



# COVID-19

A report on the situation  
of intersex people in Africa

Obioma Chukwuike



AFRICAN  
INTERSEX  
MOVEMENT





# COVID-19. A report on the situation of intersex people in Africa

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This report is part of a global study on the situation of intersex people and their families in times of Covid-19, initiated by OII Europe and conducted by the International Intersex Community in different regions of the world. The global report will be published in 2021.

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Available from <https://www.intersexkenya.org/>



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## Introduction

The unprecedented crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic is creating havoc in human lives. It has created unimaginable changes of tremendous scale on personal and public levels. Since the World Health Organization (WHO) declared it a pandemic, a significant proportion of the world population is either under complete lockdown or partial lockdown along with family or even unwanted company (World Health Organization, 2020).

This survey was initiated by the global intersex committee to establish the situation of intersex people in different regions; it was important to conduct this survey to assess the pandemic's impact specifically on the lives of intersex people globally. To actualize this global initiative, African Intersex Movement adapted the questionnaire template created by OII Europe, which was used in Europe and Central Asia, shaped it to accommodate regional realities in order to gather more information about different areas of lives for intersex people in Africa in times of Covid-19.

From a statistical point of view, the quantitative findings are not applicable to the general intersex life, as the sample size is too small, and the necessary statistical randomness is not met. They do, however, provide valuable insight and indicate areas of concern.

The quantitative and qualitative data together strongly point towards intersex people being a highly vulnerable part of the population in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. One of the most critical findings in this respect is the highly increased risk of intersex people not being able to access financial support with a history of discrimination at workplaces and an inability to gain employment.

The high percentage of increased mental health issues amongst the respondents represents another worrying (though not surprising) finding. Many intersex people suffer from mental health issues due to the violations of their physical and psychological integrity, living in secrecy, isolation, the stigma they experienced, which makes intersex

individuals more vulnerable. Also, pre-existing structural barriers, like lack of educated appropriate psychological support counseling, make it harder for intersex people to access help; this situation has been aggravated during the Covid-19 crisis.

These results align with surveys and studies about the increased vulnerability of minority groups in a pandemic and Covid-19. The crisis of financial insecurity and mental health faced by intersex persons is alarming; the factors contributing to these crises are the social, cultural, and economic inequalities caused by structural discrimination. This exploratory study's findings mirror these well-known facts to a worrying extent and therefore make a strong call for the need for further, educated, and intersex-focused research.

We want to graciously thank the members of the African Intersex Community who responded to this survey and OII Europe for supporting this initiative by creating the questionnaire template.

**AFRICAN INTERSEX MOVEMENT**

June 2021

# Methodology<sup>1</sup>

The survey was launched on 12 October 2020 through multiple communication channels of the African Intersex Community and was open for approximately one month and two weeks until 16 December 2020.

## Questionnaire

The questionnaire used for this survey is based on the Covid-19 questionnaire for Europe and Central Asia. It was adapted for the African region through a multi-step process.

The coordinating committee of the African Intersex Movement reviewed OII Europe's questionnaire, adjusting the existing questions to reflect more realities of intersex persons in Africa. The questionnaire was then sent for review to 4 intersex people from African Intersex Movement to allow for maximum inclusion of the diversity of issues relevant to different African regions.

In addition to the pre-determined answers, 40 out of 46 questions had an open text option, which was used extensively by the participants to give more details or, in some cases, to add additional responses. Many of the questions were set up as multiple marks to allow respondents to capture different parts of their experience.

The questionnaire consists of a set of 46 questions, which cover the impact of Covid-19 in the following areas of life:

- Physical and Mental Health and Wellbeing (including questions about general
- Access to health, access to health care related to a possible Covid-19 infection, access to medication)
- Access to Support (including questions about peer support, financial support, another kind of support)
- Financial Situation and Housing (including general questions about income shifts and the reasons for it, shifts of expenses, governmental financial support)
- Traveling (including the possible impact of restrictions on intersex activism)

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter is based on the chapters "Methodology" and "Limits of the Survey" in the OII Europe (2020): Covid-19. A report on the situation of intersex people in Europe and Central Asia survey and, with OII Europe's approval, quote relevant text from these chapters while adding and changing information for Africa where required. See <https://oiiueurope.org/covid-19-survey-report/>



- Education (including, e.g., the impact of online learning)
- Personal Safety (including, e.g., at home during lockdowns, when seeking access to health services)
- Intersex Activism

In addition, the questionnaire asked about:

- Whether the respondent was an intersex person or a family member of an intersex person
- Country of residence
- Areas of life that the respondents felt were most impacted by Covid-19
- Aspects of the respondent's life that add to their vulnerability
- Challenges regarding participating in the "new normal" (i.e., online-based communication and internet access)
- Perspectives on future developments, access to the vaccine, and specific sub-regional issues.

A particular focus was put on the area of health and the area of work, as these had been identified already before the development of the questionnaire as being particularly challenging for intersex individuals in times of Covid-19.

To protect the privacy of intersex individuals and their families, we abstained from collecting any demographic data that was not directly needed for the purpose of the survey. In addition, the three last questions of the survey asked for consent to quote from the open-ended responses in reports; only the responses of those who consented are mentioned in this report.

## Self-selection of respondents and dissemination of the questionnaire

In order to bring the questionnaire to the attention of intersex people within the African Intersex Community, it was disseminated through African Intersex Movement communication channels (email, social media) to member organizations and members of the African Intersex Community.

These individuals furthered the dissemination of the questionnaire within their organizations and networks (social media and in-person) of intersex individuals and their families (snowball sampling).

## Language

The questionnaire was made available in 2 languages: English and French.

## Technical tools used

Survey Monkey Pro was used as a tool to set up the questionnaire and to collect results. Final percentages were calculated in Excel to circumvent some of the limitations set by Survey Monkey.

## Definition of “intersex” used for this survey

The survey focuses on intersex people/ people with variations of sex characteristics and their families. Terms intersex people/people with variations of sex characteristics were defined as follows, and the definition was communicated during the dissemination of the survey:

*The term “intersex” is an umbrella term for the spectrum of variations of sex characteristics that naturally occur within the human species. The term intersex acknowledges the fact that physically, sex is a spectrum and that people with variations of sex characteristics other than male or female exist. Intersex individuals are born with sex characteristics (sexual anatomy, reproductive organs, hormonal structure and/or levels and/or chromosomal patterns) that do not fit the typical definition of male or female.*

*The fact that someone has an intersex body can become apparent to them at different times in their life: at birth, during childhood, in puberty or even in adulthood. Depending on the specific life circumstances and the degree of taboo in their environment, a person might learn that they have an intersex body at a very early age or later in life. Some intersex people never find out at all.*

## Use of bar-charts in the report

The use of bar-charts aims to provide a visual overview of trends. The numbers cannot be generalized for the total intersex population of Africa.

# Findings of the Survey

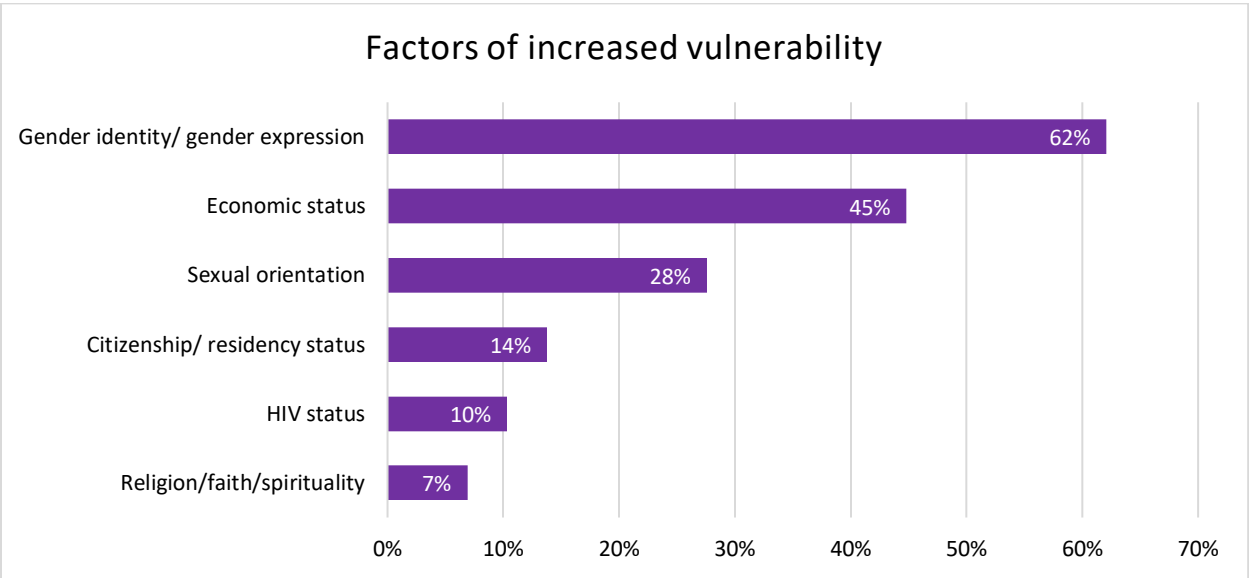
## Regional representation and respondent matrix

The survey was filled out by 29 African intersex people, including 2 family members of intersex people responding on behalf of those intersex persons, coming from 9 countries in Africa:

- West Africa (15 intersex respondents): Nigeria, Ghana, Burkina Faso, and Liberia.
- Southern Africa (11 intersex respondents and 2 family members responding on behalf of intersex persons): Zambia, Zimbabwe, Malawi and Botswana.
- East Africa (1 intersex respondent): Kenya.

