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Islam and Sexual Diversity

Attitudes Among South African Muslims

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2 out of 3

Muslims willing to engage in dialogue with queer Muslims, with the intention of “finding out what is wrong with them”

Over 12%

Muslims expressed the view that any dialogue on Islam and sexual diversity is *Haram*

4 out of 5

Muslims cited the story of Lut and/or Hadith as a basis for their position that homosexuality is unacceptable in Islam

Over half (55%)

Queer Muslims rejected by their families

9 out of 10

Muslims believe that homosexuality is a choice and that it is absolutely unacceptable for queer Muslims to express their sexual orientation

Over 4%

Muslims believe queer Muslims should be killed

The Inner Circle (TIC) does not promote homosexuality, but instead promotes the right of every soul – despite sexual orientation or gender identity – to have a spiritual connection with

The Inner Circle (TIC) is a leading human rights organization that seeks to encourage the Muslim community to make paradigm shifts regarding sexual diversity among Muslims. In 2014, TIC conducted a research project spanning across South Africa to study attitudes toward sexual diversity among South African Muslims.

In 1973, the American Psychiatric Association declassified homosexuality as a mental disorder and recognized homosexuality as a natural variation of human sexuality. In 1990, the World Health Organization also declassified homosexuality as a disorder from the International Classification of Diseases (ICD). The majority of queer Muslims in this study, stated they did not choose their sexual orientation, which aligns with professional opinion, however nearly 90% of South African Muslims who took part in this study still believe homosexuality is a choice. This study reveals that the majority of South African Muslims have a narrow view of the relationship between Islam and sexual diversity and hold negative

“Just to talk about homosexuality, it was against Allah’s wish. No one questioned religion, no one talked about such a thing; it’s a very big sin.”

Ibrahim, Gay

attitudes toward Muslims who fall outside of established gender binaries and sexual norms. Queer Muslims recount experiences where they were condemned and rejected by their Muslim communities because of their sexual orientation. More than half of participants reported being rejected by their families; often cut off financially and or estranged from relatives. In the documentary, *Fitrah* (2014) produced by TIC, every queer Muslim reported being taken to an Imam to confront their same sex desires, which is often viewed as sinful, unnatural and against Islam. The impact these attitudes have on queer Muslims themselves has led some to engage in harmful activities, such

“They interrogated me...I was afraid they would reject me, but eventually I had no choice. When I told them I was lesbian, they moved me out of the main house... [and] told me I no longer have any business with them because I was a disgrace to the family.”

Fatima, Lesbian

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“Islam was offering
me nothing but
condemnation”

Aleem, Gay

Many queer Muslims question their relationship with Allah due to the rejection, lack of support and outright condemnation or violence they experience from their Muslim communities.



“I used to take drugs...
just to cope... just to
survive another day in
this body.”

Reyaaz, Transgender

In the absence of answers to the challenges queer Muslims encounter, many turn to drugs, alcohol and other habits detrimental to their health. This may lead to serious mental health issues such as depression, anxiety and even suicide.

as the excessive use of drugs and alcohol, which can lead to dependence through self medication or mental health issues such as depression and anxiety. Furthermore, queer Muslims who are rejected by family may contemplate or attempt suicide.

Current Engagements with the Muslim Community

Over the last 18 years, TIC has engaged with mainstream Muslims in South Africa and has noted common arguments used by religious scholars to condemn homosexuality; specifically the use of homophobic and patriarchal interpretations of the Quran and citing Hadith that have been classified as weak.

“Whoever you find doing the action of the people of Lut, execute the one who does it and the one to whom it is done”

Narrated By Ibn 'Abbaas

Earlier scholars such as Abu Bakr Al-Jassas (d. 981 AD/370 AH) argued that the Hadiths on killing homosexuals ‘are not reliable by any means, and no legal punishment can be prescribed based on them.’ Mohamed El-Moctar El-Shinqiti, a contemporary Mauritanian scholar, has argued that ‘[even though] homosexuality is a grievous sin...(a) no legal punishment is stated in the Qur’an for homosexuality...(b) it is not reported that Prophet Muhammad has punished somebody for committing homosexuality... (c) there is no authentic Hadith reported from the Prophet prescribing a punishment for the homosexuals...’ Hadith scholars such as Al-Bukhari, Yahya ibn Ma`in, An-Nasa’i, Ibn Hazm, Al-Tirmidhi, and others have also impugned these ahadith.

On Sodom and Gomorrah

Another common citation used to condemn of homosexuality in Islam is based on interpretations of the Story of Lut (AS). Contemporary progressive scholars from the Abrahamic faiths conclude that the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah were not destroyed for homosexuality, but for a multiplicity of atrocities, which included xenophobia, economic exploitation, as well as sexual coercion where men became victims of anal penetration and women victims of temple prostitution. It refers to the atrocities of Lot’s people (Sodom and Gomorrah), including same-sex rape, molestation, sexual coercion and same-sex indecent public sexual behaviour related to idolatry and does not include sexual orientation as a vice. The Holy Quran’s silence on the issue of sexual orientation implies permissibility.

For Further Information On This Topic

- Kugle, Scott (2010) Homosexuality in Islam: Critical Reflection on Gay, Lesbian, and Transgender Muslims, OneWorld Publications
- Hendricks, Muhsin (2010) Islamic Texts: A Source for Acceptance of Queer Individuals into Mainstream Muslim Society, The Equal Rights Review, 5, 31-51
- Hendricks, Muhsin (2013) Islam, Sexual Diversity, and Access to Health Services, The Equal Rights Trust 1-21