2021 Global LGBTI Seed Grant Recipients

In 2021, the Williams Institute launched a seed grants program to foster new empirical research focused on LGBTI populations in the Global South and to support the work of researchers from those regions. Researchers from more than 40 countries submitted 115 proposals spanning a range of topics that disproportionately impact LGBTI people worldwide, including violence, access to healthcare, discrimination, legal gender recognition, and policing.

We are pleased to announce that seven proposals have been selected to receive awards.

Silenced No More: Queer Women, Trans and Nonbinary Persons, and the Criminal Justice System in Ghana

Over the past two years, LGBTQIA persons in Ghana have been arrested, sent to court, or imprisoned. Others have been assaulted by the police. Ghana’s law says that “unnatural carnal knowledge” is a crime. However, the law does not clearly explain what unnatural carnal knowledge means, and the police frequently arrest anyone they believe is queer, for a variety of reasons that are not crimes under the law. Queer women, trans, and nonbinary persons face a double disadvantage because many people assume that they are not targeted by the law and so their problems are ignored.

Using semi-structured interviews and analyzing court and police records in the form of charge sheets, statements, court proceedings, and court rulings, this study will examine the following research questions:

- To what extent are queer Ghanaian women, trans, and non-binary Ghanaians arrested, prosecuted, or incarcerated on the basis of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity?
- To what extent are queer women, trans, and non-binary persons in Ghana exposed to harassment and brutality from the police, or security forces, due to their actual or perceived sexual orientation and/or gender identity?
- Do the intersecting identities of queer women, non-binary, and trans persons, expose them to particular vulnerabilities within the criminal justice system in Ghana?
- Are inherent biases, systematic inequalities, and oppressions present within the Ghanaian criminal justice system?
If such biases and systematic inequalities exist, to what extent do they influence the interactions of queer women, trans, and non-binary persons with the criminal justice system in Ghana?

Kuukuwa Andam, PhD candidate, Queens University  
Roberta Edem Abbeyquaye, Multimedia Journalist and Filmmaker

**Barriers to Identity Rights of Travesti, Trans, and Nonbinary Population of Argentina**

This research project aims to make visible the situation of travesti, trans, and nonbinary people in Argentina regarding the State’s recognition of their identities. The goal is to elaborate and implement a survey instrument, gathering and processing data to promote public policies that would seek to guarantee the human right to gender identity. In Argentina, the 2012 Law on Gender Identity, N° 26.743, guarantees the recognition of identity through correction of the name, image, and sex assigned at birth on the National Identity Document (DNI). This law is considered one of the most encompassing and inclusive gender identity policies in the world. However, countless institutional obstacles remain—legal, administrative, and technical—which preclude people’s access to a national identity document outside the established binomials imposed at birth.

Given the current context defined by the pandemic and the implementation of restrictive measures to circulation, this study will use a virtual/online survey and non-probabilistic sampling to target travesti, trans, nonbinary, and non-cissexual gender identities, in Argentine territory, without age restriction. The goal is to reach, approximately, 500 travesti, trans, nonbinary, and non-cissexual people. The identity categories described by people in a free text field will be examined, as will the barriers faced by people to attain legal recognition of their identity, both regarding access to the DNI, and other personal documents and public administrative registries.

Sabina Bercovich Szulmajster, Independent Activist  
Valentine Ayre Luy Machado, Activist, Member of Todes con DNI  
Marcelo Mangini, Diversity and Gender Area, National Secretariat for Human Rights  
Ameleo Armando Botto, Independent Activist and Gender Consultant, Ministry of Women, Gender and Diversity of Argentina
Vulnerability Amplified: Assessing the Needs of LGBT Refugees in South Africa

Given South Africa’s Constitutional protections, the country has emerged as a major hub for LGBT persons seeking refuge. Yet very little is known about LGBT refugees in South Africa. In fact, there is almost no reliable data on demographics available. This is in part due to their need to remain inconspicuous, as the high rates of xenophobic and homo/transphobic attacks in South Africa attest. Covid-19 has placed states, communities, and individuals under immense pressure, exacerbating simmering inequalities and disproportionately impacting marginalised communities, including LGBT refugees. A key means of assisting this community has been the establishment of crisis relief networks via WhatsApp Messenger, a social media platform for smartphones. Through the use of this app, researchers and activists have been able to connect with and financially support LGBT refugees in South Africa’s major cities. It is these digital networks that this project aims to tap into. The proposed intervention will harness this relatively new and as yet underutilised social media platform to rapidly collect data (courtesy of a low-cost survey tool). Our aim is to produce a snapshot of LGBT refugees living in South Africa by capturing vital information on the community’s make-up and salient needs.

B Camminga, Researcher, African Centre for Migration & Society, Wits University
Thomars Shamuyarira, Founder and Executive Director, The Fruit Basket
Nyasha Zhakata (Masi), Founder, Pachedu LGBTQ!