## Vulnerability factors in Africa

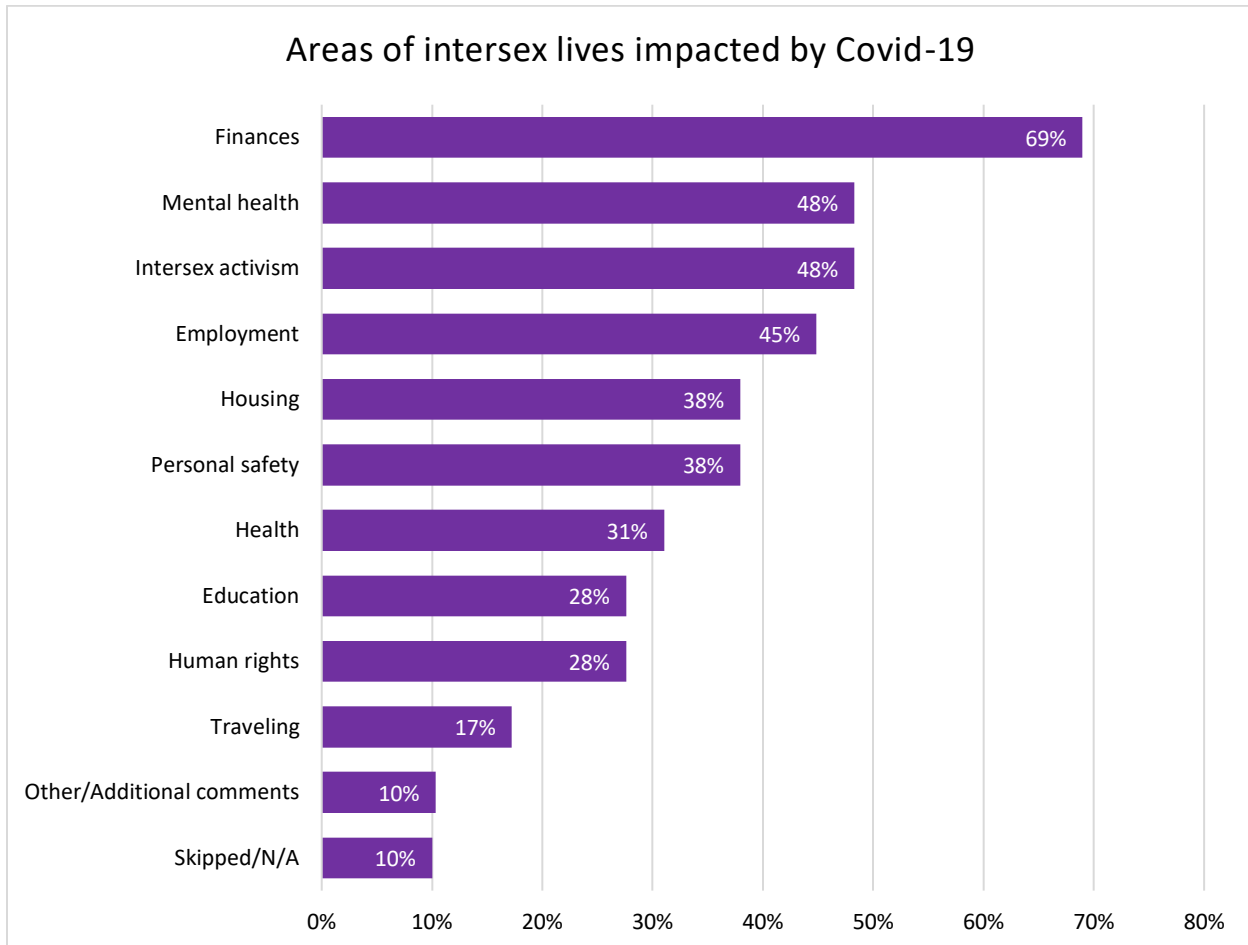
Intersex people cannot talk about the challenges they face every day without looking into the intersectional realities embedded in different factors. The pandemic has made it even worse. Many intersex persons in Africa face catastrophic conditions in their everyday lives, ranging from loss of income to increased mental health challenges linked to violence and isolation. The vulnerability of intersex persons is highly correlated with the different misconceptions society has on intersex.



In total, 62% of respondents expressed being more vulnerable these past months because of their gender identity/expression, in addition to the vulnerability they experience because of variation of sex characteristics. 45% of respondents mentioned

that their economic status makes them more vulnerable; 28% shared their sexual orientation is an increasing factor. Other factors considered were citizenship (14%), HIV status (10%), and religion (7%).

## Areas of Lives impacted by Covid-19



The survey findings show that the financial situation of a great majority of the respondents (69%) has been affected dramatically by the pandemic, with many losing their jobs. Close to half said their mental health (48%) and intersex activism (48%) were impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic, closely followed by the negative impact on respondent's employment situation (45%). Another area of respondent's life affected was their personal safety and housing (38%). 31% indicated their health was impacted while 28% marked education and human rights respectively as areas of impact, 17% of the respondents traveling schedules were impacted by the pandemic.

# Finances and Income

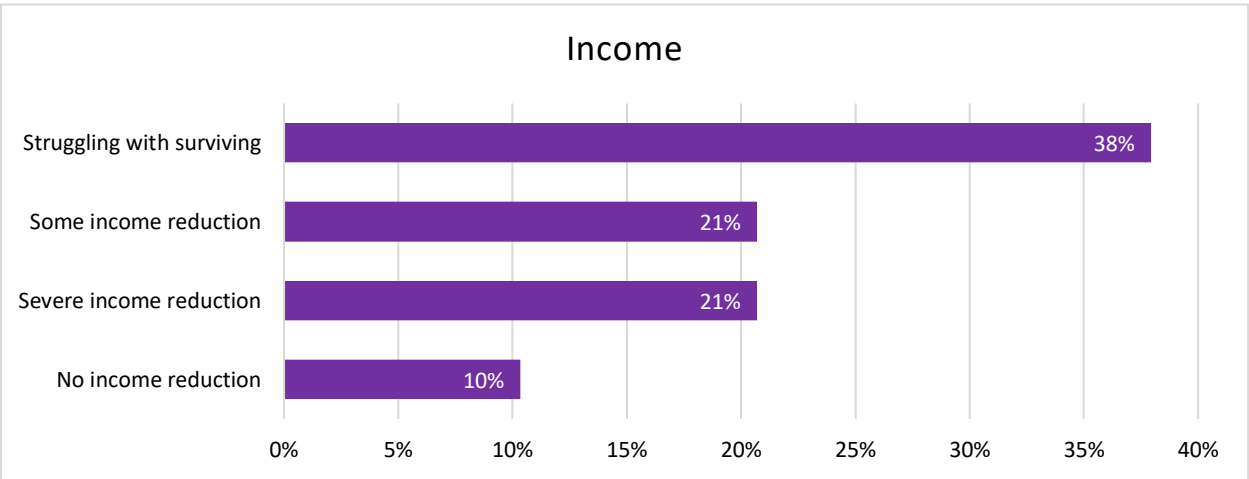
The Covid-19 pandemic has significantly impacted the financial lives of intersex persons in Africa. With the outbreak of this pandemic, many countries and cities were thrown into confusion about the potential impact of this virus and the best methods to combat it. Notably, many countries went into lockdown to protect people’s lives and avoid the virus’s continuous spread, as advised by medical experts. This, on the other hand, negatively affected the financial situation of many people, especially people who live on either daily income or salary pay. Most intersex persons fall under this category, and their vulnerability impacts their employment prospects and options. It can be argued that most employers discriminate against people with different gender expressions other than typical male or female, as seen from the above indicators of vulnerability provided by this survey.

The already reduced income of intersex persons has further declined. A high proportion of respondents said they are struggling to survive (38%) during the Covid-19 pandemic; (21%) have indicated having income reduction or severe income reduction in these times. At the same time, (10%) marked no income reduction.

A participant of the survey reported instances of engaging in private tutoring sessions to have a sustained income after losing their job as a teacher, but it being disrupted due to the pandemic.

Another respondent selected the "I am struggling with surviving" option and stated:

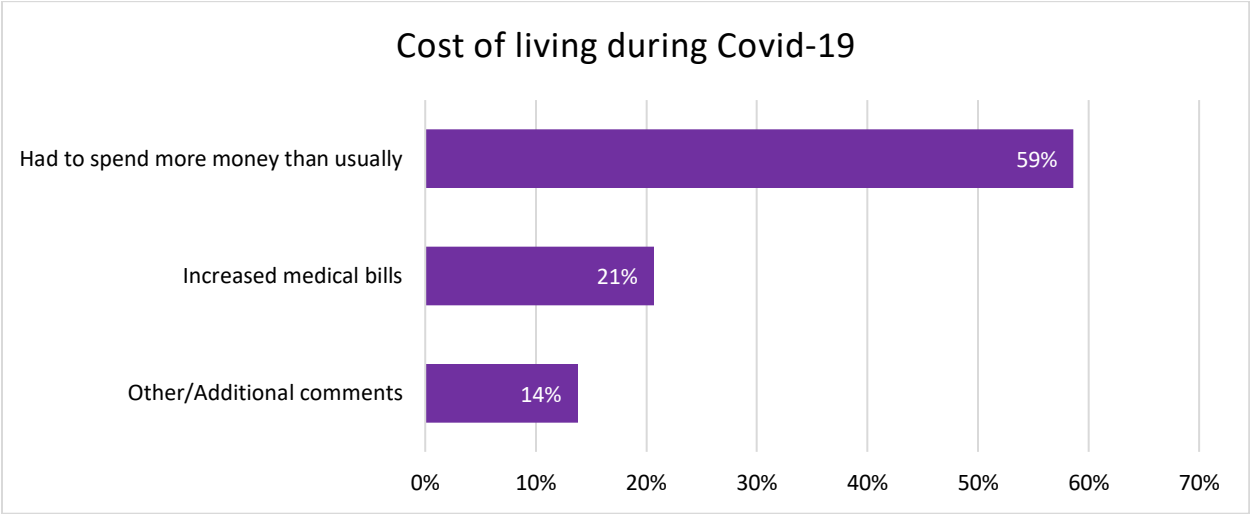
*“The economic situation of my country and the Covid-19 lockdown restrictions are restricting me from carrying on with my informal trading activities to support my livelihood.” (Southern Africa)*



In assessing how the pandemic has affected the cost of living of intersex persons in Africa, more than half (59%) have indicated spending more money than they usually do, while about a quarter (21%) has mentioned increases in medical costs.

