*Research Summary:

Not just a woman – An overview of LBQ activism in Vietnam

RESEARCH INTRODUCTION

The research **"Not Just a Woman - An Overview of LBQ Activism in Vietnam"** poses four main questions:

- What is the landscape of LBQ activism in Vietnam?
- What are the main challenges faced by LBQ organizations and activists, and how do they affect their work?
- How have LBQ organizations and activists collaborated with each other and other stakeholders?
- What opportunities are emerging for LBQ activism in Vietnam?

To answer these questions, the research uses a **qualitative method,** combining **in-depth analysis** of existing documents and **in-depth interviews**.

- **In-depth interviews:** Conducted with various activists, including independent activists, representatives of LBQ groups/organizations, and leaders from LGBTIQ+ organizations.
- **Data analysis:** Using thematic analysis and content analysis to identify key themes, messages, and recurring patterns in the interview data.

The research was conducted from August to October 2024, with 21 in-depth interviews and one focus group discussion with LBQ and feminist activists.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Socio-cultural and Economic Context

- **Socio-cultural context:** In a patriarchal society, women are prone to internalize degrading beliefs about their position, abilities, and roles in society, such as: (1) women lack leadership ability, (2) women should be patient and tolerate hardship or inequality, (3) women should remain in minor positions, avoid standing out, and refrain from speaking up on any issue. Internalizing these beliefs can lead to self-doubt, a lack of motivation to speak out about their own issues and their community's issues, and a reluctance to lead advocacy efforts. Women's fear of the consequences of stepping out of their socially assigned "minor" roles also hinders them from speaking out for themselves. Publicly speaking out, which means stepping into the spotlight and attracting attention, is a cause of fear and pressure for many LBQ activists.

- **Socio-economic context:** Within the LGBT community, divisions based on regional origin and urban-rural distinctions create barriers to cooperation and access to rights. Cultural differences between regions can lead to communication and work coordination conflicts, affecting the unity and development of the LBQ community.

2. Overview of LBQ activism in Vietnam

2.1 Organizing Structure

Origin and purpose of establishment: Most LBQ organizations/groups were formed due to the perceived lack of space for LBQ women and their issues. Many founders of LBQ organizations were LBQ who had participated in LGBT community activities but recognized the limitations in LBQ representations and LBQ voices in these spaces. The dominance of voices from the MSM-TG group (men who have sex with men and transgender women) and the concentration of resources on this group also motivated the establishment of LBQ organizations. Some LBQ organizations and networks were supported in their formation by larger organizations, such as Organization C[1], through leadership capacity building programs.

1. Requested cryptonym to protect the identity of the organization mentioned.

Legal registration: Most LBQ organizations/groups operate without legal registration, relying on volunteer human resources and financial resources from initiative funds, donations, or individuals. Some organizations operate with the support from legally registered organizations, or through the sponsorship of local authorities.

Recruitment of personnel: LBQ organizations often do not have a formal mechanism for recruiting members, relying on acquaintances or social networks. Finding and maintaining the commitment of personnel is a challenge, especially in smaller provinces and cities, due to economic pressures and youth migration. Women often face greater economic pressure due to gender inequality in income, job opportunities, and property ownership, making it difficult for them to commit to community activities that do not generate income or have low incomes.

2.2 Main themes and areas of activism

Social advocacy: Social advocacy activities of LBQ activists in Vietnam mainly focus on raising awareness and eliminating discrimination. Some typical activities include: Pride events, cross-country cycling trips, sharing sessions at schools, media responses in the cases of misinformation about the LGBTIQ+ community, and using social media to disseminate knowledge. Although focused on the rights and presence of LBQ, the social advocacy activities of LBQ in Vietnam are often carried out within the framework of larger LGBT community campaigns and events.

Policy advocacy: Policy advocacy activities of LBQ in Vietnam are still very limited, mainly focusing on the goal of legalizing same-sex marriage. Advocacy efforts are mostly led by large LGBT organizations with legal status, However, the participation of LBQ people and LBQ organizations in these efforts is still limited, mainly via sharing stories.
The research proposes some hypotheses for this limitation, including:

- The internalization of patriarchal beliefs makes LBQ people hesitant to speak up and fight for their rights.
- The devision in areas of advocacy and the lack of connection among LBQ organizations.

