

# 8 SELF-CARE & WORKING IN HOSTILE ENVIRONMENTS

The global landscape is composed of a range of support levels for MSM and other differently sexually- and gender-oriented populations, ranging from very supportive to unsupportive to hostile. As advocacy requires MSM and their allies to be open about their needs and beliefs and to make a stand for them in public ways, this poses a serious threat in environments that are hostile and sometimes even violent toward MSM. The recent arrests (and eventual pardon) of a couple whose engagement ceremony raised community ire in Malawi are an example of what can happen when MSM identity and culture finds its way into the public space, and the very serious denial of personal freedoms that can occur in hostile environments. And even though their situation fortunately worked out, the threat is very real. In some countries sex between men is punishable by death. Safety and self-care become very important considerations for groups living under such circumstances.

Despite the threat of imprisonment and even death, many MSM activists and groups continue their battle for very basic rights that many MSM in other parts of the world take for granted. And even for those MSM living in “accepting” and “affirming” environments, there are still pockets and places where bigotry against MSM is the status quo. The spirit and strength of MSM who persevere in the face of this adversity is inspiring, and is a testament to the fact that change is possible even in the most difficult of circumstances. Many MSM have been forced to develop coping tools for mitigating unfriendly, hostile situations from the youngest of ages.

In any advocacy efforts for MSM, whether they are in environments that are mostly hostile or environments that are only sometimes hostile, the safety of community members should always be at the top of the priority list of every action plan, every step toward bringing injustices and needs to light. To provide a comprehensive approach to situations of hostility and risk is certainly beyond the scope of this toolkit; however, the following chapter presents some ideas for preparing for hostility so groups are better equipped to cope if and when advocacy results in damage to the community in the form of detention or violence.

## Key points:

- MSM community safety should always be a top priority.
- Communities should have a safe space in their locales for MSM to gather.
- MSM communities should have a “violence plan” in place.
- Documentation of violence can be a powerful advocacy tool.

## Chapter goals:

Upon completing the exercises in this chapter, participants will be able to:

- Define hate violence
- Cite shared experiences of hate violence
- List safety strategies for dealing with hate violence, self-care, and healing

## 8.0

### EXERCISE 8.0

# RESPONDING TO HATE VIOLENCE

## Purpose:

To facilitate sharing among the group about their personal experience of hate violence and to give direction for the creation of a violence response plan.

## Goals:

At the end of the exercise, participants will be able to:

- Define hate violence
- Cite shared experiences of hate violence

## Materials:

- International HIV/AIDS Alliance toolkit pictures depicting violence
- Handout 8.0

## Process:

- ① Facilitator should introduce the concept of hate violence, as it is defined in the Cambodia MSM toolkit:

Hate violence is any act of intimidation, harassment, physical force, or threat of physical force directed against any person, or his or her family or property. It is motivated by hostility to the victim's real or perceived identity (eg, sexual orientation) with the intention of causing fear or intimidation. Hate violence can be perpetrated by any community member, even police officers who abuse their power.<sup>1</sup>

Facilitator should acknowledge the fact that this is a difficult topic that can sometimes bring up hard feelings, which is perfectly natural.

- ② Break out into small groups, distribute the handout, and have participants discuss the following:

- Have you ever been the recipient of hate violence?

- What form did it take (eg, intimidation, harassment, physical force)?
- Who was the perpetrator (eg, family, rowdies, police)?
- How did you mitigate the situation?

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**FACILITATOR NOTE:**

Ask participants to take note of how they have managed violence when state actors have perpetrated it.

1. The members of each group should note down the situations they have faced in Handout 8.0.
2. Bring the group back together in plenary and come up with a master list of the types of violence they have experienced, the perpetrators, and strategies for managing/mitigating hate violence.
3. Thank the group and reiterate that even though this is a difficult topic, it is crucial to look into the problem in order to find solutions. The facilitator should share resources with participants at the end of this chapter.

## 8.1

### EXERCISE 8.1

# PRACTICAL SAFETY STRATEGIES

## Purpose:

To facilitate thinking around strategies for working safely in hostile environments.

## Goals:

At the end of the exercise, participants will be able to:

- List some safety strategies for dealing with hate violence

## Process:

- ① Group brainstorm ideas for the specific ways hostility manifests as an obstacle to advocacy work. Facilitator should note these on a flipchart.
- ② Divide the group into smaller groups and assign each team 1 of the obstacles. Some examples may include police violence, blackmail from local rowdies, and vandalism of MSM offices/work space.
- ③ Ask each group to brainstorm the most effective solution they can come up with for the obstacle they have been assigned. Have each group role-play a “before” scenario, depicting the obstacle; followed by an “after” scenario, in which its solution is depicted. The other groups guess which solution has been implemented.
- ④ After each role-play session, the facilitator opens the discussion up to the participants and asks if this resonates with their own experience. Do they agree that the solution chosen by the group is the most effective? Would they do something differently? What has worked in their communities?

## Safety strategies:

- Set up phone trees for efficient network activation in emergency situations.
- Have a “fact-finding team” trained and on call, in the event it needs to be dispatched.
- Establish inconspicuous safe spaces.
- Develop exit strategies/plans for local emergency situations, such as violence. These should include certain “musts,” such as getting authorized medical reports with documentation after cases of violence. These reports can be used for future advocacy.
- Build local networks with lawyers and advocates, who can serve as allies when necessary.
- Strengthen connectedness with Internet groups; this can be an effective way to reach beyond the confines of a hostile country.
- Set aside emergency funds for bail/support.
- Develop a checklist for police identification (badges, time of shift, location). If these details are noted during an incident of violence, filing a case later becomes possible even when literacy skills are lacking.
- Consider investing in self-defense classes and other trainings for the community.