A participant stated:

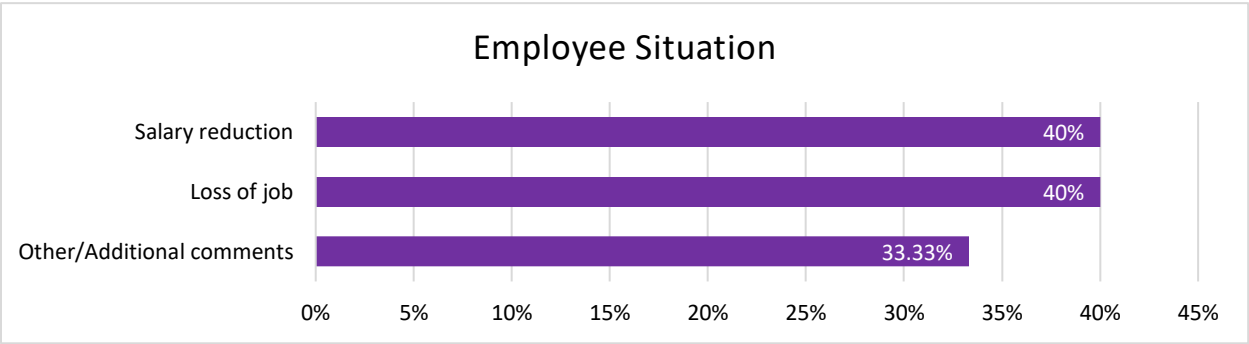
*“As a result of the pandemic, the cost of living increased in my country.”  
(Southern Africa)*



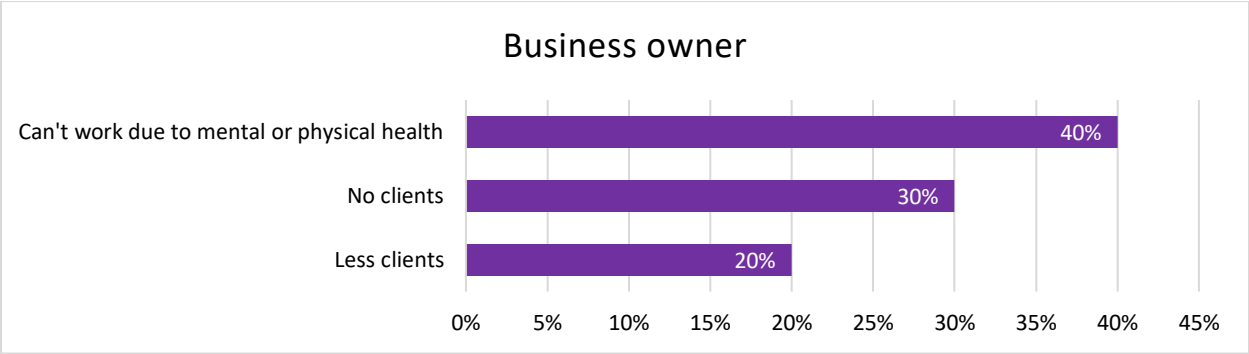
# Employment

Many intersex persons, similarly to others, experienced job losses and, in the case of business owner's loss of clients. When asked how the COVID-19 pandemic and related business shutdowns impacted their employment situation, 40% of employees noted their salary was reduced, the same as employees who lost their jobs (40%). Other reasons for the decline of financial stability include the need to care for family members. As one respondent stated:

*“It's now difficult for me to go to work because I am looking after my sibling's children because they died during the period of lockdown and no tests were taken, so I think they died with Covid-19.” (Southern Africa)*



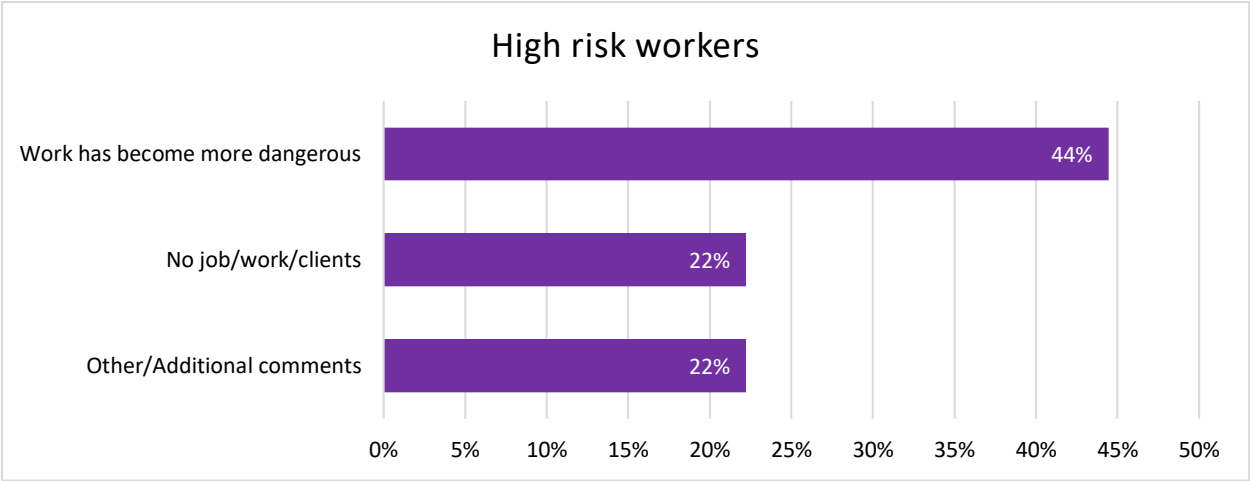
40% of business owners reported not being able to work due to their mental or physical health. 30% said they experienced no clients at all as the pandemic ravaged the region, while 20% had fewer clients than before the pandemic.



In addition, there is increasing concern on how job losses affect the mental health of intersex respondents in the longer run, a situation which is made worse by lack of access to mental healthcare.

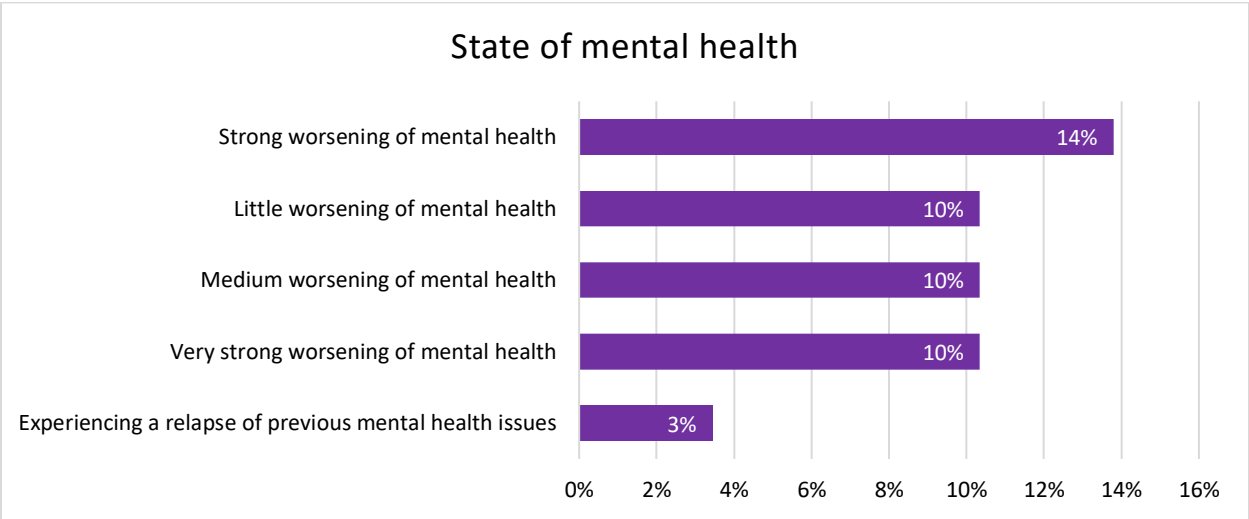


The survey included Intersex people who engage in high-risk work. 44% marked their jobs during the pandemic as more dangerous than before, and 22% recorded no jobs or clients due to the lockdowns and restrictions in their respective countries.



# Mental health and Wellbeing

The mental health and wellbeing of intersex persons were heavily affected. Many did not expect the pandemic and related restrictions. Living in a region where less attention is paid to mental health, unprecedented events like the COVID-19 pandemic has amplified the impact on already discriminated and stigmatized groups like intersex people. The existence of Intersex persons is widely misunderstood in Africa. Lockdowns, social isolation, and fear of the unknown increased feelings of anxiety and fear. When asked about their mental health, 14% expressed substantial worsening of their mental health; many others indicated an extraordinarily strong, medium, or slight worsening of their mental health.

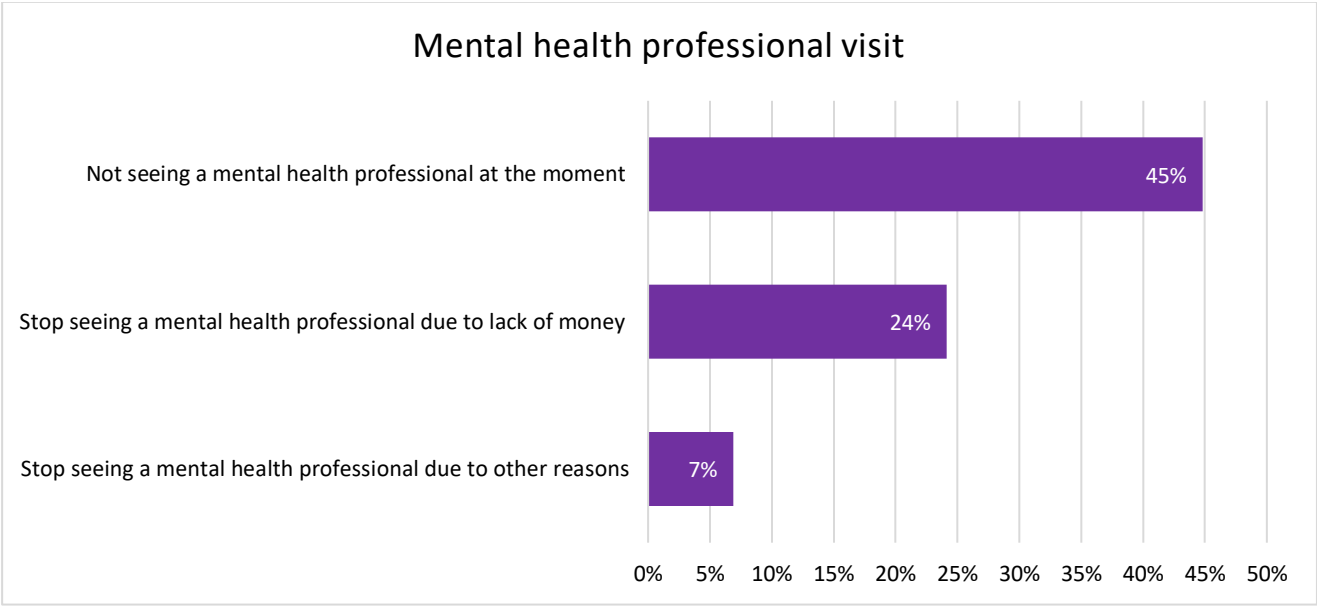


Stress and anxiety are some of the factors having a detrimental impact on mental health. Events like a pandemic trigger these factors. Many intersex people have gone through traumatic experiences in their life. Uncertainty can bring back these memories and cause worsening of mental health.

