

LGBTQIA RIGHTS

Queer women 'vulnerable in the workplace' in SA

HOPE MAFU

SOUTH Africa might lead in the protection of LGBTQIA+ human rights on the continent, but queer women have become vulnerable to discrimination in the workplace.

While labour laws prohibit discrimination in the work environment, queer women continued to be subject to discrimination based on their gender and sexual orientation.

According to the Kantar Diva 2024 survey, only 63% of queer respondents said their manager supported them being open about their sexual orientation and gender identity. A good 67% agreed that their companies have strict policies against homophobic slurs.

Another 39% of respondents felt comfortable to speak about their gender identity at work.

Despite optimistic responses, transgender women were plagued by high levels of discrimination in the workplace.

The survey reported that 19% of

transgender women experienced inappropriate commentary and conduct at work, while 6% said they were sexually harassed, and faced threats of both physical and sexual violence.

Additionally, an alarming 21% had encountered verbal harassment, including transphobic slurs.

The survey further highlighted that queer women are more prone to verbal harassment and outing their sexual orientation without their consent in South African workplaces, which may commonly be unintentional.

This suggests little progress of queer inclusive workspaces that may not align with heteronormative standards.

Employment law directors at Cliffe Dekker Hofmeyer, Nadeem Mahomed and Asma Cachalia, said queer women of colour bear the brunt of homophobia in workspaces.

"Employment lawyers can be effective by advising employers of their obligations in creating a safe working environment free of discrimination," they said.