

# Examining Intersections of LGBTQ+ and Women's Socio-economic Issues: A Belizean Case Study

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## Abstract

*Working-class single mothers are human rights defenders. They fight for their own rights and manage with limited access and resources to promote the equal treatment of others, including minorities. Currently there is little understanding of how these women navigate social and systemic barriers for justice and gender equality in Belize. Even less is known of what working class mothers experience when they challenge those same systems on behalf of LGBTQ+ people. Traditional gender roles and social norms ensure that women and LGBTQ+ community face similar economic, social, and sexual inequalities. Many of those socio-economic disparities are intersectional when we consider the impact of sexual orientation, gender, class, educational status, and ethnicity within the Belize context. This case study explores one woman's experiences, over six years, as she battled class stereotypes and gendered economic disparities, while fighting for the human rights, safety, and basic needs of her maturing bisexual son. This case documents her advocacy from the time he is eight years old and was assaulted by a teacher to the present as he continues to face bullying. It traces the mother's evolution as a human rights defender while she simultaneously traverses her own difficulties with discrimination, intimate partner violence (IPV), and economic instability. Her advocacy was shaped through various life events, including the sudden death of her husband, navigating social security benefits, her son's medical issues, resolving marital rights to property, and homophobic violence targeting her son. Throughout her engagement with various government institutions, the state appears complicit and indifferent. The case study highlights the lack of adequate investments to address Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ESC) issues impacting working-class single mothers and LGBTQ+ youth.*

**Keywords:** LGBTQ Youth, Belize, United Belize Advocacy Movement, LGBTQ Youth case study

*Note: The pseudonyms "Grace" and "Roy" are adopted to protect the privacy of the mother and son mentioned in this case study*

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## The Scope of the Problem

The case study of Grace presented and discussed in this paper helps to broaden the understanding of gender inequality in Belize. By tracing one mother's experiences with the judicial system, education system, law enforcement, her community and various public offices, the case outlines the intersectionality of gender, ethnicity, working class, and social status as major factors impacting women and sexual minorities. The study invites new questions about the state's preparedness to protect women's equality through law, regulations and policy (de jure) and their equality based on lived experiences based on socially and culturally constructed differences between men and women (de facto). The case study also highlights the state's attention to the rights of children and its constitutional obligations to protect lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender, queer (LGBTQ+) youths against stigma, harassment, and discrimination.

The combination of the mother's testimony and United Belize Advocacy Movement's (UNIBAM) documentation of her lived experiences over six-years, positions this case study as an intimate review of the socio-economic disparities working class mothers face; disparities that force them deeper into poverty. Without financial resources and social status, the study reveals that some working-class mothers are forced to become their own rights defender, leaning on ad hoc support systems and civil society organizations for help. This case demonstrates how human rights are violated at the court and community level, how gender biases and sexual- inequities are perpetuated within state systems, and the devastating impact left on women and children.

At the individual level, the case also reveals coping mechanisms developed by the mother and her son during a sustained period of discrimination and stress. It reveals how sexual orientation amplifies vulnerability to harassment and victimization, even when the victim is a minor child. Finally, it highlights the role of civil society and non-governmental organizations in maintaining human rights principle, underscored by UNIBAM's moral, financial, and logistical support of the mother and her son.

The issues identified in this case study were explored through the following research question and sub-questions. The driving research questions is:

*How does the state's limited investment and resource allocation reveal gaps in Belize's fulfillment of Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ESC) for working-class women and LGBTQ+ youth?*

This question is especially pertinent when we consider women's de jure rights in Belize and the de facto realities Grace experienced within the magistrate court. De jure rights refer to gender equality and non-discrimination through constitutional and other legislative guarantees and De facto rights refer to "Fit for Purpose" mechanisms that help to effectively monitor and implement the laws that safeguard women's equality (ICJ, 2014). As part of its commitment for the implementation of the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Elimination on all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), Belize is legally obligated to ensure that women have substantive and cultural equality. Grace's experiences, as her son's rights defender, highlights an important epistemic gap. This study considers this issue within the following sub-questions:

1. *How do working-class mothers navigate systemic discrimination and operationalize personal agency to defend de jure rights?*

2. *In what ways do government institutions reinforce or fail to address inequalities experienced by working-class mothers and LGBTQ+ youth?*
3. *What reforms are needed to strengthen Belize's compliance with its national and international human rights obligations for achieving gender-equality?*

## **Positionality of the Authors**

### **First Researcher: Caleb**

The spirit of the Garifuna people is that they fought the British Empire for the better part of a century, survived an attempt of genocide, and later arrived in Belize seeking refuge and a better life. As a gay man, who must fight the oppression of homophobia, I share similar values within the context of resistance against covert and overt forms of discrimination and assault. I believe in the principles of human dignity and if I will be discriminated against, then it will be for my beliefs on social justice and equality and not only for my sexual orientation.

This case study, emerging from my reflection on the advocacy provided by UNIBAM, highlights the promise of hope for marginalized populations, even in seemingly unsurmountable difficulties. The tenacity of the mother to improve her quality of life, her perseverance in confronting abuse, and her willingness to keep trying for solutions, embody a spirit of resistance that I share. While the mother's approach is survival, my position is grounded in civic advocacy, human rights, and as a change-maker. This case study is the representation of strength, inspiration, and humanity beyond the limitations of masculinity and femininity-guided by core principles of justice, parity, and equality that are innate to my beliefs. This case study carries forward the strength of mothers and the advocacy of 'bembe' women who helped to propel gender equality in Belize throughout the twentieth century. I write and analyse Grace's story through the power and history of resistance.