Another issue that was mentioned by a participant is the recurrences of nervous and paranoid feelings of being infected with Covid-19.

When questioned about social distancing and the impact of self-isolation during the pandemic, 38% did not feel supported by their government; 34% said they feel stressed by the necessity to change or cancel plans. 28% indicated difficulty living through the pandemic, 21% feel uncertain about the future after the pandemic. 17% said they missed human connection, especially with their fellow intersex persons and family members. 10% said the situation is unbearable and severely affects their mental health. Only 3% reported feeling well during this time.

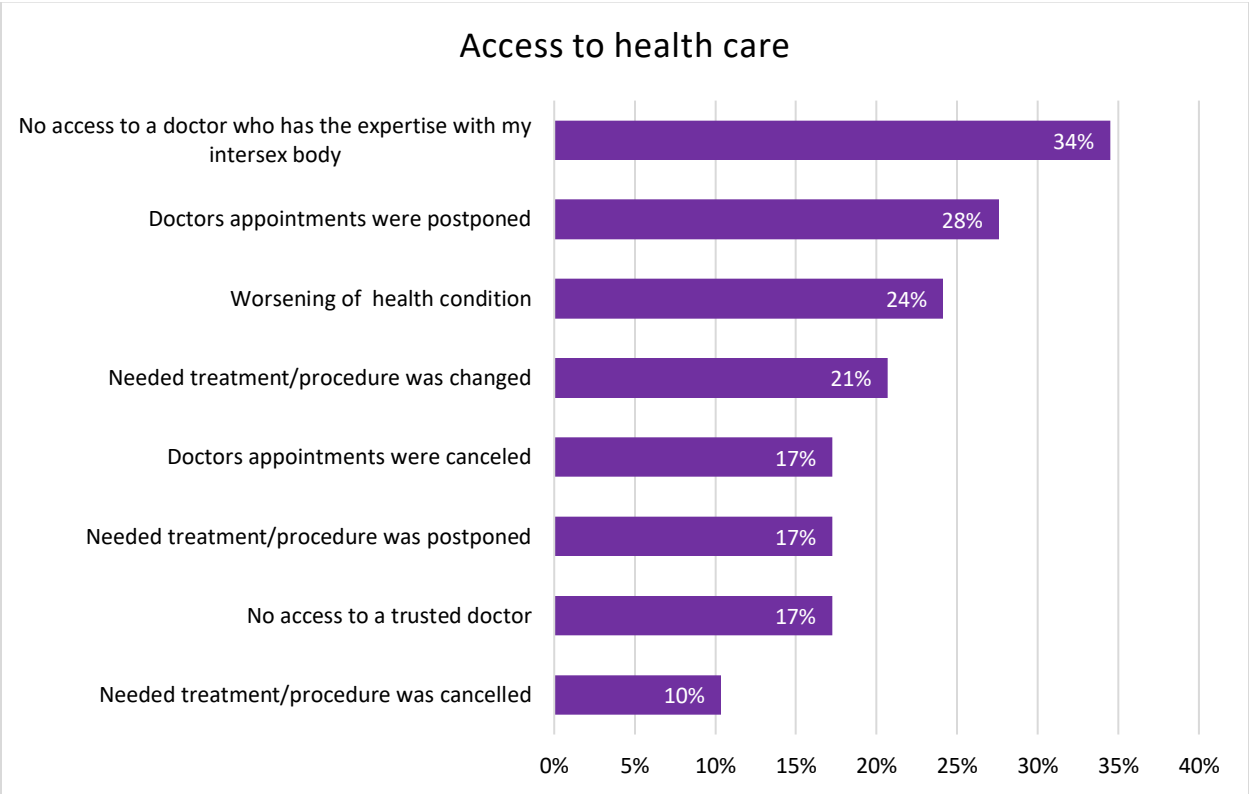
To support mental health and wellbeing, educated professional psychological help tailored to intersex people’s specific needs would be strongly required. The survey results show that 45% of intersex respondents from the African region are not seeing any mental health professional to address their mental health challenges; 24% stopped seeing a mental health professional due to financial reasons; 7% discontinued because of other pandemic related reasons.



# Healthcare

Amid the pandemic, access to good health care services is critical.

International health organizations raised concerns about the pandemic increasing significantly in Africa as access to health facilities is limited. This access is not guaranteed for many respondents, who reported multiple cases of not being able to access health care services: 34% of all intersex respondents currently have no access to a doctor with relevant intersex expertise. 28% had their doctor appointments postponed, and 24% of intersex respondents reported worsening health conditions due to the inability to access services. 21% said their treatment has changed. 17% of the respondents respectively mentioned no access to a doctor that they could trust due to the pandemic, necessary treatments were postponed, and doctor's appointments were canceled.



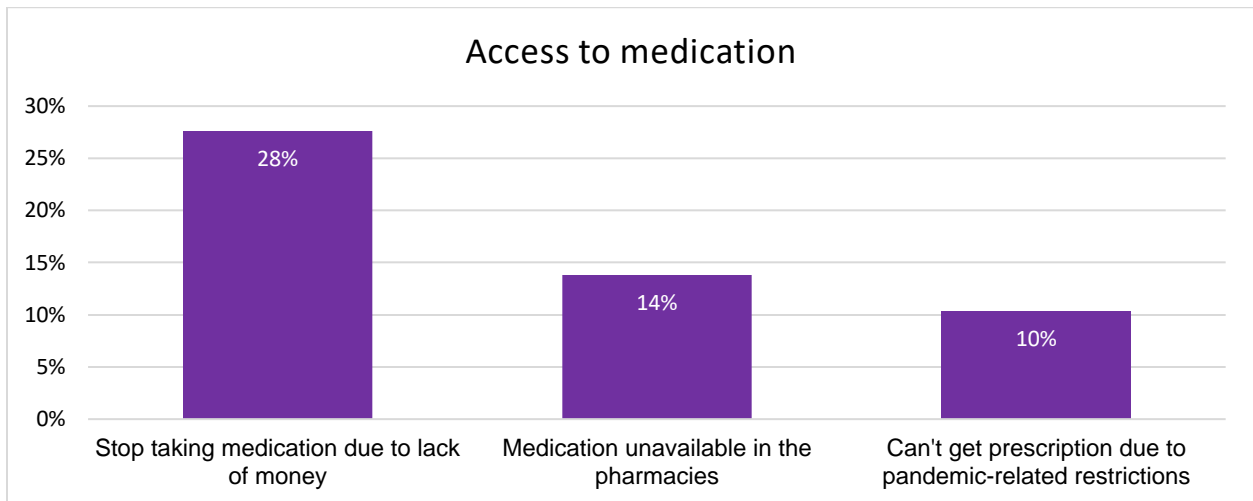
Many intersex people have to rely on prescribed medication for health reasons continuously. The survey results show a negative impact of the pandemic on access to those medications, their availability, and chances of being prescribed new medication. 28% of the intersex respondents indicated that they stopped/will eventually stop taking their medication due to financial reasons. 14% marked that their medication was unavailable at the pharmacies. 10% could not get prescriptions due to pandemic-related restrictions.

A respondent noted:

*“I will eventually stop taking my ARV medication because I cannot afford private healthcare services where the medication that I take is usually readily available at very expensive prices.” (Southern Africa)*

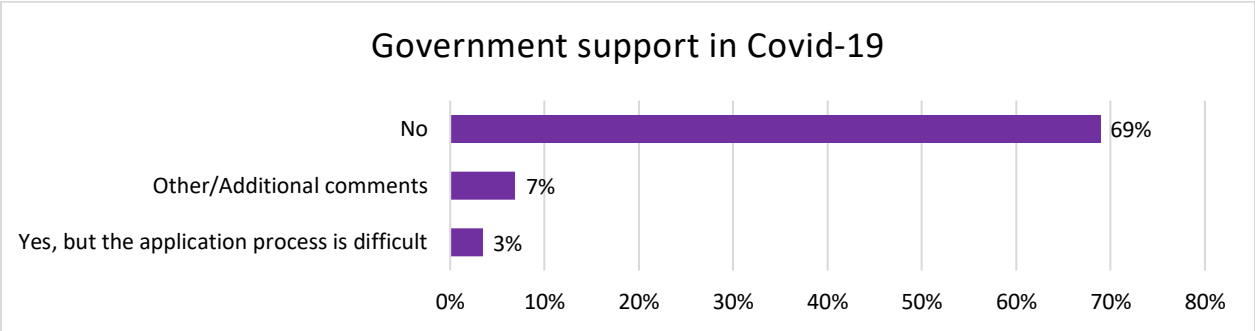
Another participant stated:

*“[I] couldn’t access hormones because of stock shortages.” (Southern Africa)*

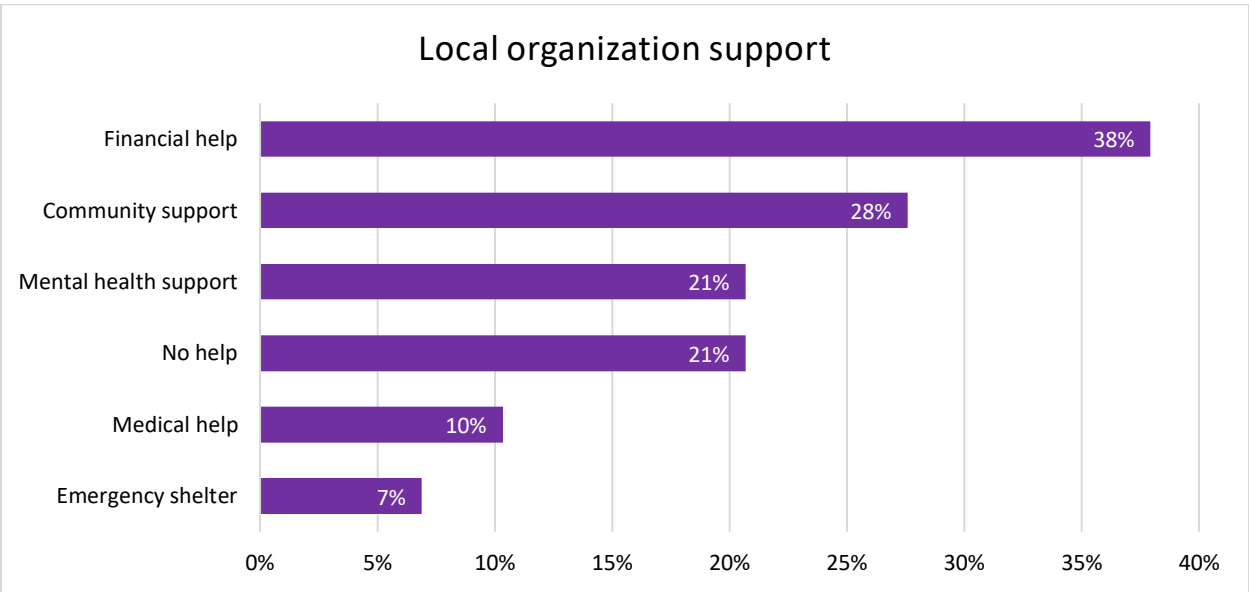


# Support

The pandemic has an unprecedented effect on the ability to work and on social interaction. The intersex population in Africa is overwhelmed by the Covid-19 pandemic. Most have resorted to isolation, often living with violent and intolerant people due to loss of income to sustain their lives. The survey investigated if, and if yes, what governmental or other support was available for intersex people. 69% of the respondents stated that they did not get any form of support from the government. 3% indicated support from the government but also highlighted that the process to get the support is overly complicated.



38% of respondents mentioned financial help from a local organization. 27% mentioned community/peer groups or similar types of support. 21% received mental health support. 10% of participants reported receiving a form of medical help, and 7% got emergency shelter during the emergence of Covid-19. 21% indicated not getting any form of help from a local organization: In the past intersex people got support in situations of urgency, but now the pandemic impacts in a way that hinders other NGOs from supporting intersex people.



One of the respondents noted the type of support received from a local organization:

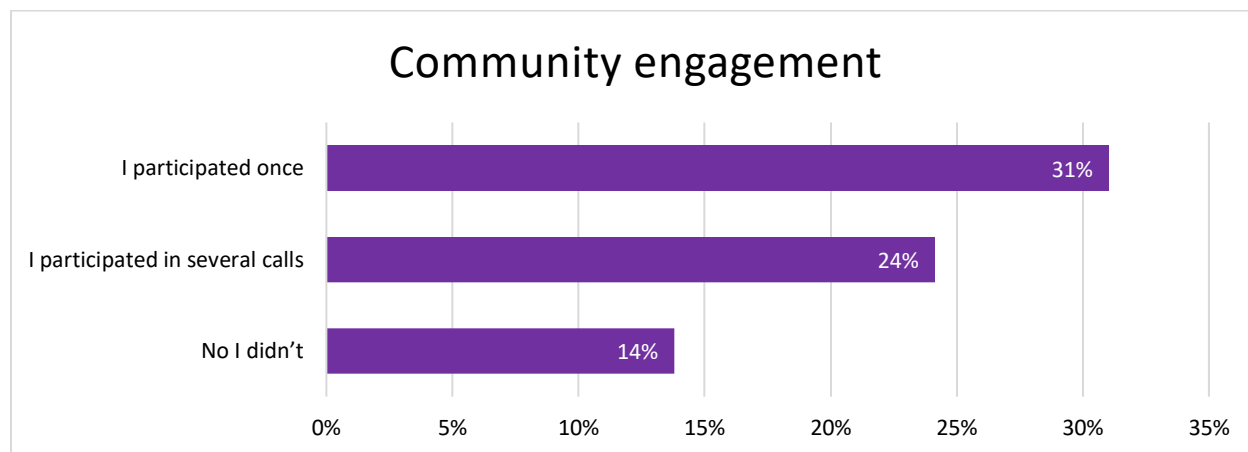
*“I received some financial support and groceries from a local Intersex organization called The Intersex Community of Zimbabwe under the Outright LGBTIQ Covid-19 relief aid.” (Southern Africa)*

Support received in difficult times can be uplifting and even life-saving. The pandemic forced many intersex people to fight for survival on a daily basis. A participant shared how they felt receiving support from their local organization:

*“Felt honoured and valued, that was my difficult time to survive, I was not going to work for me to sustain.” (Southern Africa)*

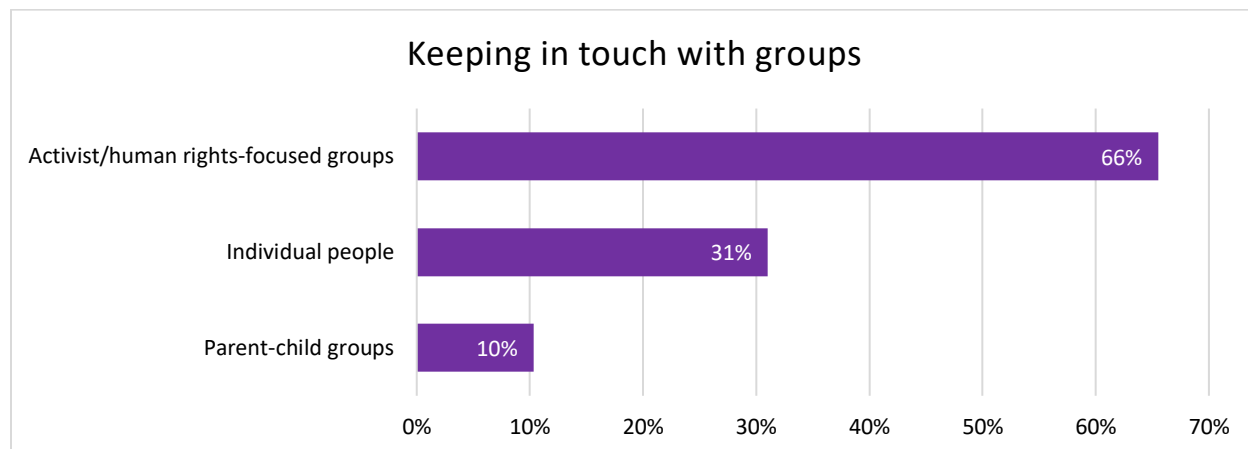
In the African region, most intersex people learn about the existence of other intersex persons, connect and share their stories through a phone conversation or social media engagements such as webinars, training, etc. This is caused by the fact that many are located far away from each other and lack of funding to organize in-person events. The survey asked whether these engagements continued after the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic and how the Africa intersex community participated.

31% said they participated once in a community engagement online, 24% indicated they participated in several calls in the pandemic, while 13% did not participate in any conversations or calls.



When asked whether they were in touch with other people or support groups, 66% said they had close contact with different activists/human rights activists, 31% had interactions with other individuals during lockdowns and isolation, 10% had contacts with a parent-child support group during the pandemic. This shows that most intersex persons held on to each other during the pandemic and confirms the trend observed before the outbreak.

As the community has been invisible for a long time, relying on people and groups who understand their struggles is the primary support source.



## Safety and Human Rights

Safety of lives became a high cost in the Covid-19 crisis. There were restrictions and sudden lockdown in different parts of Africa; many had to stay in hostile and unsafe places. The pandemic brought total confusion, limited movement, reduced mental and physical health, and individuals' lack of safety. Response from the African intersex community showed that 39% stayed at home in self-isolation with people they have a strained relationship with, including their partners, friends, or family members. 24% experienced violence, harassment or abuse on the street, 14% experienced violence, abuse, harassment or controlling behavior from someone they currently live with. It further showed that 10% regularly experience controlling behavior from someone they currently live with. 17% mentioned not experiencing personal safety issues, 10% of the respondents also marked being uncomfortable receiving Covid-19 related medical help due to their past intersex medical trauma. A respondent referred to their safety in these words:

*“Felt unwanted, being insulted with different names due to the fact of my intersex situation, and from my landlord because I was not up to date in paying my rentals, because of the lockdown, my shop was shut down, my place was taken by force.”  
(Southern Africa)*



Some participants reported cases of harassment from neighbors who see their existence as disturbing and uncomfortable and how this has made them unsafe in the community where they live.