Empirical Analysis of the Socioeconomic Condition of the Gender and Sexual Minority

Communities in India and Building Pan-South Asia Queer Research Collective
Recent advances in the legal realities around the rights of gender and sexual minorities (GSM) in India, popularly known as LGBTIQA+ communities, have slowly started changing the queer landscape. These changes, however, are not yet reflected in how GSM individuals are perceived by the larger society – that their struggles in their daily lives and at an institutional level still continue, reflected in an acute lack of access to resources, especially financial resources. The COVID-19 pandemic, the subsequent country-wide lockdown, and the current second-wave have exacerbated inequalities, socially and economically, and the lack of the scaffolding of a welfare state and rights-based state development paradigm, with the institutional infrastructure imbued in transformative justice, have altogether unsettled the lives of millions of transgender and economically underprivileged GSM individuals, including the migrant labourers from the
community. Millions of them have been pushed into extreme poverty and their abilities to meet their basic needs, such as staving off hunger, are severely compromised.

This study (Project Reach OUT) will focus on two sets of activities addressing the needs of SGM communities in the Indian State of West Bengal. First, we will survey GSM community members across the three West Bengal districts of Hooghly, Kolkata, and Malda to conduct a livelihood mapping of skills, capacities, material and social resources, activities engaged in to earn a living, migration patterns, and barriers to sustainable development. Second, this project will engage with researchers, activists, and government officials to lay the foundation for a South Asian GSM rights research collective. Through a series of online participatory workshops and consultations, GSM rights activists and community researchers will strengthen their capacity for conceptualizing and implementing policy-oriented research, including research methodologies and documentation.

Avinaba Dutta, Principal Investigator, Research and Advocacy, Centre for Queer and Transgender Studies, Pleqsus India Foundation

How the Family Environment Shapes LGB Individuals’ Mental Health in Brazil

There is robust evidence that lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) individuals are at a higher risk of mental health disorders even with the improvements in legislative changes. Part of the explanation for this may be remaining support deficits in some institutions, such as schools, faith communities, and especially within the family. Thus, understanding the role of the family in different cultural backgrounds and its effects on the mental health outcomes of LGB people may help to explain why LGB youth still are at an elevated risk for mental health disorders. This study will investigate how the family environment shapes LGB individuals’ mental health in Brazil. The operationalization of the household composition analysis will utilize the information available in the PNS (National Health Survey – Brazil – 2019), which is the first official survey at the country level to ask about sexual orientation in a health inquiry. Besides its theoretical contribution, the results will impact the formulation of public policies by demonstrating the importance of thinking about actions to reduce stigma not only in individual-oriented institutions but especially within families, particularly in the Global South where the family has a central role in the individual’s choices.

Samuel Silva, Assistant Professor, Department of Demography, Federal University of Minas Gerais
Gender Identity and Violence: Investigating the Impact of Legal Protections Under the Transgender Persons Act 2018 in Pakistan

Transgender people in Pakistan continue to face violence, discrimination, and persecution despite the passage of Transgender Act, 2018. Authorities often fail to provide adequate protection or hold perpetrators to account. According to an annual report by a local NGO of human rights violations against LGBTIQ people, the most widely reported crime by gay men and trans women in Pakistan is rape, followed by emotional violence, ranging from sexually explicit verbal abuse in the streets to intense humiliation and psychological torture at home (NMHA, 2015). According to one study of trans women and gay men from Punjab and Sindh, 41% of the respondents from a sample of 297 were victims of sexual violence. At the same time that transgender persons in Pakistan struggle against extreme violence, they are also challenged by underreporting of their numbers. The trans population remains invisible and persecuted in Pakistan. The socio-cultural and religious stigma attached to sexual and gender minorities makes it hard to document atrocities committed against these groups. Without real evidence, lobbying for Trans rights at the policy level to improve the situation for trans communities is extremely difficult.

Against this background, our study will implement a qualitative impact study of the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2018. It will be the first impact evaluation of this legislation. Extensive qualitative data will be collected through in-depth interviews, short surveys, and official documents pertaining to reporting of violence against transgender persons in the Lahore district of Punjab, Pakistan to understand and uncover the lived realities of transgender persons. Our goal through this project is to create new knowledge on the transgender experience in south Asia, thereby filling a significant research gap on issues related to these communities. Our study will generate scholarship that can be used to inform better policies that enable transgender persons to attain human rights with dignity and prosper as equal members of society.

Joham Aziz, Adjunct Professor, Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS) School of Education Commonwealth Fellow
Sabahat Rizvi, Lawyer and Advocate of the Supreme Court of Pakistan
Faryal Shahid, Program Associate, Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS) School of Education
Hasham Nasir, Chevening Scholar and Teaching Fellow, LUMS School of Education
Policing LGBTI Persons at Kenya’s Urban Margins

While police brutality is widely acknowledged as a challenge in Kenya, commentary has mainly focused on police brutality towards young men living in Kenya’s informal settlements. Police violence against members of criminalized groups, such as LGBTI persons, has received limited scholarly attention beyond ‘grey literature’ produced by NGOs or in public health literature focusing on HIV/AIDS. Through a qualitative study of perceptions of police officers regarding police fairness, policing qualities, policing outcomes, and police interactions with LGBTI individuals living in Kenya’s urban margins, this research project will explore the dynamics of the interactions between the Kenyan state police and LGBTI individuals with a view to understanding how the ‘criminal’ identity of the individual is negotiated in their interactions with the police officers at the street-level. The project will involve key informant interviews with police officers in Kisumu, Nairobi, and Mombasa, and insights from this study will be disseminated in a policy brief in collaboration with local LGBTI organisations.

Kamau Wairuri, PhD Candidate in International Development, University of Edinburgh