Workshop Report

International Perspectives on Defining and Measuring the Needs of Older LGBTQIA+ People

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Organised by Dr Richard Green (School of Health Sciences and Surrey Institute for People-Centred AI, University of Surrey), Dr Milton Crenitte (University of São Paulo), Dr Sarah Combes (School of Health Sciences, University of Surrey), Dr Ashok Jammigumpula (Manipal Academy of Higher Education), Dr Frances Sanders (University of Surrey).

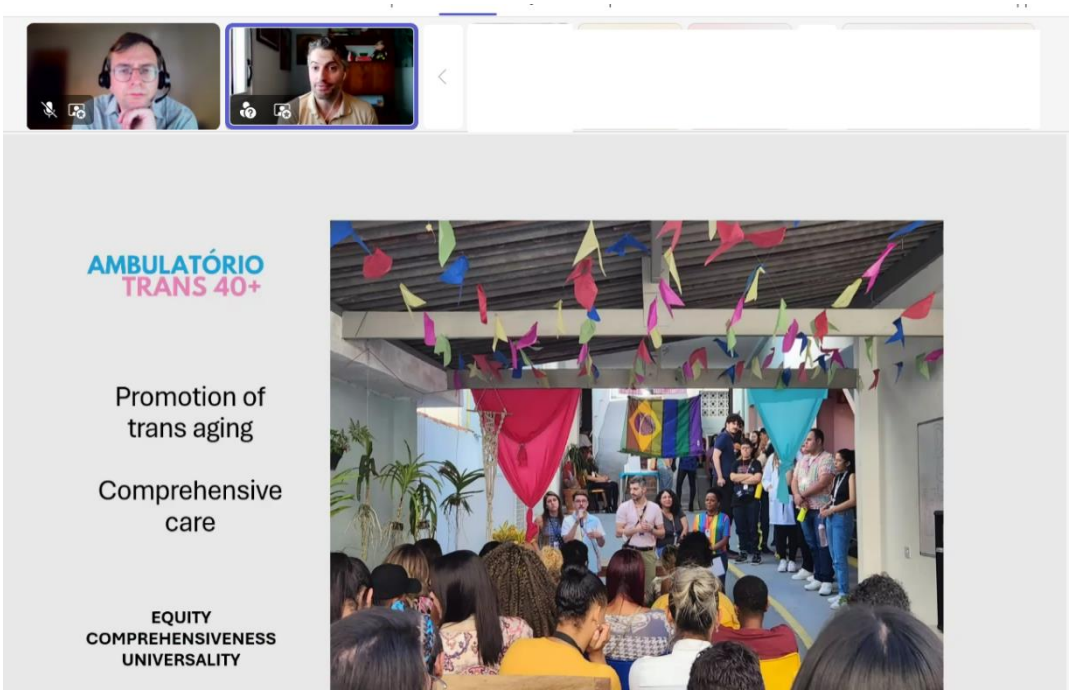
Workshop Summary

Over recent decades, research into the health and wellbeing of LGBTQIA+ people has expanded considerably. Legal and social reforms in many parts of the world have been accompanied by a parallel growth in scholarship seeking to understand the lived experiences of LGBTQIA+ individuals across the life course. Increasing visibility, community advocacy, and a slowly growing evidence base have all contributed to a more nuanced understanding of the health inequities this population continues to face. At the same time, the global population is ageing, albeit unevenly. Some regions are ageing rapidly while others remain comparatively young and, within this picture, older LGBTQIA+ adults represent a growing and diverse group whose needs have often been overlooked. These needs vary considerably depending on context, shaped by local legal protections, cultural attitudes, family structures, and access to health and social care; yet, many experiences are widely shared across borders, including heightened risk of social isolation, disparities in mental health, barriers to accessing appropriate care, and the ongoing impact of discrimination, both historical and present-day.