### **Second Researcher: Jasmine**

I identify myself as Creole woman, a mother, and a feminist. I hold two post-graduate degrees, I am a former educator, and an entrepreneur. On the surface my background looks very different from that of the mother involved in this case study; however, my positionality is deeply entwined with the subject matter of this case. I was raised by a single mother who experienced extensive intimate partner violence and coercive control by multiple partners. My maternal grandmother's education ended at the secondary level, my mother never returned to a classroom after graduating primary school, and my eldest sister left school to help care for her younger siblings. The generational experiences of women in my family, shaped by their gender, economic status, educational attainment, and social class have impacted how I see and understand myself in the within Belizean society, the regard I have for 'gender' as a factor in everyday life, and how I view socio-economic disparities impacting Belizean women. My feminist views are grounded in academic research, theories, and lived experiences. I view the power relations between women and institutions, women and the law, and women and their intimate partners as being directly related to Belize's patriarchal norms, gender expectations, and the historic psycho-social subordination that women have faced under British rule and post-independence.

Rhode (1990) argued that feminist scholars must challenge the "tokenism" of political movements that solicit a "women's point of view" while maintaining the male perspective as the unstated norm (p. 618). Crucially, Rhode contended that traditional legal approaches often allow mandates of formal equality to

obscure substantive inequality-particularly when legal decision-makers fail to recognize gender bias (Rhode 1990, p. 630). Butler (1990) explored gender as a historical, performative construct, asserting that gender is not simply expressed but enacted through culturally sanctioned behaviours. From through this lens, I analyse the lived experiences of the mother and her son mentioned in this case study. Maintaining confidentiality and ethics for the mother's experiences are tied to my experience as an academic researcher.

## **Literature Review: Centering *De jure* & *de facto* equality**

Belize bears constitutional, regional and international treaty obligations to addressing Economic, Social, and Cultural (ESC) concerns for its citizens. The International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), article I&II, recognize the self-determination of all people to freely pursue economic, social and cultural development and calls on states *not* to discriminate based on characteristics, including sex. The Belize Constitution preamble (e) has its own reference to ESC issues and notes that it will:

require policies of state which... eliminate economic and social privilege and disparity among the citizens...; which ensures gender equality; which protect the rights of the individual to... basic education, basic health (Belize Constitution, 2011, Preamble)

While the Belize Constitution section 6(1) is an equal protection clause, its implementation in statutory legislation remains devoid of the state's commitment to LGBTQ+ Belizeans who exists with multiple, intersectional identities which includes race, sexual orientation and gender identity. The 2012 Youth Policy and the 2020 Education Act complement the state's international and constitutional ESC obligations. The former establishes the need for a non-discriminatory approach to youth development initiatives while section 29(13) of the latter states that it shall

(d) "neither directly nor indirectly, or unfairly discriminate among persons on grounds of gender, disability, race, religion, ethnicity, socio-economic status, political affiliation, or any other forms of discrimination"

Nevertheless, language in The Education Rules (2012), that target non-discrimination, remains vague which helps to enable the institutional circumvention of Belize's non-discriminatory state commitments. Similarly, while The Education Act (2012) commits to non-discrimination, the Education *rules* appear to cultivate language that undermines a child's right to an education if he or she is an LGBTQ+ youth. Under section 3 b(x) of the rules, there is reference to "action directed at subverting the democratic process or interests of the community" (p ) - the community does not appear to include non-binary citizens.

Some of the discriminatory practices in educational institutions go beyond gender and sexuality. Incidences of hair discrimination, often tie to ethnicity, made the news coverage in 2018. Yet, no movement has been taken in Belize for 14 years after the National Youth Policy was endorsed by government in 2012. The High Court Ruling of Case 668 in 2010 (Orozco v The Attorney General of Belize) which decriminalized same sex intimacy, did not move the state in strengthening its ESC responsibilities or add urgency for passage of anti-discrimination bills, such as, the Equal Opportunities Bill (EOB).

The State's inattention to its obligations and its deficient investments for dealing with such complex issues, has had a significant impact on working class, single mothers and their children. These mothers have filled the void that state legislation and policy should protect, by asserting themselves as a rights defender for themselves and their children.

The Needham Point Declaration on criminal justice reform made recommendations that call for implementation of a holistic and inclusive Criminal Justice Reform Strategy as well as a need to have considerations of the impact of intersectional issues like youth, crime, gender, gender identity, economics in addressing stereotypes in the criminal justice system.

With statutory laws devoid of legal services support or strong mechanisms to support redress this case study, help to highlight the challenges to rights enforcement for a mother with limited resources to demand resolution of ESC concerns.

Next, we offer a brief understanding of the multiple identities working class, single women navigate as they experience economic marginalization within their role as rights' defenders.

### ***Advocacy: Human rights & Gender rights***

Advocacy is “the pursuit of influencing outcomes” (Carroll, 2010). For youth, advocacy resists oppression and upholds justice through marches, protests, digital campaigns, and public panels (Poteat & Kiekens, 2025). Those who engage in such ordinary, yet courageous acts are recognized as human rights defenders, holding those in power accountable and often risking their lives, liberty, and reputations in pursuit of equality (Nah, 2020). Nah and Smith (2019) found that the *gender* of rights defenders mattered significantly where women tend to grapple with more misogynistic attacks while lesbians, bi-sexual and trans women faced a particular threat from institutional discrimination. In the context of LGBTQ+ rights, advocacy applies international human rights standards to analysing issues, taking action, and amplifying voices.

Internationally, the need to protect human rights advocates is well established. The United Nations (UN) human rights protection regime offers safeguards at the individual, group, and community levels, yet their legitimacy is often challenged at the state level (Bennet, et al., 2015). In Belize, although gender equality is widely accepted as a priority of the state, there is tension around gender identity, sexual orientation, and the socio-cultural factors that continue to contribute to discrimination against women. This next portion of the literature review looks at some of the factors that outline women's de facto equality in Belize.