Community building: This is the most common area of activity, including online forums, offline meetings, community gatherings, thematic discussions, and occasional events. However, some organizations have difficulty attracting participants due to social prejudice, fear of being found out (by family), and the development of social media, making face-to-face meetings seem less necessary.

Research: Very few LBQ organizations conduct research. Research activities are mainly carried out by organizations with legal status such as Organization C and iSEE, but the number of documents on LBQ issues is still very limited.

Emergency support: Includes domestic violence hotline, shelters, and programs that provide support for urgent issues such as forced marriage. However, these activities often only address short-term issues due to limited resources and long-term strategies.

2.3 Financial resources

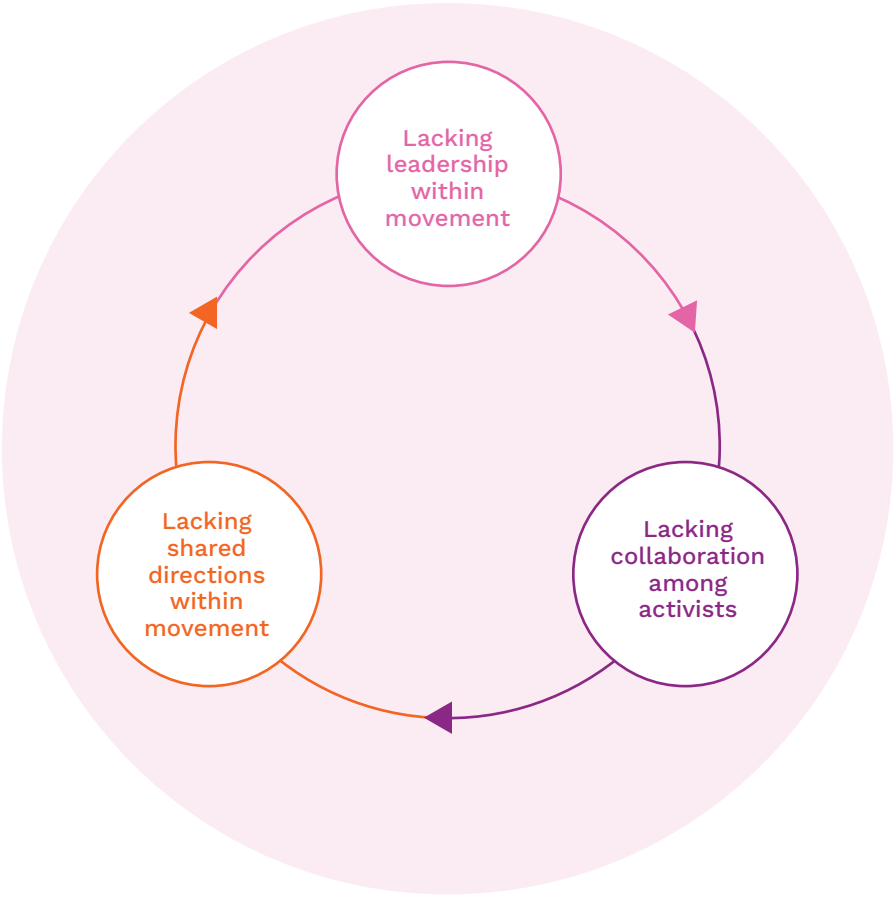
Most LBQ organizations receive financial support from Organization C and initiative funds. Accessing large funds often requires legal status or going through intermediary organizations, creating challenges for grassroots organizations. Unlike some groups working for gay men's rights, LBQ groups do not develop service business models or social enterprises for self-funding, due to legal limitations and risks in sensitive areas such as shelters, gynecological clinics, or legal counseling services for adoption. Despite financial difficulties, LBQ organizations maintain their operations through community fundraising and the use of personal resources.

2.4 Collaboration, linkage, and conflict among LBQ organizations

Collaboration among LBQ organizations mainly takes place within a facilitated network, but this network is currently inactive due to resource constraints. Cooperation among organizations outside the network is often occasional or sporadic, mainly in the form of one organization granting another.

Conflicts and disagreements among LBQ organizations often stem from regional cultural differences, varying opinions, and differences in experience levels, resulting in members leaving the network, changes in leadership, and a loss of motivation to work, despite efforts by the coordinating organization to resolve conflicts through training and establishing common working rules.

Before 2012, LBQ forums also disagreed on the issue of advocating for same-sex marriage, but this disagreement has diminished after advocacy activities achieved certain results.



