This can help them establish themselves in our society and carry out their activities at an equal level as other members of our society.