### ***Law and Labour: Women's socio-economic status & identities***

The status of Belizean women today as “somewhat paradoxical” (Brunot & Wainright, 2024). Considering the intersection of gender, economic status, motherhood, ethnicity, religion, and geographic location, the status of Belizean women would be better described as a myriad of paradoxes and oxymorons. One paradox is that women have made significant economic and educational advancements while their political and economic status has remained a sort of participation without representation (Lewis, 2012)- women make up only 4% of Cabinet (National Women's Commission, 2023).

The oxymoron is that Belizean women, who demographically have higher educational attainment than their male counterparts, remain one of the most underutilized segments of the labour force (Hadley et al., 2020). Women are the educated-unemployed and the freely entrapped whose economic advancement have not surpassed the over empowering influence of traditional gender norms, rooted in Belize's patriarchal culture (Gordon, 2020).

The statistics paint an even clearer picture. The Belize Census (2022) revealed that 33.5% of females were head of households in Belize. Females make up most secondary school students at (51.2%) as well as at the tertiary level being 62.8% of grandaunts. Nevertheless, more education for women has not translated into a smaller gender wage gap. In 2021 women made 24% less than men. Women make up 50.8% of the total population in Belize; however, even in 2025 the female employment rate was (41.7%) or 16.6% lower than men's which was 58.3% (SIB, 2025). Nearly sixty percent of women say that they have never married and 89.5% of women, not in the labour force, say that personal and family duties prevent them from working.

Women carry the bulk of the responsibility for unpaid domestic work and childcare. Submission to their male partners is expected and domestic violence against them is largely considered "no big deal" (Lewis, 2012, p. 37). Furthermore, domestic violence is endemic within Belizean society (CEDAW, 2024). Between 2009-2023, 185 women have been killed within domestic violence disputes- shooting and strangulation are the leading cause of death (Belize Crime Observatory, 2025). Just in September of 2025, five women were killed in a span of 20 days, placing intimate partner violence (IPV) at the forefront of women's struggle for equality and legal protection.

Despite economic and social pressures for women to contribute to national development, entrenched gender ideologies continue to limit support for women across class, ethnicity, and educational background (CEDAW, 2024, pp. 58–62). This lack of societal support has profound implications for women's collective identity and lived experiences. Arguably, women's vulnerability to gender-based violence, sexual exploitation, poverty, and the double burden of domestic labor is sustained due to this patriarchal norm. Women remained fearful of reporting sexual harassment in the workplace, struggled with low self-esteem when challenging traditional gender roles, and faced discriminatory attitudes within the judicial system. Belize's church-state education system further constrained progress on gender issues, sexuality, and family life education (United Nations, 2005).

The intersection of roles and identities compound their socio-economic issues which are largely misrecognized within the Family Court, the health system, the education system, and other government institutions that are supposed to be impartial and non-discriminatory.

## ***Motherhood: An Identity of Survival and Entrapment***

At the heart of working-class women's socio-economic challenges, gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, socio-economic status and class is intersecting with cultural expectations that complicates motherhood. Gordon (2020) argued that Belizean women are expected to become mothers the moment they enter a cohabiting relationship. She asserts that "motherhood" itself is a central gender identity. According to CEDAW (1999), "Belizean society assigns a strong value to mothering" and that "Gender roles are clearly defined and not questioned within the context of everyday life...children can be beaten for playing with the wrong kind of toy". The implications of having such strict expectations based on traditional gender roles, while there is a prevalence of gender-based violence, is that is that equality for women and LGBTQ+ citizens cannot be addressed without unpacking sexual inequality. This is especially true when women take on the role of rights defenders for other sexual minorities.

At times women are forced to become their own rights defenders due to the cost of legal representation. Access to justice continues to be limited due to the high cost for retaining an attorney (CEDAW, 2024). Arguably, women in Belize enjoy substantive de jure equality where legislation and policy continue to revise as a part of Belize's gender-quality goals. The Spotlight Initiative (2022) praises Belize's legislative and

policy framework for aligning with international human rights standards, noting the existence of training manuals for court officials and programs aimed at shifting inequitable gender norms. However, data from the Belize Crime Observatory (2025) paints a starkly different picture. In May 2025, intimate partner violence accounted for 51.7% of domestic violence reports. Of the 789 reports filed, 697 were made by women. Between January and October 2024, nine out of ten victims of gender-based violence were female, and 67% of perpetrators were identified as current or former intimate partners.

Economic hardship, motherhood, and domestic violence collectively shape the identity and living standard of Belizean women across ethnicities, race, class, socio-economic status, educational background, and geographic location. These intersecting and conflicting identities strain women emotionally and economically. Under these circumstances, how is it possible for the average woman and working-class mother to operationalize her personal agency for upward social mobility or to protect the rights of her children, and other marginalized groups?

To explore this question, this review now turns to the status of LGBTQ+ community in Belize and Belize's existing national, regional, and international obligations to safeguard all its citizens and vulnerable communities.

## **The Belizean LGBTQ+ Community: Beyond gender marginalization**

The *Belize Legal and Empirical LGBTQ+: Case Study* (Crehan, et al., 2024) reveals that vulnerability to violence and discrimination increases with low-economic status, but more resources equal a buffer to homophobia (p. 51). The Anti Sexual Harassment Act, the Inter-American Convention on Protecting the Human Rights for Older persons offer support to LGBTQ+ populations along with section 53 ruling of 2016. Section 53 judgement of 2016 referenced the United Nations Human Rights Council decision in 1992 in (Orozco v The Attorney General of Belize, 2016, pp. 35- 36) and spoke of sex in article 2 and 26 for the International Covenant for Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) was interpreted as including sexual orientation when Belize acceded to the ICCPR, as a result, it tacitly embraced the interpretation.