This one-day online workshop brought international researchers, health and social care practitioners and LGBTQIA+ community representatives together to share evidence and lived experiences across different national and cultural contexts to identify points of consensus and divergence in health and social care provision.

The workshop took the form of two presentation sessions followed by a facilitated plenary discussion with four panellists. A total of 59 people attended, representing 14 countries (6 outside the UK/Europe) and approximately 45 organisations; including 31 universities, 8 health and wellbeing organisations, 3 community/other groups, and 3 members of the public.

While much progress has been made in identifying the needs of older LGBTQIA+ people in recent decades, this event highlighted ongoing challenges and barriers that remain and the need for more work to improve the health and wellbeing of this group internationally. Discussions highlighted that ground-up approaches to identifying local needs are required that pay careful consideration to geopolitical and cultural contexts, as well as for novel and community-engaged approaches to undertaking more equitable research, which recognises and draws on the resilience and knowledge that comes with age and ageing.



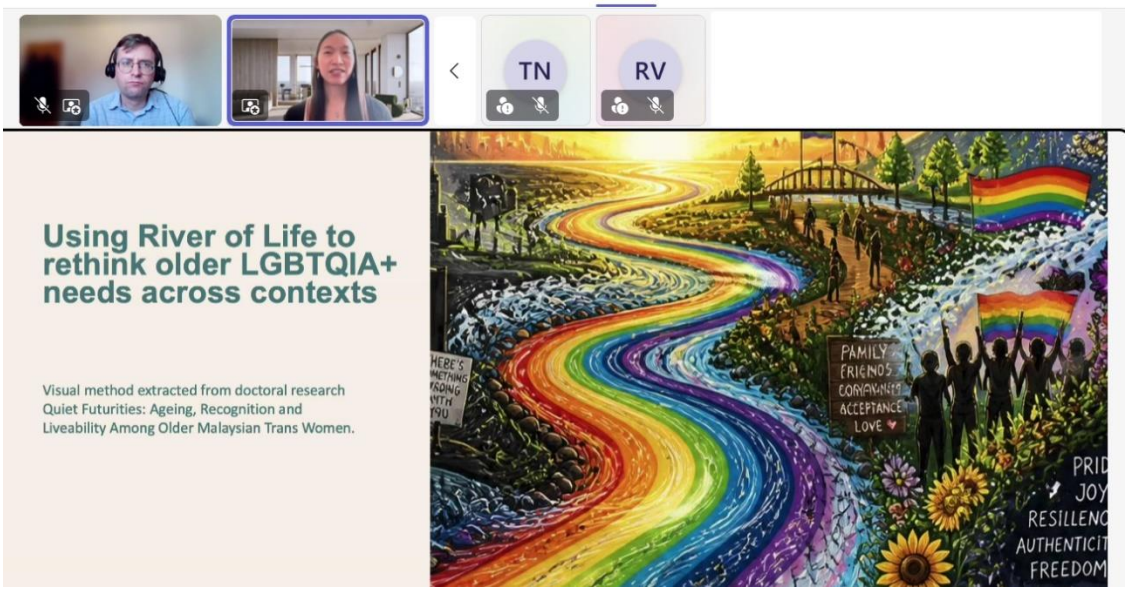
Workshop Aims

The workshop aimed to provide a forum for discussion to begin laying the groundwork for a future international framework of 'core' needs through identification of cross-border priorities; one that can meaningfully inform research, policy, and practices of care for older LGBTQIA+ everywhere. Specifically, the workshop sought to address a critical and under-researched question: 'How do we better define, measure, and respond to the distinct needs of older LGBTQIA+ people in research, as well as in health and social care practice more broadly?'

