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The verdict is in: homosexuality is not a choice

Being gay is part of the normal range of human sexuality, shows a new report that also states it's not a mutation, but rather very much like the genetic regions that determine the colour of your hair.

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The evidence on homosexuality is out: it is not a choice. It is rooted in biology; it is not a result of "upbringing", "socialisation", or sexual molestation as a child. And people who act on the belief that it is, very often end up doing great harm, wittingly or not.

This is the outcome of a huge report recently published by the Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf).

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The ASSAf is tasked with providing government and other stakeholders with evidence-based science advice that are crucial to the nation. Africa's constitution protects the rights of homosexuals, and while same-sex marriage is legal here, it remains a bone of contention, with anti-gay prejudice constantly surfacing, often in very nasty ways such as 'corrective rape', for one.

Homosexuality is criminalised in 38 out of the 54 nations on the African continent – in fact, not one single African country has followed South Africa in this respect, although in 14 other countries, while homosexuality is not protected, it is at least not illegal.

A century of evidence

So the best evidence on this would be of immense value to our and to other governments. The ASSAf worked together with the Uganda National Academy of Sciences (UNAS) on this, gathering a distinguished multi-disciplinary panel with Professors Glenda Gray (president of the Medical Research Council) and Jerry Coovadia (whose positions and achievements are so vast they fill almost a full page of the



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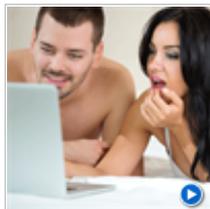
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report) as co-chairs. The panel included one member from UNAS, and UNAS endorsed the results, a report called Diversity in Human Sexuality which was presented on 6 August 2015 at a dialogue held in Sandton, Johannesburg.

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The panel looked at research done in this field over the last century, reviewing more than 500 studies and papers. One of the most recent of these was published just last year, as the panel was busy collating evidence. It confirmed earlier research indicating, as panel member Professor Michael Pepper said, that there is a strong association between a certain region of the X chromosome and male homosexuality. Pepper, who is director of the Institute for Cellular and Molecular Medicine at the University of Pretoria (among a number of other titles) said that this research also revealed another, previously unknown chromosome area that is associated with male homosexuality.

Not a choice

"This is not a choice," he said. "This happens very early on." Biological gender is set in the first trimester of pregnancy; psychological gender is set in the second, when the child in the womb is exposed to varying levels of testosterone.

It's not a mutation; it's very much like the genetic regions that determine whether you will have black or brown hair, whether you'll be tall or short, have dark or light skin, have broad or narrow hips... in other words, it is part of the normal range of normal human sexuality. And across all societies, the percentage of people who are gay remains about the same, at between 5-8% (although there is a difference between the incidence for men and women).

Some people argue that this is counter-intuitive in terms of evolution: homosexual people are not likely to reproduce. But having this variation in the gene pool may have some evolutionary use, as Pepper illustrated when he pointed to a strange little fact: the mothers and aunts of gay men tend to produce more children!

Changing minds

Panel member Professor Harry Dugmore, director of the Discovery Centre for Health Journalism, pointed out that even though many societies are still discriminatory legally or socially, change in public opinion across the world has in fact come remarkably swiftly: 15 years ago, no countries allowed gay marriage, now 19 do (the nineteenth being Catholic Ireland, which racked up a vote of 62% in favour recently).

Dugmore addressed the question of whether it is possible to 'acquire' homosexuality – and said the panel's trawl through all available science had led to a resounding 'No' answer: "The idea that sexual orientation can be acquired because of greater contact with LGBTI [lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual and intersex] people or that societies that are tolerant 'promote' an 'uptake' of non-normative sexualities has no basis in science," he said.

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As for any evidence that attempts through 'therapy' to 'convert' someone from homosexuality to 'normal' heterosexuality worked, there was absolutely none, he said. Indeed, it does great harm to the mental health of the 'patients' subjected to it.

It's called SOCE (sexual orientation change efforts), and it's even been renounced by the president of the largest coordinating body of organisations offering SOCE, who said on the dissolution of Exodus International in 2014, "I am sorry for the pain and hurt many of you have experienced. I am sorry that some of you spent years working through the shame and guilt you felt when your attractions didn't change. I am sorry we promoted sexual orientation change efforts and reparative theories about sexual orientation that stigmatised parents". (Professor Glenda Gray suggested, when she took the podium, that people promoting SOCE should face charges for the damage they've done over the years.)

Abuse is 'normal'

There is also no evidence that LGBTI people cause any more or less harm than others, he said, addressing the misplaced notion that gay men are out to are paedophiles. "No evidence in any study supports the idea that men with same-sex attraction, or MSM, are responsible for the high rates of childhood sexual abuse in African countries or in other countries," the report says.

Indeed, while the figures for sexual abuse of children are shockingly high (20% globally), the majority of the abusers are heterosexual men – most often they are related to the child. This, suggested Dugmore, is what civil society and churches should be putting their energy into fighting.

Finally, the report found that discrimination against gay people has a significant impact on their



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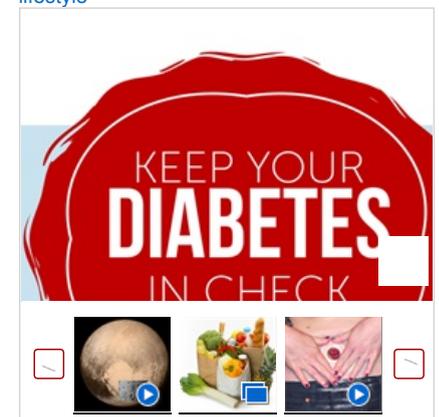
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health – and, indeed, on public health, as Gray pointed out. Not only are they more at risk of the mental health problems that track discrimination, isolation, bullying and worse (gay adolescents in the States, for example, are nearly six times more likely to suffer from depression and 8.4 times more likely to commit suicide), but they are less likely to receive good and adequate health care. (And that's aside from the risk of physical violence – gay-bashing – that so many face.) There's no physical or mental trigger in being gay for these issues: this is strictly the fall-out of discrimination and stigma.

"You do not need the Pope to say you have to act with compassion," said Dugmore. "All the great religions emphasis humanity and compassion; there's no humanity and compassion about saying you should hang gay people."

Anyone who would like to read the full report, which is crammed with fascinating insights, should contact [ASSAf](#) to get hold of a copy.

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