



CAISO: Sex and Gender Justice

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IDAHOBIT 2024 Media Statement

Theme: No One Left Behind – Equality, Freedom and Justice for ALL!
International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia

CAISO's Wholeness and Justice Insights

In commemoration of the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia (IDAHOBIT) on May 17th, **CAISO: Sex and Gender Justice** is pleased to share the findings of its *Insights from Wholeness and Justice Report*, based on the third year of providing clinical, legal, and wholeness development services to Trinidad and Tobago's LGBTQI+ communities.

At a virtual media conference on Thursday 16th May, CAISO shared an overview of the findings of the *2023 Insights Report*, which will be available for public download on CAISO's website (caisott.org) from May 17th. The Report provides data on service provision and community interventions, discusses key findings, provides a deep dive into the problems presented by clients, and offers policy recommendations based on client and community engagement.

The Wholeness and Justice Programme offers free, clinically competent, trauma-informed interventions that enable healing and resilience to members of the LGBTQI+ community who experience a violation, with a focus on trans, non-binary, gender-non-conforming and intersex people. In 2023, the Programme enlisted 30 new clients and continued services for 26 existing clients from 2022. This brings the total number of clients seen by the Programme, since the December 2020 launch, to 94 LGBTQI+ community members.

Over 50% of total clients enlisted in 2023 were gender diverse—that is, their gender identity and/or gender expression differs from the perceived prevailing norm. This reflects the Programme's understanding that trans, non-binary, gender-non-conforming, and intersex people face unique vulnerabilities because of the non-recognition of their identities and forms of expression, legally and socially. As such, the Programme is committed to work that supports this community and individuals we define under the expansive term – gender diverse people.

All 30 new clients who accessed services in 2023 experienced a violation, with 90% of them receiving legal services from the Programme in varying combinations. Among legal services provided to clients in 2023 include these interventions:

- Assisting clients access police, health care, and judicial services
- Assisting clients access continuous treatment and unemployment relief because of injuries sustained from criminal acts
- Liaising with trade unions and preparing clients for redress of employment-related discrimination



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- Navigating support services for migrant clients
- Supporting clients through the legal process for changing one's name and reflecting that change on national identity documents.

Along with client specific interventions, the Wholeness and Justice Legal team frequently engages broader-based interventions geared towards advocating for the LGBTQI+ community and alleviating conditions that make community members susceptible to violations.

Most new clients also accessed clinical services, which included psychosocial support, complex trauma therapy, support with social, economic, and personal issues, and social services navigation. Interventions focused on providing LGBTQI+ people who experience violations, mental and emotional support while they receive legal services and navigate relevant institutions and legal processes. The Clinical team aims to equip clients with skills to cope with their experiences of violation and trauma and to manage stress and day-to-day challenges. Ultimately, all clinical interventions focus on enabling healing and resilience in addition to encouraging self-advocacy and self-empowerment.

The main three problems presented by new clients included: 1) discrimination and harassment; 2) family violence; and 3) physical assault. The report offers an analysis of these problems and explains how clients experienced them:

- Discrimination and harassment affect LGBTQI+ people's quality of life, their access to safe housing, health services, proper policing, and gainful employment, and their ability to enjoy their workplaces.
- Over 70% of clients reporting family violence were subjected to verbal and emotional abuse that included name-calling, humiliation and intimidation, unwillingness to recognise the individual's identity, the use of religion to shame and oppress, confinement to the home, threats to life and property, and threats to disown and displace the individual.
- Discrimination makes sections of the community more vulnerable to physical assault because the pervading negative attitudes towards LGBTQI+ people, the absence of legal recognition or protective laws, and the dearth of community-sensitive systems for care and redress, foster an environment where perpetrators believe their actions will be met with impunity.

Further, the Report discusses the following overall key insights produced from a third year of service provision to Trinidad and Tobago's LGBTQI+ communities:

- The Equal Opportunity Act (in excluding sexual orientation) limits avenues of redress for classes of people who experience discrimination;
- Inaccessible and inadequate social service institutions continue to disenfranchise a wide class of people;
- Police violence significantly hinders access to justice;
- The "anti-rights movement" promotes violence that increases the vulnerability of LGBTQI+ people.