Yet, while the ruling was given on August 10<sup>th</sup>, 2016, advancement in new legislation remains limited to the Anti Sexual Harassment Act and the Inter-American Convention on Protecting Older Persons that acknowledge sexual orientation and gender identity in some form. The police policy for the treatment and detention of LGBTQ+ Belizeans was endorsed in 2024, a first, in the Police Department history. While the Ombudsman office is available for human rights reports by LGBTQ+ population, its authority is limited to public authority, not private authority and its ability to support constitutional concerns are limited to documentation and inquiry. While the High Court is accessible on paper, the reality for a working-class, single mother with limited resources to defend her son from homophobia or violence is affected by prohibited cost; she would have to go into debt to access justice for her son.

In Belize, the law does not define what is considered a family. Examining existing data about the value of family support to an LGBTQ+ person, establishes the buffering they received in the enjoyment of their ESC rights as citizens. In reference to dependency on family for support, the 2018 Belize summary report, *Estimate of Key Population Size of Men who Have Sex with Men and Transgender Women*, reveals that 38% of men who have sex with men stay with family/parent (Budhwani, Waters, & Hasbun, 2018, p. 23). Those who rent, stay with friends, or are homeless make up a combined 42%. establishing the importance of parents subsidizing housing access for LGBTQ+ populations at large. The report found that when support exists, there is a 69% achievement rate for acquiring primary and secondary education (p.19) regardless of

homophobic violence within the community. When family support deteriorates, the study found that 46.1% of young men who have sex with men (MSM) reported that their own families made discriminatory remarks reinforcing psychological violence. The Legal and Empirical Analysis of LGBTQ+ Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: Case Study (2024), offers two tables that highlights the relationship LGBTQ+ Belizeans have within families. The first speaks to discrimination and exclusion.

**Table 1: Experience with Discrimination (Crehan, et al., 2024, p. 33)**

ITEM AGREEMENT (%)	LGBQ	Trans	Hetero-Cis
I have experienced discrimination or exclusion from my family	34.7	41.4	16.3
This discrimination or exclusion was a result of my gender or sexual identity†	79.0	83.3	—
As a result of this discrimination or exclusion:†			
<i>I experienced shame as a result of interacting with family members</i>	63.9	83.3	26.7
<i>I was forced into a heterosexual relationship</i>	12.6	29.2	6.7
<i>I was denied the ability to live openly</i>	45.4	62.5	6.7
<i>I was deprived of financial resources</i>	14.3	25.0	6.7
<i>My family cut me off from generational wealth</i>	13.4	8.3	0.0
<i>I was kicked out of the house</i>	16.0	20.8	6.7
<i>I was forced into conversion therapy</i>	10.1	4.2	0.0

Table 1 shows that 63.9% of the sample size experience shame because of interacting with family and 45.4% who answered this question reported being denied living openly. Reliance on family comes with a double-edged sword. The table below speaks to reliance of family and the family reliance on them. It shows a pattern of dependency in housing, food, financial resources and other basic needs, but over time a co-dependency relation develops when the family relying on an LGBTQ+ person for food and financial resources.

**Table 2.: Reliance on Family for Support**

Item Agreement (%)	LGBQ	Trans	Hetero-Cis
I rely on my family for:			
<i>Housing</i>	33.5	42.0	42.0
<i>Food</i>	37.1	42.0	40.0
<i>Financial resources</i>	33.8	31.9	39.0
<i>Other basic needs (clothes, etc.)</i>	22.8	31.9	27.0
<i>I don't rely on my family for finances or resources</i>	27.1	33.3	27.0
My family relies on me for:			
<i>Housing</i>	6.9	4.3	18.0
<i>Food</i>	20.5	23.2	24.0
<i>Financial resources</i>	35.3	33.3	36.0
<i>Other basic needs (clothes, etc.)</i>	12.8	11.6	21.0
<i>My family doesn't rely on me for finances or resources</i>	30.7	31.9	36.0

Table 2 highlights the cyclical reality of meeting basic needs. It shows a time when a LGBTQ+ person is dependent on family and graduates to a time when they are self-sufficient and contributing to family.

Sociological theories offer insights into this case study. It can be noted that Structural Functionalism, according to American sociologist Talcott Parsons, requires that each gender fulfils distinct functions to satisfy societal cohesion (Parsons & Bales, 1955). The theory has been criticized for reinforcing stereotypical roles that limit personal freedoms (Bernard, 1964; Chafetz, 1997; Merton, 1968). Parson's view of the need for structural functionalism is right, but it is only part of the analysis in family investment. Conflict theory, on the other hand, argues that gender is a tool used to maintain dominance (Collins, 1975). In table 1, that dominance is reflected in forms of economic and psychological violence rooted in homophobia-often enacted to correct any perceived wrong to the traditional family structure.

While both tables do not speak directly to gender and social identity, the mother and son in this case study does. Symbolic Interactionism acknowledges that 'gender' is not fixed but instead is a social identity that is learnt and reinforced through socialization. This theory builds on Conflict Theory and Parsons Structural Functionalism as a pathway to better understand how heterogeneity affects the mother and son lived experiences.

In closing this section, we draw upon the work of Butler (1990) who critiqued judicial systems for producing subjects within imbalanced power structures. She warns that unless categories like "man" and "woman" are unpacked for their social and historical dimensions, legal systems will continue to constrain women's emancipation. Belize defines gender as "the socially constructed roles allocated respectively to men and women," acknowledging their historical and cultural context and the unequal power relations they often entail (National Women's Commission, 2024). However, gender is still interpreted within a strict binary. This binary framing means that the legal mechanism that exist as women's *de jure* equality, only protect their rights to the extent that the judiciary sees them as fixed gendered subjects.