This was to be achieved through a facilitated panel discussion informed via a series of short (oral and rapid) presentations, by invited speakers, which highlight the diversity of the research and practice within this field:

- Ageing, Care Planning and Kinship Networks in India
- Citizens' Perspectives and Evaluation of the Implementation of Age-Friendly Cities in Indonesia
- Embodied Resistance: Rethinking the Needs of Older LGBTQIA+ People through Literature and Movement
- Homosexual Men and Aging: Body, Desire, and Sexual Narratives
- Intraminority Stress and Experiences of Exclusion Among Mid-Older LGBT+ People
- LGBT+ Ageing in Germany: Opportunities and Challenges for Quantitative Social Research
- LGBTQIA+ Aging, Art and Self-Perception: The Impact of Social Representations on Mental Health
- Promoting Health and Wellbeing Among Transgender Adults Aged 40+: Experiences from a Brazilian Public Health Initiative
- The Working Life Course of Aging LGBTQ Workers
- Using River of Life to Rethink Older LGBTQIA+ Needs Internationally

Many speakers have kindly agreed for their slides to be shared, and these are enclosed as an accompaniment for all workshop registrants.



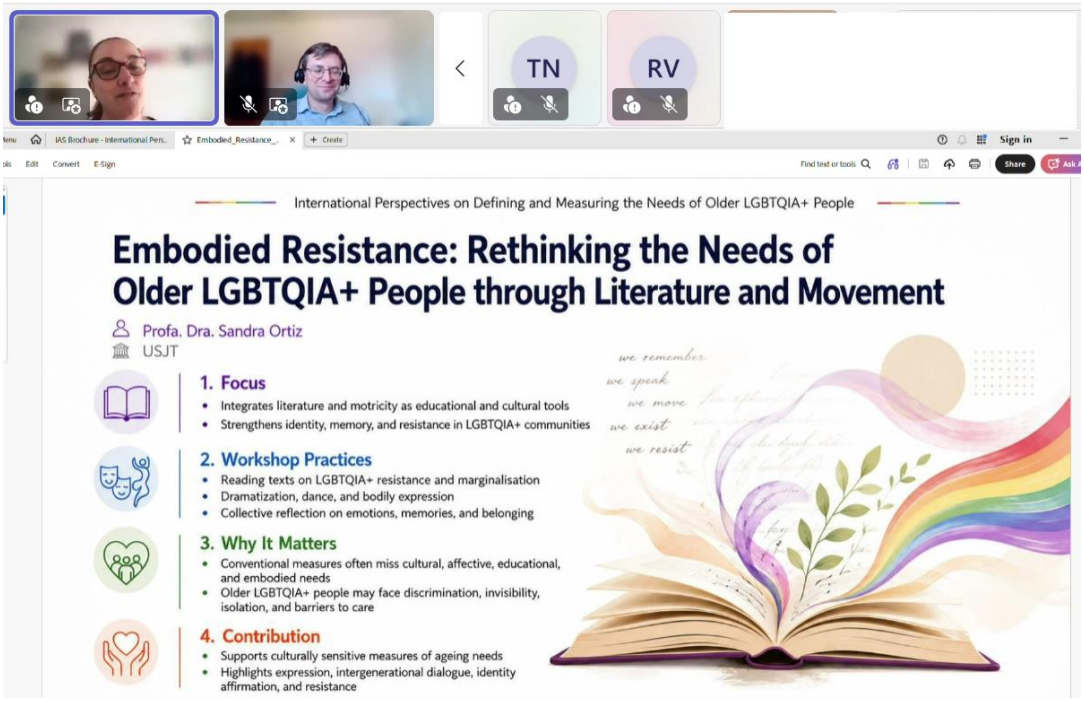
Cross-Cutting Themes

The panel-led discussion following the presentations identified a series of shared challenges, gaps, and policy-related issues across different nations and contexts represented in the workshop:

