



Benefits of Peer Support Groups for LGBTQI+ Refugees in Kenya: Evidence from Nairobi

Program Description & Context

Kenya is one of the few African countries that accepts refugees and asylum-seekers fleeing persecution for sexual orientation and gender identity. While LGBTQI+ refugees and asylum-seekers find relative safety in Kenya, they often face challenges including resettlement difficulties, stigma, lack of support, social exclusion, and safety concerns (1). For many, such stressors compound prior experiences of persecution, abuse, and torture - resulting in increased need for comprehensive and affirming mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) services (1).

The Center for Victims of Torture (CVT) has delivered culturally informed, multidisciplinary 10-week group counseling services for LGBTQI+ refugees and asylum-seekers since 2015. However, clients have requested additional supports to cope with daily stressors (2). In response to such ongoing needs, CVT developed a 6-week peer support program to provide continued, identity-affirming support following structured group counseling. The peer support groups aim to offer a safe and facilitated therapeutic space where LGBTQI+ clients can strengthen coping skills, rebuild social connections, and process ongoing challenges related to discrimination, safety, and access to resources. These groups are co-facilitated by CVT-trained peer facilitators from the LGBTQI+ community, whose lived experience help foster trust, cultural relevance, and collective empowerment within the group process.

Evidence Collected

Pre- and post-assessment surveys were completed by 46 peer support group clients (N = 65; 71% response rate). The survey included adapted tools from the LGBT Health and Human Services Evaluation Toolkit (3) to measure self acceptance and self esteem, social support and connection, identity, and access to resources. Specific measures included the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, Brief Sense of Community Scale, and Sexual Identity Distress Scale. This Evidence Brief includes data collected between November 1, 2021 - December 15, 2025. Client satisfaction surveys were also administered in January 2026 following program completion for a subset of participants (8 of 17 clients who were randomly selected).

Key Findings

Participants report significant improvements across key outcomes: self-acceptance and self-esteem, social support and connection, and perceptions of LGBTQI+ identity, based on paired sample t-tests of pre-post assessment data.

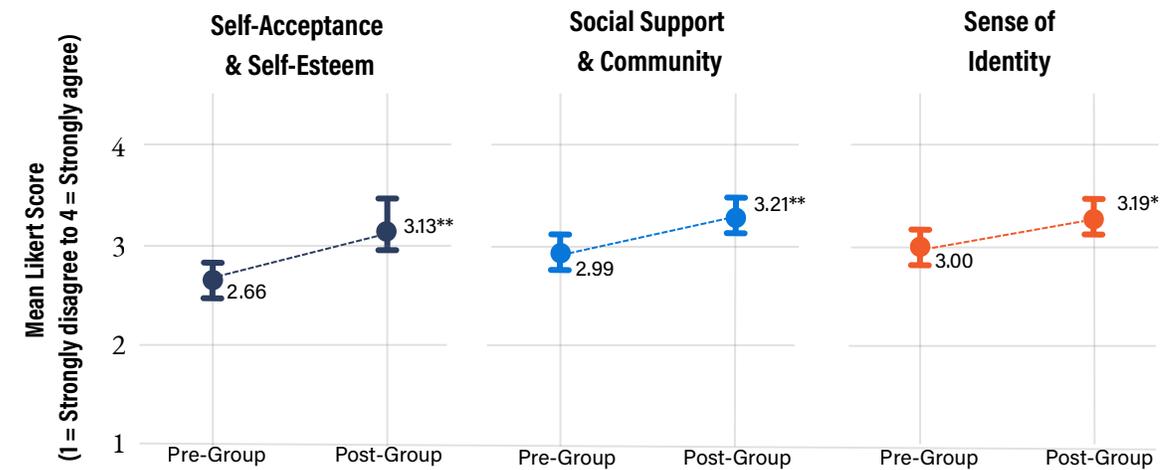
Evidence and Interpretation

The figure on the following page presents the average (mean) scores on measures assessing self-acceptance and self-esteem, social support and community, and identity before and after the peer support group. Clients were asked to rate how much they agree with statements on a four-point scale (some of which were reverse coded). The results below are coded on the same scale, from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (4).

Results indicate participants in the LGBTQI+ peer support group demonstrated statistically significant improvement across all key domains with the greatest improvements in self-acceptance & self-esteem, with a mean increase of 0.47 points ($p < .001$), indicating meaningful improvements in self-worth and positive self-perception. Smaller, but statistically significant gains, were achieved in areas of social support and community ($p < .01$) and perceptions of LGBTQI+ identity ($p < .05$) with a mean increase of 0.21 and 0.19 points, respectively. Baseline levels for both were high before the group, indicating a strong sense of community and identity among participants, possibly increased by prior participation in CVT's 10-week group counseling services for LGBTQI+ clients. At baseline, clients reported limited access to basic needs including healthcare, food, housing, and financial stability, underscoring the persistence of structural and systemic barriers related to stigma and lack of LGBTQI+ inclusive care with an mean score of 1.24 (SD = .34).

Changes Before and After LGBTQI+ Peer Support Groups

Mean Likert scores with 95% confidence intervals (n=46)



Note: , * p ≤ .05; ** p ≤ .01

Impact In Clients' Own Words: Sample Quotes

Findings about the positive impacts of the peer support services were reinforced by qualitative feedback from post-group client satisfaction surveys. When asked “What did you find most helpful about the [peer support] group counseling sessions?”, participants reported they valued being able to express themselves in a supportive community, learning more about their identity, and understanding what protection services are available.

“The services were good, we were taught how to seek protection when we're in danger and linked to other organization like UNHCR that can support us. I found that helpful because I live in a community that discriminates against individuals who identify as LGBTIQ and sometimes they can plan to harm us.”

“When I encounter challenges I remember what I was taught in CVT and I can say some things that were a challenge like expressing myself and identification are no longer a challenge again after the [peer support] program. CVT also gave us strategies of protecting ourselves.”

Conclusion

CVT's LGBTQI+ 6 week peer support groups appear to offer meaningful benefits to clients in Nairobi. Clients reported improved self-acceptance and self-esteem, greater pride in their identity, and strengthened social support and community. Notably, these gains are still seen even when baseline values were already high following CVT's 10-week integrated group counseling services. Given participants reported limited access to basic needs and other resources at baseline, likely limited due to community stigma for LGBTQI+ refugees, additional programs to combat structural and community barriers to care should be considered.

Statement about Interpreting Evidence

Findings indicate that CVT's peer support group services likely contribute to improved self-esteem, self-acceptance, positive perceptions of LGBTQI+ identity, and social support among LGBTQI+ clients in Nairobi. However, since the analysis is based on a limited follow-up sample (response rate 71%) and without a control group, results should be interpreted cautiously. Without a control group, it is not possible to attribute symptom improvement solely to CVT interventions.

References

1. D'souza, F., Blatman, Z., Wier, S., & Patel, M. (2022). The Mental Health Needs of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Refugees: A Scoping Review. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Mental Health*, 26(4), 341-366. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19359705.2022.2109333>
2. Center for Victims of Torture. (2018, June 5). Aftercare – Ongoing Support for the LGBTI Refugee Community at CVT Nairobi. <https://www.cvt.org/articles/aftercare-ongoing-support-for-the-lgbti-refugee-community-at-cvt-nairobi/>
3. Frazer, M. S., Roche, C., & Mirzayi, C. (2011). LGBT Health and Human Services Evaluation Toolkit. Strength in Numbers Consulting Group for the AIDS Institute of the New York State Department of Health: Brooklyn, NY and Albany, NY.

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