Culturally, women are expected to provide for their children while surviving or escaping domestic abuse-a burden shaped by social norms around motherhood. Gordon (2020) found that rural women were oppressed by traditional gender roles, lacked support from family and authorities, and felt pressured to conceal their abuse. Gordon explains that for many women, motherhood and the safety of their children is the decisive factor when leaving an abusive relationship. Societal expectations in Belize place the full weight of child welfare and unpaid domestic labor on women which may explain why many women identify more strongly as mothers than as wives (United Nations, 1996, pp. 59–60). How are women equal in Belize when there is such a gap between their *de jure* rights and their *de facto* realities?

This next section explains the methodological design used in this case study to capture and analyse the lived experiences of Grace.

## **Methodology**

This case study employed a qualitative, interpretive, and feminist research methodology. Qualitative approaches prioritize open-ended inquiry and interpretive meaning-making (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Case study research involves the investigation of one or more cases within a particular setting or context, better referred to as a bounded system (Creswell, 2007). Its qualitative elements ensure a holistic approach

to the issue that is being studied (Chowdhury & Shil, 2021). Bounded parameters may include a specific location, timeframe, and the individuals involved while the type of case study will depend on what the researcher focuses the analysis on (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Using the mother's lived experiences as its focus of analysis, this investigation is a single instrumental case study (Creswell, 2007; Creswell & Poth, 2018) that presents an in-depth understanding of the intersectionality of class, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation. It employs observation, documents, legal analysis, and direct correspondence as forms of data collection. The triangulation of the data, through these different forms of collection mechanisms, improves the confidence in the findings (Chowdhury & Shil, 2021). Qualitative sampling, such as those collected in this case, is not intended to be "representative" (Abrams, 2010); however, case study data can be theoretically generalizable (Chowdhury & Shil, 2021).

While the mother is the main unit studied in this case, the experiences of her young son are considered as an important component within the data analysis. The events highlighted in the study developed organically through the mother's interactions and advocacy. Using an iterative analytical process, themes emerged through close engagement with the mother and her son and through a review of the data. The case study research methodology allowed for an intimate understanding of the circumstances, experiences, and perspective of the mother and her son, explored through a feminist-legal perspective.

## **Consent & Confidentiality:**

The use of the case documents and lived experiences of the mother involved in this study was secured through a signed consent form. The mother was informed of the purpose and aim of the study, she was notified of the subject areas that it would discuss, along with possible risks it could cause to her and her son. She was notified that she could withdraw her consent at any point while the research; however, Grace opted for more and direct involvement in the case study. Her interviews, feedback, and opinions on the issues discussed in this research positions her as a co-creator of the investigation.

## **Data Collection**

The primary data used in this study is the accumulation of documents gathered over six years, interview recordings, and personal notes taken made by the director of UNIBAM. UNIBAM is an L.G.B.T.Q+ organization with a prolific reputation for operating on human rights advocacy principles. Grace first contacted UNIBAM in 2021 after feeling turned away by the magistrate court. UNIBAM's rights advocacy was paramount to her concerns for achieving justice for her son.

Over the last six years, UNIBAM has provided financial and moral support to the mother. The organization has also supplemented payments for food, bills, medical consultations, the son's prescription glasses, legal representation, and the cost for the son's counselling. The director of UNIBAM has also attended the son's school to speak with administrators over bullying targeting the boy. He has also been directly involved in communication with various individuals and parties involved in the mother's engagement with public institutions, helping her to maintain marital assets and social-security benefits after her husband had passed away. UNIBAM continues to be involved in matters relating to the son.

The documents were filed into five major categories and safely stored at UNIBAM's office. Only the main researcher in this case study has had and maintains access to the data to maintain confidentiality and anonymity. Consent to use the data and to conduct the study was given through a signed consent form. The

mother was informed of the purpose of the research, its aim, and the subject areas that it would discuss may include the personal information and events mentioned in the documents. The documents include:

1. *Media Reports*: primarily on the son's injury in 2018
2. *Land papers*: These are inclusive of the mother's registration for matrimonial land, notes on the barriers for processing her land title, copy of her application to get land title, lawyers letter to Lands Commissioner to investigate her claim, marriage certificate, receipts that showed we paid for the land, copy of land title.
3. *Social Security files*: Include medical papers, death certificate of husband, social security application for funeral grant, copy of marriage certificate,
4. *Son's Medical Files*- letters from Belize Council of the Visually Impaired (BCVI), Karl Huesner Memorial Hospital (KHMH) and Belize Health Care Partners- including prescription for migraine, glasses, and cost for medical assistance
5. *Notes on son problems at school*: inclusive of voice recording from interviews

Each file chronologically traces major issues encountered by the mother, Grace, within her identity as a Garifuna, single, working-class mother and sole rights-defender of her self-identified bi-sexual son. Bhattacherjee (2012) emphasized the researcher's role as a data collection instrument through observation, relational engagement, and sensitivity to context. The observations and correspondences shared between the director of UNIBAM and various individual and institutions involved are also considered within the data collection and analysis.

## **Data Analysis**

The data analysis procedure used in this investigation was Braun and Clarke's (2006) reflexive thematic analysis method, chosen for its flexibility and alignment with feminist epistemologies. The objective of the research was to understand how a mother's access to justice, for her son, is impacted by her gender, ethnic, and socio- economic status.