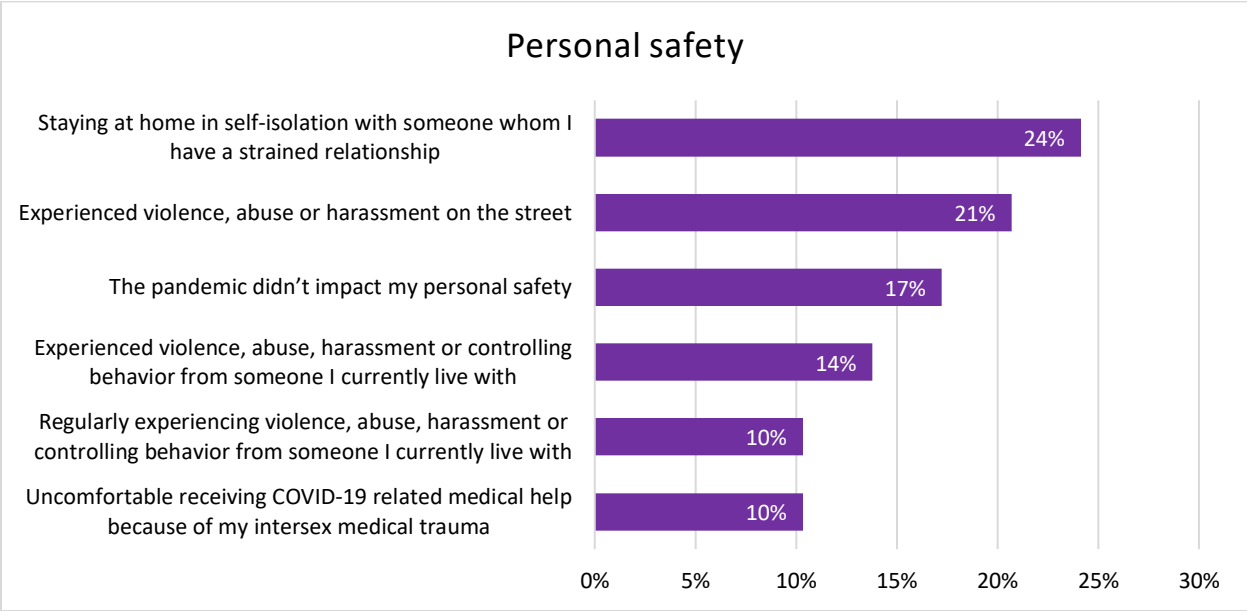
One of the respondents noted:

*“Now I have to talk, do, sound, express myself as my father wants me to, or I face being kicked out of the house.” (West Africa)*

Another respondent stated:

*“I was stigmatized by my family members. I was always addressed by the wrong pronoun. I was discriminated against because I looked different.” (West Africa)*

Human rights violations such as violence, harassment and abuse are most concerning in the fight for recognition and visibility of an intersex person in Africa. There have been different forms of violations of marginalized people around the world. For the intersex part of the population, these violations include being victims of unwanted medical interventions or even killings of intersex babies. This has negatively impacted how intersex persons perceive themselves and view their existence and aggravates the endlessly unsafe environment they always find themselves in, especially during situations like Covid-19, when fear and agitation make them more vulnerable to the public.



Public spaces such as toilets and bathrooms are some of the places intersex persons get harassed or violated. People become hostile to them and either confront them in physically or verbally, as another participant shared how uncomfortable they are sneaking

into bathrooms every time to avoid being embarrassed by other people who are not aware of their intersex variation.

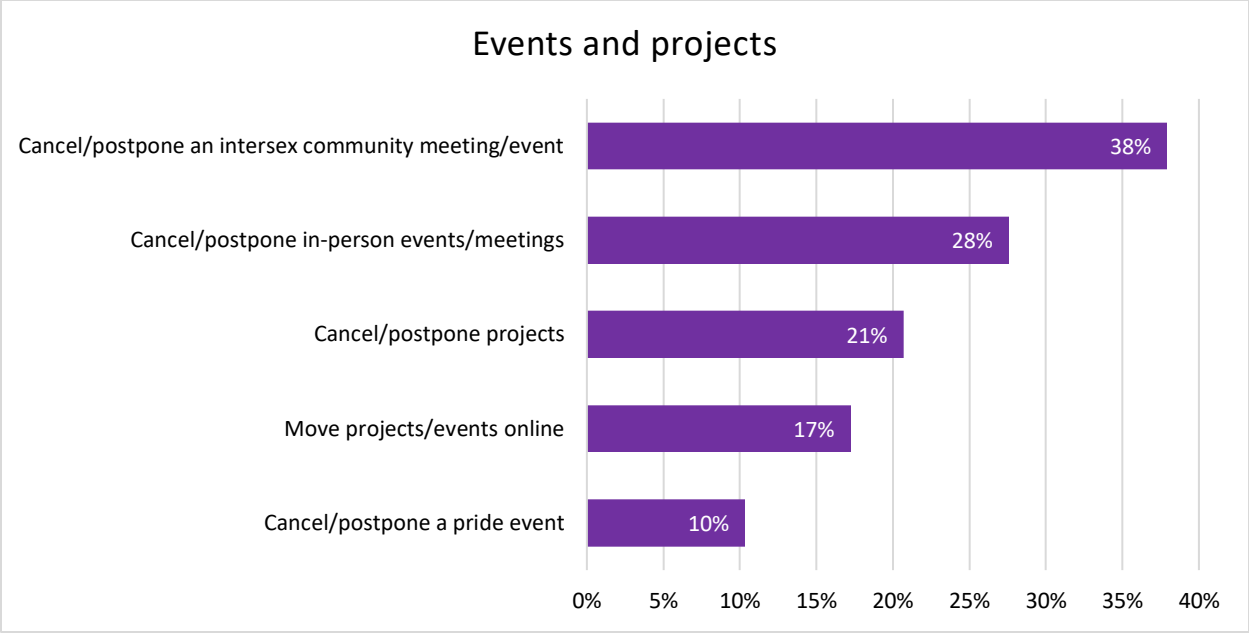
In some cases, intersex persons were denied protection from the authorities, which should be their bedrock of protection. One of the respondents described an experience at the police station:

*“I was once denied to press charges at a police station against someone who had violated my human rights by verbally insulting me because of my intersexuality.”  
(Southern Africa)*

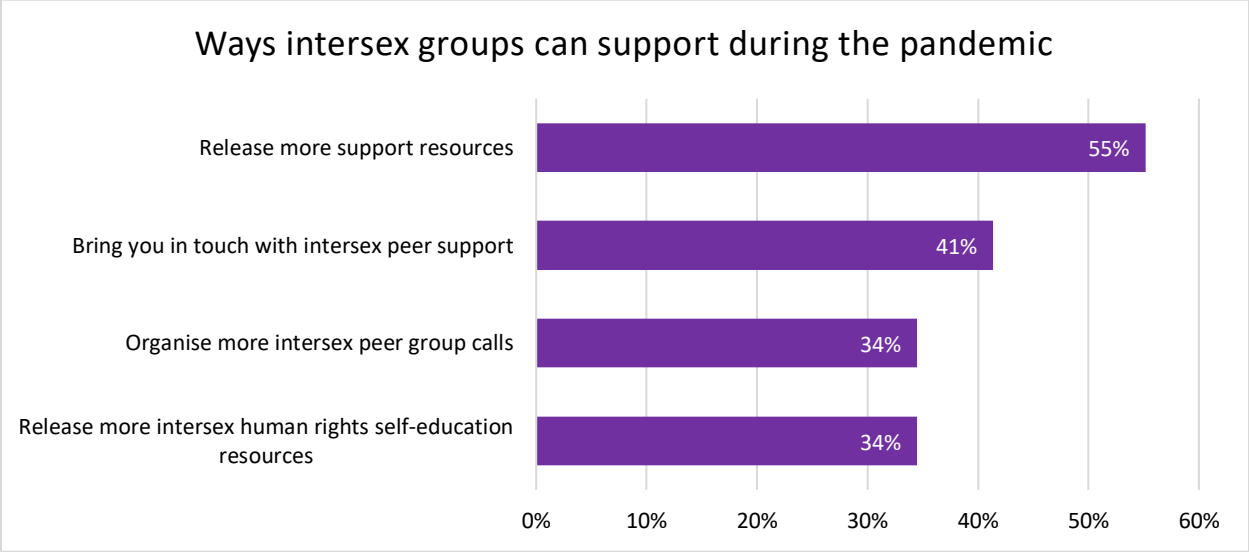
## **Intersex activism**

Activism is always a bedrock of liberation and visibility for people fighting for their rights. The pandemic, which took the whole world by surprise, impacted negatively on intersex activism, including on planned events, projects, outreach and other forms of organizing. African intersex organizing is growing daily and African intersex activists are making significant steps forward by speaking up against violations of intersex human rights, bringing intersex people closer to understanding themselves and supporting them through different forms, such as organizing events or meetings and carrying out projects in line with the aims and objectives of intersex-led organizations.

However, with the pandemic, this organizing suddenly encountered huge and unexpected obstacles: 38% of respondents reported that they had to cancel or postpone an intersex community event, 28% canceled or postponed in-person events, 21% canceled or postponed a project, 17% moved the events and projects online, while 10% canceled or postponed a pride event.



The survey explored how intersex groups can support intersex persons during the Covid-19 pandemic. More than half of the respondents (55%) asked for more support resources to be released, 41% said they wanted to be brought in touch with intersex peers. 34% wanted intersex groups to organize more intersex peer group calls and release more intersex human rights self-education resources.



## Internet Access

It is no doubt that life has shifted more to online engagements since the outbreak of Covid-19. Physical interactions have decreased tremendously. Individuals and organizations are taking solace in reaching out to intersex people online and have also shifted events and programs online. Intersex persons use online mediums to chat with loved ones and make new acquaintances as physical distancing becomes a new normal.