The fragmentation and lack of connection, coupled with the absence of leadership and a shared direction, hinder LBQ activists from building a cohesive and unified social movement.

2.5 The impact of participating in LBQ activism on LBQ activists

Participating in LBQ activism has many benefits to activists, but it also has potential negative impacts. The research noted negative impacts on mental health, including burnout, time management challenges, and psychological trauma stemming from work pressure and exposure to stories of gender-based violence. It also documented a case of an activist facing abuse from her boyfriend for pursuing activism against his wishes. Additionally, activists struggle with economic hardships and career development due to the unstable income associated with their work.

LBQ activists often seek support from other LGBTIQ+ activists, family, friends, funding organizations, and (less often) psychological support facilities.

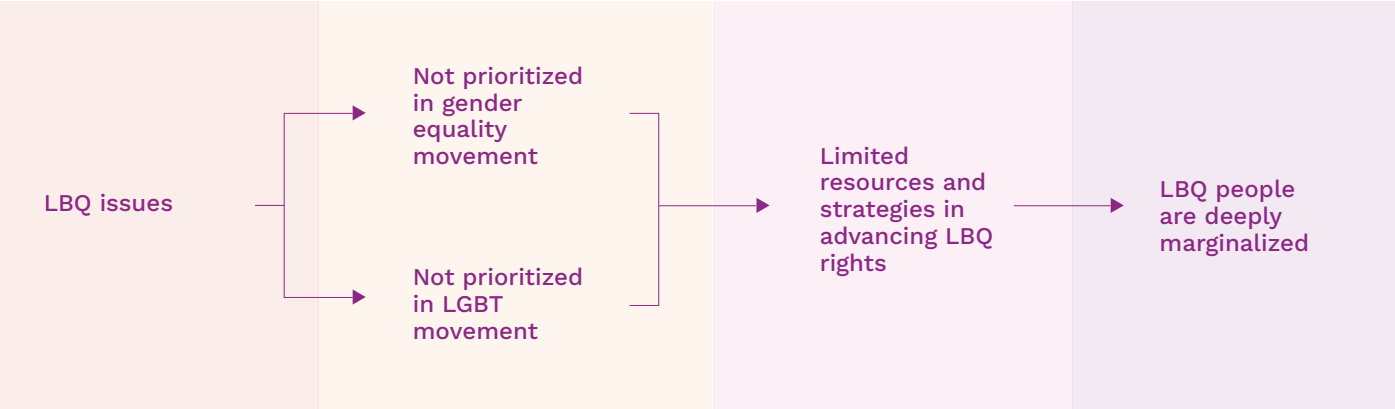
3. LBQ activism in larger umbrellas

3.1 Intersection with the feminist movement

No LBQ organization participating in the research mentioned collaborating with feminist organizations. According to feminist activists, collaboration is hindered by differences in values, the lack of consistent activity from LBQ groups, and disparities in power and resources. The concept of "collective imagination" was mentioned to explain the lack of connection between the feminist and LGBT movements, as projects often focus on solving individual problems without connecting to the bigger picture.

3.2 LBQ and LBQ issues in the LGBT movement

LBQ issues are often overlooked in gender equality campaigns and human rights conferences. Some large LGBT organizations admit they do not fully understand the needs of LBQ people, leading to a lack of activities and strategies to support this group. The lack of awareness of the needs of LBQ people is also reflected in their being marginalized in events and discussions, and sometimes facing opposition when proposing specific activities.



4. The future of LBQ activism

- **OPPORTUNITIES:**

- The increasing presence of LBQ, especially through online platforms and events like Pride, contributes to raising awareness of gender diversity.
- The emergence of LBQ groups/organizations led by young LBQ brings a fresh breeze to the movement.
- Research and documenting LBQ stories are necessary to provide insights for policymakers and promote more effective advocacy.
- The potential for intersectional advocacy of the LBQ movement, connecting with other marginalized groups, can promote broader social justice.

- **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- Recognize the influence of Confucianism and address these issues in projects targeting LGBTIQ+ and LBQ people.
- Focus on the voices and leadership roles of LBQ people in the LGBTIQ+ movement.
- Promote harmony and collaboration between LBQ organizations.
- Adopt an intersectional approach when developing strategies.
- Build alliances with other social justice movements.