## 8.2

### EXERCISE 8.2

## SELF-CARE

#### Purpose:

To bring group attention to care of the self and its connection to strong advocacy.

#### Goals:

At the end of the exercise, participants will be able to:

- List some safety strategies for self-care and self-healing

#### Process:

- ① Explain how MSM advocacy work can be incredibly energizing and rewarding, but can also be exhausting and sap individual and group energy. There are also other aspects of MSM life that can be mentally and emotionally exhausting; leading a double life and dealing with lovers are just 2 examples! Ask the group to divide into pairs and discuss a time they felt emotionally exhausted with the group. This can be related to anything, not just advocacy work with MSM. Ask the participants to share with their partners how they managed those experiences.
- ② Return in plenary and share as a group the situations that sapped the group members' energy and the ways they managed to reenergize and move past the difficult time. The facilitator should keep notes in 2 columns on a flipchart; 1 titled "problem" and the other titled "solution."

Some ideas for solutions:

Living as an MSM can be incredibly difficult; especially in cultures where marriage is virtually impossible to avoid. MSM spend a lot of energy keeping up appearances and playing roles out of a need to survive. In cases like this, connecting with other MSM in a social, relaxed manner can be incredibly helpful. Organize get-togethers at least once a month, away from the stress of the double life. What would be a hit in your community? A fashion show? A cook-off?

## 8.2

MSM also often bottle up the stress and strain that come from romantic pursuits. In the event that you are experiencing stress related to relationships and sex, reach out to other men in your community; someone else will have already experienced what you are going through. Sharing (1) releases some of the tension and (2) can lead to coping strategies.

Mark and celebrate even the small victories when they occur. These lead to big victories.

Cultivate a spiritual practice. Meditation and prayer have been proven to reduce stress. Experience the collective spirit of your MSM community. If your religious establishment is not welcoming or affirming, mobilize the community to do something spiritual together.

- ③ End this session with a “backrub chain.” Have the group form a circle, then turn to the person to their right (maintaining a circle formation). Ask that the participants place their hands on the shoulders of the people in front of them and give a 2-3 minute massage.





# SELF-CARE RESOURCES

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## AVP COMMUNITY RAPID INCIDENT RESPONSE MANUAL

### Anti-Violence Project

<http://www.avp.org/publications.htm>

This Guide to Community Rapid Incident Response (or CRIR guide) focuses specifically on anti-LGBTQH hate violence and in doing so addresses some of the unique factors that may need to be considered in before launching a response to this type of violence.

This CRIR guide can be used by anyone, but it has been specifically developed with a beginner or a less experienced community activist in mind to provide a number of helpful tips, each of which are simple enough to be learned over a lunch break.

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## CREATING SAFE SPACE FOR GLBTQ YOUTH: A TOOLKIT

### Advocates for Youth

[http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=608&Itemid=177](http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=608&Itemid=177)

This special section of Advocates for Youth's web site is devoted to helping communities create safe spaces for young people of all sexual orientations and gender identities. Because homophobia is a real problem, for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (GLBTQ) and straight youth, this online toolkit is a timely guide.

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## RUNAWAY & HOMELESS YOUTH AND RELATIONSHIP VIOLENCE TOOLKIT

### The National Resource Center on Domestic Violence (NRC DV)

<http://www.nrcdv.org/rhydvt toolkit/terms-definitions/>

Developed by and for experts and advocates in both the runaway and homeless youth (RHY) and the domestic and sexual violence (DV/SA) fields, the Toolkit provides information, resources, tips, and tools to better address relationship violence with runaway and homeless youth.

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## OUT AT WORK: A TOOL KIT FOR WORKPLACE EQUALITY

### Lambda Legal

<http://www.lambdalegal.org/take-action/tool-kits/out-at-work/>

More and more LGBT people are coming out at work. No matter where you work or what you do, you'll feel more secure in your job if you know your rights. For more than three decades, workplace equality has been a top priority for Lambda Legal. This tool kit gives the information needed to help guide LGBT groups through your work life.

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## IDENTIFYING VIOLENCE AGAINST MOST-AT-RISK POPULATIONS: A FOCUS ON MSM AND TRANSGENDERS

### USAID

<http://www.healthpolicyinitiative.com/index.cfm?ID=-publications&get=pubID&pubID=1097>

Negative attitudes and violence toward MSM and TG are common worldwide and, in fact, are condoned by many societies. In this way, violence against MSM and TG is a form of gender-based violence (GBV). Researchers have only recently begun to explore the intersection between violence and HIV vulnerability in most-at-risk populations (MARPs). Nonetheless, strong evidence points to the importance of these linkages. Health professionals have the potential to play a key role in the promotion of sexual health, including the prevention of GBV associated with stigma and discrimination in most-at-risk populations for HIV.

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## **TRAINING MANUAL FOR HEALTH PROVIDERS GENDER IDENTITY AND VIOLENCE IN MSM AND TRANSGENDERS**

### **USAID**

<http://www.healthpolicyinitiative.com/index.cfm?ID=publications&get=pubID&pubID=1101>

There are two primary goals of this review. First, it aims to synthesize the literature on violence and related forms of stigma and discrimination among MSM and TG, particularly those engaging in sex work, through a gender perspective. In doing so, it analyzes ways in which violence and S&D among MSM and TG are gender based. Second, the review looks at how violence and related S&D against MSM and TG affects vulnerability to HIV.

## CHAPTER 8

# REFERENCES

1. Pact Inc. and the International Center for Research on Women. Understanding and challenging stigma toward men who have sex with men: toolkit for action. Adapted version for use in Cambodia. <http://www.icrw.org/files/publications/Understanding-and-Challenging-Stigma-toward-Men-who-have-Sex-with-Men-Toolkit-for-Action.pdf>. Published 2010. Accessed June 23, 2010.