- Chosen family and non-biological carer recognition were raised as a widespread topic of importance, though the panel noted the specific forms this takes vary by legal and cultural context (e.g. state-dependent retirement provision in some countries assumes heteronormative family structures by default).
- Data collection for LGBTQIA+ people was recognised as challenging: standardised categories aid comparability and service planning, but these reflect a largely Western framing of gender and sexuality that fits poorly elsewhere. Open self-description produces rich but far less easily comparable data.
- Country-specific and administrative barriers were raised as distinct manifestations of the same underlying need for basic recognition: e.g., absence of identity documents blocking access to health cards, and recent narrowing of legal recognition affecting access to welfare and pensions.
- The current international policy environment was discussed as showing a shared trajectory of rollback in several countries (US federal guidance, UK legal rulings, and elsewhere) though panellists were careful to note this is not uniform and differs by country and legal system.
- The open-floor discussion raised, without resolving, whether the distinction between "general needs" and “LGBTQIA+-specific barriers" is useful for service redesign. For instance, does seeking to universalise needs provide a space for shared advocacy

across overlapping intersectional dimensions (e.g. ethnicity, socioeconomic status) or does this weaken the application of improvements that seek to target needs that are specific to individuals.

- Minority stress and its cumulative health impact over the life course reinforces that mental health support for older LGBTQIA+ people needs to be distinct from generic provision and designed for and with them, not just more accessible to them.



Future Directions

At the end of the workshop discussion, panellists William Lodge II (Cornell University), Katherine Bristowe (Kings College London), Charles P. Hoy-Ellis (University of Washington) and Barry Lee (Chairperson of Grey & Pride; Education University of Hong Kong; Royal Holloway University of London) each identified their near-term priorities for research in this field and reflected on the approach(es) that academics, advocates, and community members can implement to collect data and advance knowledge:

- There was a call for more attention to the needs of older LGBTQIA+ people coupled with the recommendation for a duality in approach; i.e., we tend to focus on the barriers that people face as they get older, yet advancing age can bring positives such as the joy associated with self-acceptance and of being comfortable with one's sexual orientation and/or gender identity, regardless of the challenges. Research should highlight the barriers and actions required but, also, identify points of unity and strength.
- There was a strong call for community engaged approaches, for communities to mobilise and work together as an effective strategy for health, wellbeing, and health improvement among LGBTQIA+ people.
    - This involves starting with the community and empowering community members to co-create and co-develop studies and interventions.

    - This should be open to novel approaches to research and ways of knowing (e.g., qualitative 'thick data') particularly in contexts in which data collection is constrained by political and/or cultural environments.
    - This may include being more mindful of how questions are phrased and take care not to pre-categorise or define how research participants may wish to self-identify.
- There was a call to 'keep moving', to continue working despite geopolitical challenges and changing environment(s), and to focus on what the community can do in terms of support and resistance at the institutional level, as well as how the community can also best support individual LGBTQIA+ people.
- There was a call for more attention to how structural conditions affect wellbeing, including at the policy level or in the media, and a strengthening of international collaborations
- There was a call for more education within and across the medical sphere not only to improve staff knowledge, skills, and understanding, but also to ensure continuity in training provision to equip future healthcare professionals with the appropriate skills.

Outcomes and Next Steps

The presentations and workshop discussion showed a shared appetite to continue advance research, advocacy and community engagement in relation to the needs of older LGBTQIA+ people.

This workshop has informed an ongoing piece of work to report on existing evidence concerning the needs of older LGBTQIA+ people, expected to be published in early 2027, which will include a proposed approach for localised identification of older LGBTQIA+ people's needs that will support further work and evidence building in this area.

An invitation to be added to a mailing list to foster future collaborations will also be shared with this report to all workshop registrants.

Acknowledgements

The organisers gratefully acknowledge the Institute of Advanced Studies (IAS) at the University of Surrey for sponsoring and supporting this event. We would like to thank our panellists and presenters for their time and for their insightful and thought-provoking contributions which helped make our discussions fruitful and rewarding. Additional thanks go to our attendees without whom there is no discussion and last, but by no means least, a big thank you to Louise Jones, Faith Howard, and Mirela Dumic for their administrative support.

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