

Homosexuality as common in Uganda as in other countries

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The results are based on a survey with nearly 3,000 participating students in south-western Uganda. The students responded to a number of questions, including aspects concerning sexuality, physical and mental health, sexual risk behaviour, and experiences with drugs. The questions about homosexuality pertained to the students' emotions as well as their actions. The results showed that one in three had been in love with a person of the same sex; almost one in five had been sexually attracted to a person of the same sex; and one in ten had been sexually active with someone of the same sex. In terms of percentages, 6-8 per cent of the men and 10-16 per cent of the women had engaged in homosexual relations.

"We were not surprised by the results, as the numbers are consistent with the situation in most other countries in the world. The real figures could actually be even higher. Although the survey was anonymous, the intense propaganda against homosexuality in Uganda may have intimidated some from providing honest answers", says Anette Agardh.

Anette Agardh is Associate Professor in Global Health at Lund University. The current surveys are part of her ongoing efforts to improve sexual [health](#) among young persons in south-western Uganda, a project she has been involved in since 2004. These efforts also include various health promoting activities with the aim of preventing risk behaviours, sexual violence, and HIV among young people.

The surveys showed that homosexual experiences appear to be

associated with several health risks, including poor [mental health](#), being the victim of sexual coercion and violence, and engaging in sexual risk behaviour and drug use. People with homosexual experiences also more frequently reported their need for, but lack of access to, sexual health counselling.

Considering the ongoing campaigns against HIV, Anette Agardh hopes that the results of this study will lead to increased prioritisation of health services for this vulnerable group as such campaigns are only effective if everyone - regardless of their sexual identity - is treated with equal respect by healthcare providers.

"This is hardly the case today, as strong prejudice against homosexuality exists in large parts of Ugandan society. In the absence of facts and knowledge about human sexuality, myths tend to proliferate, for example, that sex between two men not involve a risk for HIV, and that a homosexual woman can be 'cured' by so-called 'corrective rape', Anette Agardh says.

The study, published in the scientific journal *PLOS ONE*, is the first study that shows the prevalence of homosexual and bisexual relations in Uganda and their association with increased [health risks](#). Anette Agardh hopes that it will help generate a more nuanced debate.

According to Anette Agardh, "Evidence-based knowledge is essential for creating openness about sensitive issues such as these. Hopefully, the results of our study can at the very least help alleviate some of the controversy surrounding [homosexuality](#) in Uganda today.

More information: Anette Agardh et al. Health Risks in Same-Sex Attracted Ugandan University Students: Evidence from Two Cross-Sectional Studies, *PLOS ONE* (2016). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0150627](#)

Provided by Lund University

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