The analysis was inductive, relying on the documents compiled over six-years and the researcher's observations to form themes and generate possible theories. As Reichertz (2014) explains, induction is a form of logical reasoning, not a tool or concept but a way of generating and connecting ideas. The analysis procedures were grounded in feminist principles, with a deliberate focus on amplifying the attitudes, beliefs, and lived realities of Grace as a working-class, Garifuna mother with a self-identified LGBTQ+ son.

The process involved direct engagement with the mother and son and document analysis. The coding process included analysing the information for semantic content and symbolic and affective undertones. Themes were developed iteratively, guided by the research question and sub-questions.

## **Limitations, Reliability, and Validity**

As a single instrumental case study, broad assumptions about discrimination and gender inequality cannot be made; however, as a case study methodology, this investigation can still represent a significant

contribution to knowledge, capturing the complexity of one individual over a period (Chowdhury & Shil, 2021).

Flick (2009) emphasize that reliability in qualitative inquiry depends on detailed documentation of the research process and data collection procedures. Validity, meanwhile, asks whether researchers “see what they think they see,” and can be judged through both the mechanisms of data production and the interpretive presentation of findings. The methodological and accurate documentation of Grace’s experiences inform the reliability and validity of this investigation. While qualitative research may resist the statistical measurements of validity and reliability found in positivist paradigms, clearly established standards must still be upheld (Richards, 2005).

## **Grace: A mother and an advocate**

Grace, who is Garifuna, was born in Punta Gorda Town in 1980. At the age of four, she moved to Belize City with her grandmother and attended a local primary school. Seeing her grandmother struggle to provide, Grace decided to quit school at the age of 13 to ease the family’s financial burdens. She was in standard five at the time. At the age of 16, Grace met a 19-year-old young man who would go on to become her common-law husband and then her marital husband until the day he passed away in 2021. Grace had two sons, but the relationship was an unhappy from the start. Her husband was physically and emotionally abusive; however, Grace found it difficult to leave the home because her husband was the sole bread winner. Her husband struggled with alcoholism and was also known to her to be bi-sexual. Eventually, the physical abuse and danger to her children forced Grace to leave the relationship. She reflects in her decision that:

*“Ah try kip dis tuggedah but sumbadi mi wah end up dead” (Grace)*

### ***The Assault on her son***

At the time Grace first came to UNIBAM’s offices her youngest son Roy was eight years old, and she had been living with a new partner. In 2019, Grace received a call from her son’s school telling her only to “come” to the school immediately without sharing any other details. A teacher met her at the gate and directed her towards a building. Once she was inside, Grace observed that her son’s face was swollen to the extent that he could not open one of his eyes. The principal informed her that a teacher had struck him and that the teacher was still on the compound. Her son was struck in the face by a female teacher who used a wooden ruler to assault him.-Grace immediately asked why her son was not taken to the hospital as he was in obvious physical pain because he vomited from the discomfort. According to Grace, the assault was deliberate and personal.

Grace decided to take her son to a clinic where she was immediately accused of being the perpetrator of his assault. The doctor assumed that she had beaten him and refused to provide any medical assistance until the police were called to the clinic. Once the police arrived, they similarly assumed that Grace had beaten her son. The child told the police that it was his teacher who had hit him. The following day the police went to the school to speak with the teacher. The series of events that took place once Grace filed legal charges against the teacher, set in motion the start of her advocacy and fight for justice.

According to Grace, the magistrate overseeing the case, threatened to jail her and suggested that she take a monetary settlement instead of pursuing the case. During the trial, the case was adjourned nine times. The

conduct of the magistrate and police officers involved in the case resulted in Grace and her sons feeling isolated and “branded” within her community.

*“I mi feel like di perpetratah. We dah mi like di problem.” (Grace)*

The isolation and bias continue to impact Grace and her son. The teacher involved was eventually found not guilty of harm. Grace’s son is now 15 years old and attends high school. He continues to suffer from intense migraine, for which he takes medication, and is impacted by astigmatism in his left eye. He also experiences depression and passive suicidal ideation. Reflecting on the changes in her son’s behaviour, Grace shares that he told her:

*“Mami, I feel empty” (Roy).*

Feeling that the magistrate court was not taking the matter seriously, Grace confided in a friend who advised her to speak with United Belize Advocacy Movement (UNIBAM). Grace approached the organization and met with the founder to tell her story. Since that time, UNIBAM has continued to provide multiple forms of support for her and her son. Grace explained

*“Knowing Caleb has helped- Caleb educate yo in how to deal wit situashans- he listen” (Grace)*

## **UNIBAM: Advocating for rights defenders**

United Belize Advocacy Movement (UNIBAM) is a Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Trans, and Queer (LGBTQ+) organization with a prolific reputation for operating on human rights advocacy principles. Grace first contacted UNIBAM in 2021 after feeling turned away by the magistrate court. UNIBAM’s rights advocacy was paramount to her concerns for achieving justice for her son. Over the last six years, UNIBAM has provided financial and moral support to Grace. The organization has also supplemented payments for food, bills, medical consultations, the son’s prescription glasses, legal representation, and the cost for the son’s counselling. The director of UNIBAM, who is also the main researcher in this study, has also attended the son’s school to speak with administrators over bullying targeting the boy. He has also been directly involved in communication with various individuals and parties involved in the mother’s engagement with public institutions, helping her to maintain marital assets and social-security benefits after her husband had passed away. UNIBAM continues to be involved in matters relating to the son.

UNIBAM not only acted as a support system for logistical needs, but it also acted source for information that enabled Grace to operationalize her self-agency. main researcher in this case study is also the Director of UNIBAM who worked to empower Grace in her role as her son’s rights advocate. It was important that Grace understood that she had to right for and direct the justice she sought. This next section briefly outlines the themes that emerged from Grace’s fight for justice.