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Programme and Research Officer Kellog Nkemakolam stated that “it is important to understand these Key Insights from the 2023 Report align with previous years’ and offers further evidence for needed changes in legislation and policies – specifically to advance protections and inclusion on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. These glaring gaps continue to perpetuate failures in social services and increase existing vulnerabilities especially for LGBTQI+ working-class people. Specific challenges remain consistent and perpetual for some community members (youth in particular) with housing instability and food insecurity, most often caused by family violence.”

Intersecting issues such as family violence, employment discrimination and job insecurity, make LGBTQI+ people more susceptible to food insecurity and housing instability. **Community Caseworker Rae Alibey** reflected on these concerns and stated that: “while the home should be a place of safety and support, for too many LGBTQI+ youth, they are rejected from families and loved ones, which leads to displacement and vulnerabilities. This is why the Programme continued its efforts in 2023 to produce resource guides and to provide food support for clients and the wider community through fundraising efforts and a community food bank.”

Considering the IDAHOBIT 2024’s global theme, ‘No one left behind: equality, freedom and justice for all’, **CAISO Director Angelique V. Nixon** explained that “this theme perfectly describes the work we do through the Wholeness and Justice Programme and reflects CAISO’s mission and consistent demands for LGBTQI+ people to be treated with dignity and be afforded the same rights and freedoms as everyone else. In working for equality and justice, our differences matter and must be accounted for in the struggle for freedom. The Programme responds to the multiple experiences of LGBTQI+ community members across intersecting issues and problems, while at the same time, advancing recommendations for policy and legislative changes. We are filling in the gaps where our community members are left out through exclusions and blatant neglect. We demand better, fight against discrimination, and insist on equal treatment and justice.”

CAISO’s Community Lawyer Donielle A. Jones insisted that we must address discrimination in every form so that no one is left behind. She explained that “the principles of natural justice dictates that justice must not only be done but seen to be done. Justice should be felt. Justice should heal. Justice should remove all fears, pains and stigma. Justice must change mindsets. So that discrimination could be eradicated. Justice must be seen in political will to do the right thing to protect all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. Our law should not be tools used to aid and abet discrimination but as tools to protect citizens from any form of discrimination.”

This is why CAISO continues to demand change through long-standing calls for amendments in legislation, which would be the most effective way for the Government to meet its obligations to ensure rights and protection for LGBTQI+ people. Moreover, the Insights Report puts forward several policy recommendations – from increasing accessibility of social services to training for service providers and judicial officers to enacting protections through constitutional reform.



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These recommendations will be circulated to Government officials and ministries in the coming months through distribution of the Insights Report and continued public engagement.

Overall, the Wholeness and Justice Programme seeks to alleviate prevailing presenting problems for our clients through individual clinical, legal, and wholeness development services. The Programme presents analysis and insights from our work with clients and community members to provide evidence for long-standing advocacy and calls for needed changes to address the wide-ranging problems reflected in structural and state-sanctioned discrimination. This evidence-based advocacy and approach supports also public education and related engagement to transform harmful social and cultural norms for a more just and inclusive society and world for all. CAISO invites the public to follow our work and support efforts to create change.

*The **International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia (IDAHOBIT)** draws attention to the violence and discrimination experienced by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex people and all other people with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities or expressions, and sex characteristics. Launched in 2004 by Martiniquan Georges-Louis Tin, the date - May 17th - commemorates the World Health Organization's 1990 decision to declassify homosexuality as a mental disorder. It was first celebrated in Trinidad and Tobago in 2011.*

***CAISO: Sex and Gender Justice** is a feminist civil society organisation that seeks to mobilise a forward-thinking, visionary, and human rights approach to wholeness, justice, and inclusion for Trinidad and Tobago's LGBTQI+ communities, through developing analysis, alliances, and advocacy. LGBTQI+ persons in Trinidad and Tobago who have experienced a violation, or who need help determining same, may contact the programme for legal and psychosocial support at: **868-28-CAISO (282-2476)**, Monday to Saturday between 9:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m.; or via email at wholenessandjustice@caisott.org.*

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