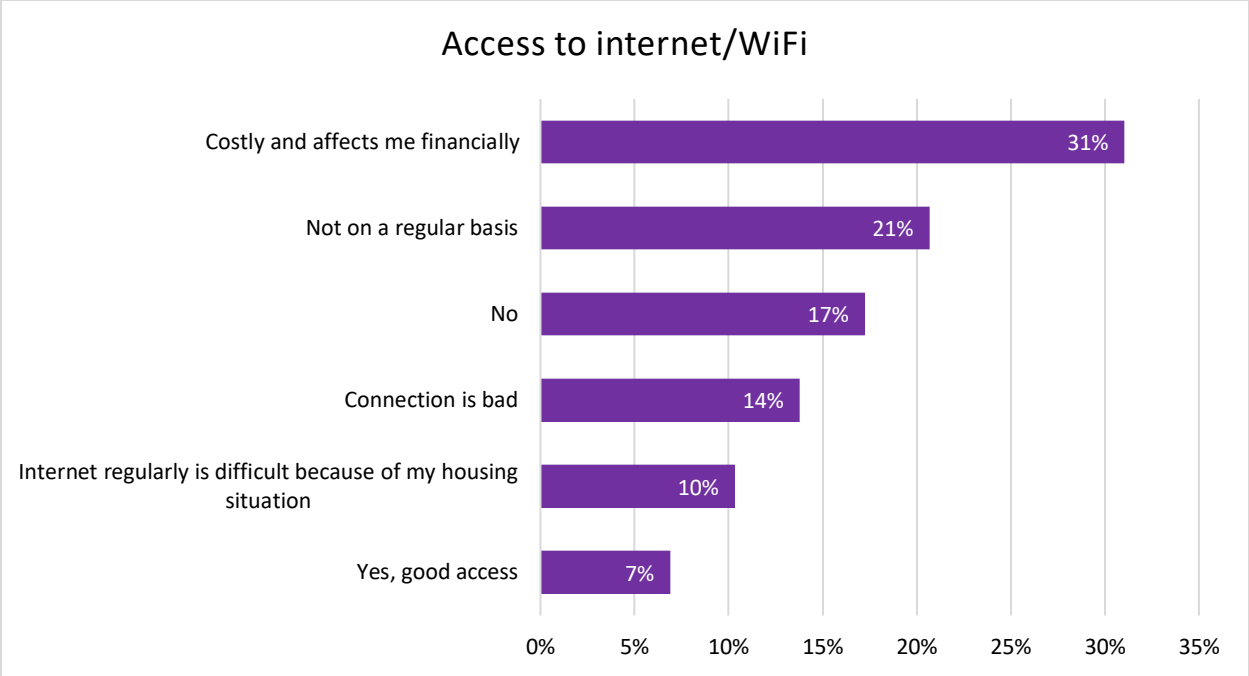
However, this shift to a virtual environment comes at a price and cannot be afforded by all: 31% of the respondents reported that internet access is costly and affects them financially, 21% reported not having internet access regularly. 17% indicated not having internet access, which makes it impossible for them to attend online activities. 14% said that their internet connection is bad and unstable. 10% reported having difficulty accessing an internet connection because of their housing situation. This can include living in areas with internet fluctuations or that their housing situation does not allow for the privacy needed to communicate with intersex peers or engage in intersex activism. Only 7% of the respondents stated that they have good access to constant and good internet access.

One of the respondents note:

*“Internet access is regularly difficult because of my housing situation. The fact that I stay in a shared accommodation, also makes it difficult for me to attain the type of privacy that I would be aiming for since there is a lack of privacy in a shared accommodation setup. And sometimes the different timeframes that we are supposed to be joining some global online meetings makes it very difficult for me to join the meeting since sometimes my housemates will be complaining of my noise making during their sleeping time when I'm attending the meetings.”*  
(Southern Africa)

Another respondent said:

*“Internet is so challenging because I am living in a rural area where network is not always available and also electricity is not available all the times.”* (Southern Africa)



For many, the new reality of constant internet engagement is challenging, as the economic and financial situation of most intersex persons is overly affected by the pandemic.

One of the respondents stated:

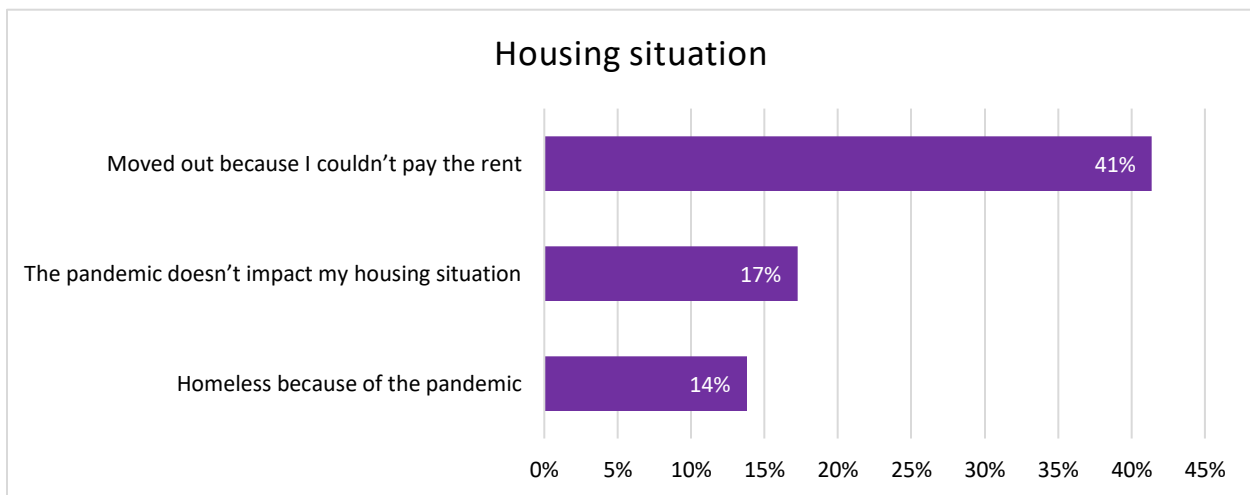
*“I don’t have any access to social media networks, because I can’t afford to pay monthly.” (Southern Africa)*

# Housing

The COVID-19 pandemic has shut people out from many economic activities, creating uncertainty for intersex people. This includes housing issues and the risk of needing to relocate or becoming homeless as a result of the economic crisis that has been provoked or worsened by the pandemic. As an already vulnerable part of the population, intersex people were hit especially hard: 41% of respondents said they had to move out of their accommodation because they could not afford to pay rent. 14% of the respondents noted they became homeless during the pandemic. Only 17% said the pandemic did not impact their housing situation.

The state of homelessness is extremely dangerous to anyone who is already facing other challenges and experiencing high levels of insecurity, as noted by many respondents of this survey. One of the participants selected the "I ended up homeless because of the pandemic" option and said:

*“At some point before I received financial support, I was forced to move back to my family household where I do not feel safe since the same family discriminate against me and at some point, in life, they rejected me. I had to move out of the family home as soon as I received financial support from the Intersex Community of Zimbabwe (ICoZ).” (Southern Africa)*



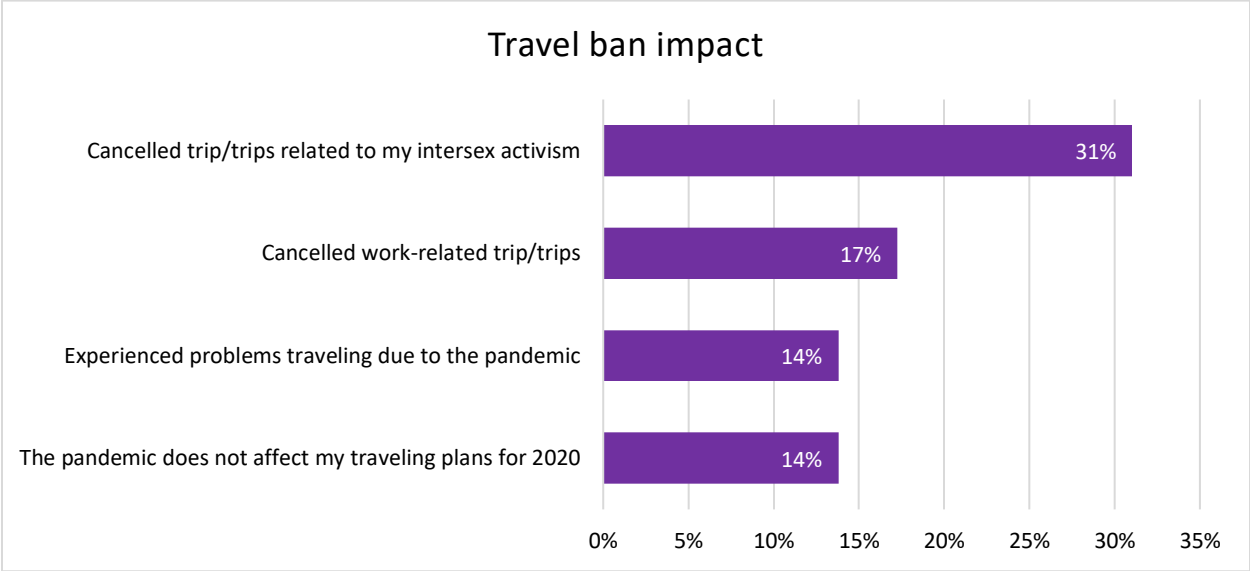
# Traveling

Traveling is essential when it comes to connecting and networking with people. Intersex persons have more sense of belonging when they have an in-person meeting with other intersex persons or groups.

Activism is another aspect where travel for either a conference or an important event can help actualize goals for the cause they fight for. For some, travel is work-related, and not being able to travel impacts their capacity to make ends meet.

Like other parts of the globe, many African countries are locked down because of the pandemic. Some counties introduced travel bans. This impacted many already planned work activities as well as planning of new activities in the future. Many projects could not be completed because of restrictions on inter-state or inter-country traveling. The travel ban also affected many people, preventing them from going to work. Some people got stranded at a particular location.

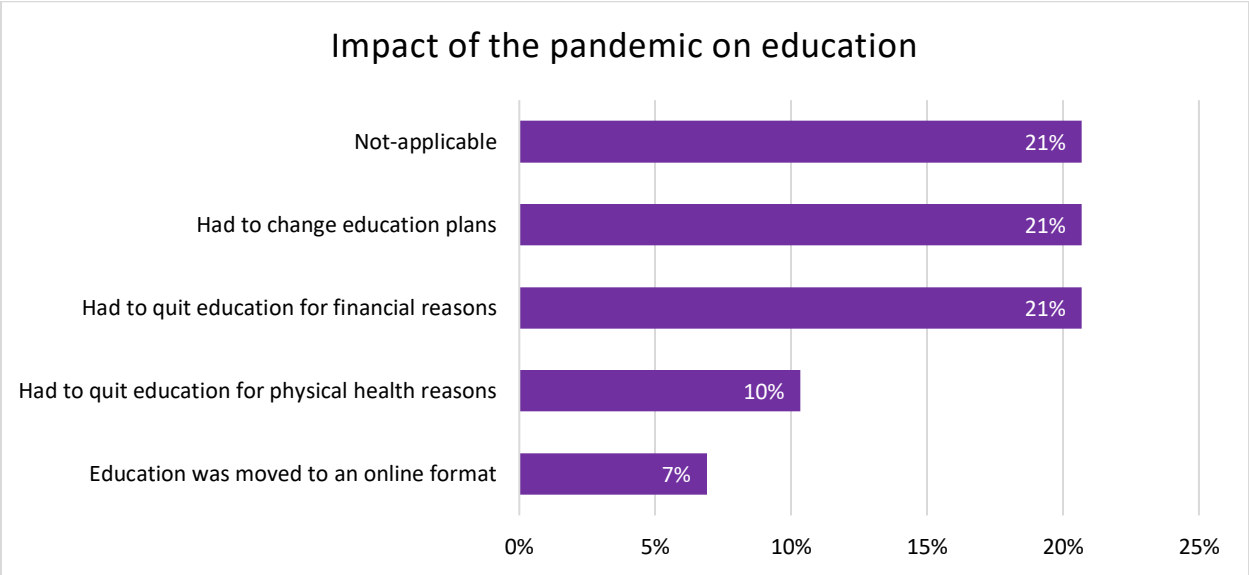
Of the respondents to the questionnaire, 31% indicated that they had to cancel trips related to intersex activism, 17% canceled work-related trips, another 14% of the respondents said they experienced problems with traveling because of the pandemic. Only 14% said the pandemic did not affect their traveling plans for 2020.