## **Findings: A series of discriminatory and biased events**

The primary data collected and used in this case study was extensive, deeply personal, and varied. It includes Grace’s recollection of events involving herself and Roy, documents collected from her engagement with various institutions, legal notes from her case before the magistrate court and the family court, engagements with school administrators, and her son’s experiences with bullying. Many of the events mentioned are told by Grace and observed by the main researcher.

The events in the case highlights four major themes: 1) Navigating Intimate partner violence and Inequality Before the Law; 2) Marital rights & Institutional; 3) Bias and bullying within the education system; and 4) Sexual Inequalities & compounded discrimination against mother and son. These themes demonstrate how, and to what extent, gender, sexual orientation, class, ethnicity, and economic status intersect within the Belize context, contributing to existing studies on gender -relations, gender- identity and gender -equality in Belize.

### **1. Navigating IPV & Silenced before the Law**

According to Stark (2007), domestic abuse persists because efforts to end it have focused too narrowly on physical violence. This has led to laws, education campaigns, and institutional frameworks that fail to recognize non-physical forms of violence rooted in patriarchal ideology. Stark argued that most legal approaches create gaps where intervention depends on the severity of physical injury, leaving psychological, emotional, and financial abuse largely unaddressed. He also emphasizes that there is no gender symmetry in intimate partner violence (IPV): women are overwhelmingly the victims of coercive control.

Belize's legal and public framing of GBV and IPV acknowledges that women and girls are disproportionately affected by gender-based violence; yet, there is a reluctance to centre the issue more directly on male socialization and behaviour. The 2007 revision of Belize's Domestic Violence Act (DVA) aimed to provide "prompt and equitable legal services for survivors of domestic violence" (United Nations, 2024); however, the disconnect between cultural norms, discriminatory laws, and the uneven application of legal protections persists. A major challenge to achieving women's substantive equality, in the context of IPV cases, is the narrow paradigm of wife battering from which domestic violence is understood. Women experience emotional, economic, psychological, and post-separation abuse without any legal redress for those forms of violence.

In Grace's case, she experienced sustained intimate partner violence and coercive control within her marriage and with her other partner. As stated before, she met her husband at the age of 16 but was not legally married to him until 2013. By 2015, she decided to go to the Family Court to get an Occupation and Protection order. Her complaint was dismissed for non-appearance.

In 2016 she managed to get an Occupation Order which was approved for six months- her application for a renewal was rejected in 2017. During this time, her husband accumulated a legal record for petty charges for incidents such as not wearing a mask during the COVID-19 pandemic. This led to his imprisonment on 16th August 2021. He died barely three months later 18<sup>th</sup> November 2021 from complications related to AIDS.

When her son was assaulted, Grace filed charges against the teacher and secured legal representation with UNIBAM's help. She recalls that the magistrate initially threatened to lock her up and that she would jail Grace's brother for speaking to the media about what had happened to his nephew. This case was adjourned nine times and Grace's attorney was not allowed into the court room at one point. Reflecting on all that had transpired Grace believes that:

*"The biggest fault is bias in the judicial system"* (Grace)

Her biggest worry about her son is that...

*“He gud just go ahn nuh com bak- maybe subadi wud just beat him”.* (Grace)

When she was in the Family Court, Grace felt that she was not being listened to or believed and so decided to deal with the post-separation abuse issues herself. In the Magistrate court, she felt that she was being coerced into signing a document without her attorney present and ultimately “branded” and a troublemaker by the magistrate and other court workers.

## **2. Marital Rights & Institutional Discrimination**

Once Grace’s husband had passed away in 2021, she filed an application at the Ministry of Lands to secure legal rights to the marital property. At the time the department was in the process of enacting new policies and procedures so there was some processing delay. Grace’s National Estate Section (NES) lease was already in the system having been filed 13 years prior. When the COVID-19 pandemic had hit in 2020, she was told that her application for the title had been lost in the system. There were processing delays before her husband’s death.

On 18<sup>th</sup> February 2020, Grace received a letter from a District Land and Survey officer at the Ministry of Natural Resources, that confirmed that she had been residing on the land for 20 years. Through the same channels of communication, with the Lands office in Belize City, Grace was made aware that the department did not have her file despite her routine visits to the Land’s Department in Belmopan City and Belize City since 2005.

Unfortunately, Grace discovered that some of her husband’s family members were seeking to remove her name from the marital property. During this time, she was able to confirm for an appointment for inspection of Property, scheduled for 13<sup>th</sup> December 2022. The inspection was never carried out.

To address the situation, an attorney was retained by UNIBAM. The attorney sent a letter, dated 6<sup>th</sup> January 2023, to the Commissioner of Lands and Surveys Department in Belmopan as well as the Land’s office in Belize City to advise that Grace’s “in- laws... have no interest vested in the property” and called for “urgent intervention in the matter.” In addition to the letter, the attorney requested a meeting with the Supervisor of Lands in Belize City. Following the intervention by the attorney, the supervisor notified the attorney that he had in fact recovered the land papers which, according to him, had been stacked at the bottom of a large pile of papers. The document was immediately scanned by phone for filing. The problem was not entirely resolved there.

Following notification about a Lands Clinic being conducted at the YMCA in Belize City, UNIBAM advised Grace to attend the event to speak with the minister about getting title for the property. Once at the clinic, Grace presented her marriage certificate and the NES lease. After the clinic, Grace discovered that her former in-laws had already succeeded in removing her name from the land title-this was never mentioned by the supervisor at the Land’s Department. The Minister ordered that the in-law’s name be removed and that Grace’s name be placed to the Ministry’s record.

