

## **Introduction and Background**

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Gender and sexuality-related healthcare disparities are not unique to Kenya but are part of a global issue. Understanding and addressing these disparities is crucial for promoting equitable healthcare worldwide.

The impact of gender and sexuality on healthcare disparities in Kenya is a pressing concern, especially for feminist activists who are at the forefront of advocating for change. It's important to recognize that these disparities are not unique to Kenya but are part of a global issue. In Kenya, as in many other parts of the world, there is evidence to suggest that gender and sexuality play a significant role in shaping healthcare access, outcomes, and experiences.

Gender disparities in healthcare are pervasive and multifaceted. Maternal health is a key area where these disparities are evident. Women often face challenges in accessing quality maternal healthcare, influenced by cultural norms and gender roles that may prioritize men's needs over women's.

Sexual and reproductive health is another critical aspect of gender disparities. Women's access to contraception and comprehensive sexual health education can be limited, and societal stigma around sexuality can deter them from seeking essential services. Gender-based violence is a significant issue in Kenya, with severe implications for healthcare. Victims, predominantly women, may face barriers to seeking medical attention due to fear, shame, or societal pressure.

In addition to gender disparities, the LGBTQ+ community in Kenya also faces unique healthcare challenges. Discrimination and stigmatization of LGBTQ+ individuals can lead to significant disparities in healthcare access. Many LGBTQ+ individuals in Kenya may be reluctant to seek healthcare services due to fear of discrimination from healthcare providers or other patients.

The mental health of LGBTQ+ individuals is another area of concern. They can experience disproportionate levels of depression, anxiety, and suicide due to societal discrimination and rejection. Access to mental healthcare for this community is often limited.

## **What is Working**

- Promoting Gender-Responsive Healthcare - We have seen promising efforts in promoting healthcare systems that explicitly consider gender as a crucial factor. This gender-sensitive approach addresses women's unique health needs and vulnerabilities.
- Empowering Women - Initiatives centered around women's empowerment through education, economic independence, and political participation are slowly but consistently making strides toward countering healthcare disparities.
- Gender-Inclusive Research - There has been an increasing recognition of the importance of integrating gender considerations into health research. This is critical in eliminating gender biases in healthcare.
- Sensitizing Healthcare Providers - Comprehensive training for healthcare professionals on LGBTQ+ health issues, cultural competence, and respect for all sexual orientations and gender identities is yielding positive results.
- Inclusive Policy-Making - Policies that protect LGBTQ+ individuals from discrimination and create safe, affirming spaces for care are being advocated for and, in some cases, implemented.

## **Major Challenges**

1. Deep-Rooted Gender Biases - Gender disparities remain deeply ingrained in Kenyan society, and significant cultural and structural changes are needed to address these biases adequately.
2. Economic and Social Disparities - Economic and social disparities continue to limit access to quality healthcare, particularly for women.
3. Stigmatization and Discrimination - Stigmatization and discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals persist, often leading to delayed healthcare access and mental health issues.
4. Exclusion in Research and Policy - The exclusion of sexual and gender minorities from healthcare research and policy planning continues to perpetuate disparities.

## **Recommendations to Conference Convenors and Decision Makers**

1. Encourage policy changes that promote gender-responsive healthcare and address gender disparities in health. Implement anti-discrimination policies to protect LGBTQ+ individuals within healthcare institutions.
2. Invest in programs that empower women economically, through education and political participation, to bridge economic and social disparities that hinder access to quality healthcare.
3. Advocate for comprehensive training of healthcare providers on gender and LGBTQ+ health issues, ensuring they are culturally competent and respectful.

4. Emphasize the inclusion of gender and sexual minorities in health research and policy planning to create healthcare systems that meet their unique needs and perspectives.
5. Support and participate in campaigns and initiatives that promote gender and LGBTQ+ inclusivity in healthcare, both on the local and global levels.
6. Encourage collaboration among activists, healthcare institutions, and policymakers to drive meaningful change and ensure healthcare systems prioritize inclusivity.

## **Conclusion**

In the Kenyan context, the work of feminist activists is dedicated to dismantling biases within healthcare systems, promoting inclusivity, and striving for a healthcare landscape characterized by equality and justice. We urge conference convenors and decision makers to take action on these recommendations, as they represent the path forward to a more inclusive and compassionate future for healthcare in Kenya and beyond.