# Education

Education also suffered from the impact of the Covid-19 crisis. The pandemic affected schooling schedules; in many African countries' students stayed at home. The use of the internet to continue studies is problematic, as many parents/students cannot afford it. Some schools do not have the facility to conduct these online classes, leaving many students to self-study.

21% of the respondents to the survey said they changed education plans due to Covid-19, 21% had to quit their education because of financial reasons caused by the pandemic, 10% quit education because of their physical health issues associated with the pandemic. Few persons (7%) said their education was moved to an online format. 21% of the respondents said this question did not apply to them; this could mean they are not students of any level.





## Expectations of the Future

Participants were asked how they envision their life one year after the survey and how they thought their situation would look by then. 31% reported that they foresee some restrictions and that protective measures would still be in place in 2021. 21% stated they are optimistic that everything would be back to normal, just like before the pandemic. 17% stated that the pandemic would slow down, but there would still be active lockdowns. 10% shared their concern that the pandemic will get worse compared to the last months of 2020. 7% viewed the Covid-19 crisis to be on the same level as it was in December 2020.

A participant stated:

*“I think one year from now, some things will change, but some things will remain the way they are during this period of the pandemic. I think some people find it working well for them to work remotely as it will take time for them to adjust to the way things used to be. However, for some of us, many things will change because things have slowed down, and it will take time for people to start traveling with our Activism work and getting used to the new normal, therefore making it difficult for things to go back to the way things used to be.” (Southern Africa)*

Another participant explained:

*“I see life to be hard in one year time as COVID-19 has made me jobless and homeless. I don't see things going back to normal in one year.” (Southern Africa)*

For those intersex persons in Africa who had a stable income before the pandemic, stabilizing their livelihood after the pandemic is not guaranteed. Many participants expressed worries about jobs and the economic recovery:

*“If I manage to stabilize my business, my clients will be available and selling my things like before I will be able to pay my rentals, buy my hormones and afford the medication for my mum because money will be circulating in the industry.” (Southern Africa)*

Following the open box to this question, many respondents shared that they feel overly unsafe and uncertain. Some believe that the crisis will change "how people relate with each other" towards the negative. There are fears of extreme hardships and worries about their safety expressed in statements like:

*“I don't think I will be alive.”*

Respondents answered further questions on how they see some aspects of their lives, highlighting specific concerns, mainly regarding their health, safety, and financial

situation. As many intersex people already suffered violations and a high level of discrimination and stigmatization and many cumulative extreme hardships that affect their social status before the crisis, now with additional pressure and stress of pandemic, the risk of those concerns materializing even more has increased significantly. Many participants in the survey are also worried about the lack of inclusion and protection in the vaccination program once it is available.

Participants expressed uncertainty in accessing the vaccine as their government is not supportive of intersex persons existence. One participant said:

*“No, intersex people won't have access to it once it comes out. There will be delays.” (West Africa)*

A participant expressed the view that lack of recognition of intersex people by the health system in their country will jeopardize their chances of receiving the vaccine early. They said:

*“I think as with access to everything, intersex people/people with variations of sex characteristics are always at the bottom of the list to gain access to most things especially access to healthcare due to different their specific needs and what makes it worse is the lack of recognition and understanding of intersex within the healthcare service providing facilities in my country.” (Southern Africa)*

Further questions on the future of intersex activism revealed many fears about the pandemic's impact on intersex-led advocacy progress in African countries. One of the participants mentioned that intersex activism is being affected in a long run by people staying in self isolation. Another participant said:

*“I think the travel restrictions and medical requirements and the lack of understanding of intersex caused by the pandemic will make it more difficult, and it will affect my intersex activism in the long run. But with more persistence and hard work, things will slowly get easier.” (Southern Africa)*

With the health crisis ravaging the world and shaping and creating an uncertain tomorrow, in another open box question, participants were asked on issues affecting African intersex people/people with variations of sex characteristics as a result of the pandemic. A list of concerns and worries were mentioned, including “stigma, shame and isolation.” A participant stated:

*“The stigmatization, ostracization and emotional turmoil has kept so many intersex Nigerians hidden.” (West Africa)*

Another participant said:

*“Stigma and discrimination, violence, loss of safe shelter, and loss of livelihood and income.” (West Africa)*

The frustration and challenges faced by intersex persons before and during the pandemic are overwhelming. One participant said:

*“I think one of the most challenging issues is that of lack of recognition and understanding of intersex issues which then makes it very difficult for most intersex people in my region to access things like education, healthcare, information and other public services therefore depriving of their fundamental basic human rights.” (Southern Africa)*

When asked for feedback or any additional thoughts or comments on the Covid-19 pandemic crisis and its impact on intersex people, the most significant finding was the uncertainty of intersex respondents about the possible fallout of the crisis and the worsening of the situation of intersex people as a result of the crisis. Many skipped the question, while some called for better inclusion and support of intersex persons. Some hoped there would be a light at the end of the tunnel. One respondent noted:

*“Yes, we need our human rights as intersex people, we need to be accepted by the society, we need you to help us have i.ds, passports, clinics and public toilets where an intersex is not questioned, we are facing these challenges to get the documents e.t.c.” (Southern Africa)*

Others lamented the need for legal recognition of intersex persons to enable them choose the gender they feel best with, in the same vein calling for better access to public and health services for intersex people without their rights being violated.

One of the respondents shared their observation about a situation where funds are not reaching intersex-led groups but instead are used to fund other minority groups, saying:

*“I think the Intersex community, being the minority of the minorities in the sexual minority group, tends to get affected more by the effects of the pandemic as we have witnessed a situation whereby other sexual minority groups misrepresenting and taking advantage of under resourced and incapacitated intersex groups by applying for intersex funding and resources which then in actual fact does not end up reaching to the intended beneficiaries, who are intersex people themselves especially those who are in hard to reach areas.*

*Due to this pandemic, intersex stories, realities, narratives and experiences are used by these advantages groups to source funding, but these intersex people never get to benefit from the acquired funds and resources for their upliftment.” (Southern Africa)*

## Conclusion

The survey shows that intersex persons in Africa are experiencing a strong negative impact of the Covid-19 pandemic in regard to their financial situation, employment, access to health care facilities and continuous access to medication as well as their mental health and well-being, and safety seriously undermined.

The worsening of their financial situation caused by the pandemic strongly impacted the livelihoods of intersex persons in Africa. The responses show that most have lost sources of income either by loss of employment or closure of their businesses, leaving them in hand to mouth situations. Lockdowns and physical distancing enforced a drastic meltdown in income generation for intersex persons in Africa, exposing them to more hardship and added vulnerability besides the already existing hardships, the stigma and prejudices they faced before the pandemic. Personal safety is not guaranteed as many intersex people became victims of abuse, discrimination, and violent attacks, staying in hostile places with the person who hosted them during the pandemic or family members who are abusive towards them. Relocation would have been helpful, but it is only possible for those who have the means and resources to do so. In times of crisis, people who are part of a vulnerable minority are more likely to be victims of human rights violations. The response to ill-treatments from security personnel is also a reminder of inadequate security measures for intersex people in Africa. Unfortunately, intersex people cannot rely on protection by law enforcement agents, who also play a role in the victimization of minority populations. Trauma from insecurity and unsafe situations often trigger past negative memories as many intersex people have suffered stigma due to non-consensual treatments that pathologize their body or cultural beliefs that harm their bodies.

Public access to health services is difficult as many cannot access health care facilities. Some do not have the finance to seek good health care practitioners and medications they require to manage their health issues. Many have worsening health conditions that need urgent medical attention. With little or no access to health care facilities, the fate of these intersex persons becomes uncertain. In most hospitals in Africa, intersex persons have always had difficulties with medical practitioners. They are often subjected to medical trials, leaving them confused or traumatized by these experiences.

The pandemic is limiting the in-person interactions of activists and intersex people and the intersex movement. As a result, it has put severe barriers and obstacles to the recent and fast growth of the African intersex movement, platform building, awareness-raising, community building, and advocacy. The Covid-19 pandemic is a significant threat to the efforts of many activists and intersex-led organizations which operate with little human capacity and limited funding. It is highly worrying that efforts made over the past years, which put intersex work in Africa in the limelight, might fade away. Many activists have

moved to the new reality of internet access to connect with stakeholders or intersex people. However, this is also challenging, as many intersex persons have indicated limited internet access or cannot afford it. In-person interactions are more effective in terms of positive engagements in events and creating a sense of belonging.

In all these uncertainties, intersex persons in Africa have shown strength in their hopes for a better tomorrow. Many have not lost hope that the pandemic will slow down and its negative impact would become less severe in the future. However, many stressed their situation would continue to worsen in terms of financial stability, safety, and health access if the society and government do not recognize their existence and rights by ensuring integration of intersex into the strategies and programs that will protect their human rights. They also marked the importance of championing more intersex activists and bringing sustainable advocacy and change in the society to dismantle the stigma, prejudice, and discrimination of intersex persons, while calling for increased funding for the intersex movement in Africa.