At this point, Grace had been managing court visits, land disputes, taking care of her boys and the responsibilities of a full-time job. UNIBAM’s records show that she was earning \$9,739.92 in 2022 as an employee at a government institution. Grace needed money to apply for the land title. She did not have the \$250.00 instalment payment. On May 24<sup>th</sup>, 2023, UNIBAM secured the full \$1500 to ensure direct purchase of the property, securing it on 20<sup>th</sup> March 2023.

Following the matters around the marital property and land title, Grace became worried about housing. At the time, she and her boys lived in a house made of plywood that was damaged by a hurricane. UNIBAM worked with Grace to apply for a house. The name of the organization that provided the housing remains confidential: however, on 14<sup>th</sup> July 2023 a letter was received from this organization that read...

“After assessing your application, our selection committee have determined that you meet the qualification of a person in need and have therefore entered you into the courtship period. During that period, you are required to take initiative to actively participate in our building programs...and to attend the monthly education sessions” (Organization A)

On 16<sup>th</sup> November, Grace received another letter to say that she was a “successful applicant and would be receiving a house.” Grace learned that information about her family issues had been leaked and was being used to undermine her access to securing the house. A call had to be made to the director of the organization involved to explore how the agreement could be honoured. Grace was told that construction on her house was scheduled to start on Friday, 6<sup>th</sup> December 2023.

### **3. Bias & Bullying within the education system**

In 2021 Grace filed a report against her son’s primary school for medical neglect. A female teacher, at the school had assaulted her eight-year-old son with a ruler leaving his face bruised and one of his eyes visibly injured. Medical reports from the 16<sup>th</sup>, January 2019, noted”

“superficial abrasions to the right orbit. Hyperaemia of conjunctiva right eye, nil corneal lesions, PERRLA, EOML, visual acuity 20/25.”

At the time of the incident, the school neglected to immediately take the child to a hospital for care. Grace believed that this delay might have contributed to her son’s sustained ailments following the assault. He now suffers with periodic migraine.

Two medical examinations were conducted on her son in 2021 and 2022 respectively. It was later discovered that the child had astigmatism and needed specially prescribed glasses to support his vision. With UNIBAM’s help, the child was taken to Orange Walk to see a neurologist where he had a CT scan and another evaluation. It was confirmed on this visit that the child suffers from migraines. The doctor prescribed prednisone and flundrizine. He had not had these issues prior to being assaulted by his teacher.

Grace decided to file charges against the teacher for harm as is her right under section 79 of the Criminal code, Chapter 101 of the substantive Laws of Belize. Revised edition 2003. On 13<sup>th</sup> May 2021, the teacher met bail of \$500 and one surety of the same amount- she pleaded not guilty. Grace made several appearances at the magistrate: first in October and November of 2020, then on March 15<sup>th</sup>, April 13<sup>th</sup> and December of 2021, and in January of 2022. Ultimately, the Magistrate Court ruled that the teacher was not guilty of harm. The teacher also refused to apologize for her conduct, even after she was told to do so by Ministry of Education. The injury to her son’s eye and the painful migraines he developed exacerbated Grace’s emotional and financial burdens.

### **4. Sexual Inequalities: Compounded Bias against Mother and Son**

Roy is fifteen years old now and continues to experience violence and bullying tactics from his peers and persons within his school system. At the time that UNIBAM started to work with Grace, Roy was nearly

nine years old. During those years, there have been numerous incidents at his schools where UNIBAM representatives had to attend as a means to support Grace's advocacy and protection of her son.

In one of the major incidents, Grace reported to UNIBAM that one of her son's classmates broke his glasses—the pair that was made especially for his eye and migraines. There was no compensation for the glasses. In a separate incident at his high school, Roy reported to his mother that he was called a "battyman" by a classmate. He admitted that he replied to the classmate by saying "you dah battyman!"

According to Roy, the classmate then walked up to him and he (Roy) decided to push the classmate out of the way. Roy received a suspension for pushing his classmate while the classmate was not held to account for his homophobic remarks.

Roy has also been targeted by teachers at his high school. In one meeting that was called by the vice-principal, two teachers made remarks about the Roy's competence and referred to him as being "disruptive". These two teachers admitted they did not have classroom management training or the pedagogical background to recognize Roy's learning style, which was tactile, according to the counsellor at the school.

In a separate school meeting, one of Roy's teachers had decided to lodge a complaint about him stating that he (Roy) was "disrespectful during class." The meeting included the principal, the school's Chief Disciplinarian, Roy, and a UNIBAM representative. Grace was unable to get time off to attend the meeting. During the meeting, Roy explained that the classmate, who sat behind him, would often disturb him during class. Instead of informing the teacher, he decided to throw a book at the classmate. Unfortunately, the teacher did not hear or notice the problem prior and Roy was immediately penalized for his actions.

Following several of these meetings and incidents, UNIBAM was made aware that Roy's former stepfather had posed questions to the school about UNIBAM's involvement and interest in Roy's care. The concerns were grounded in covert homophobia and micro-aggressions. The stepfather's comments were repeated at the meeting with the teacher who felt that Roy was "disrespectful".

Roy was warned, by this same teacher, that he should be "careful" of UNIBAM and that it was a "REDFLAG" to have the organization represent his interest at the school. At the time Grace had already ended her relationship with the stepfather, but the gentleman had continued to harass her at her house. The principal reprimanded the teacher for his comments and agreed on a plan on how to move forward.

In 2024, Roy also reported to his mother that he was assaulted in his face while walking to a store near his home and had to run into a primary school yard to get away from individuals who were trying to attack him.

Roy has experienced multiple forms of attacks and assault while he was in the charge of other adults. The attacks were always charged with homophobic remarks. In mid-2025, Grace reported that her son was assaulted at a camp for youths by nine of his peers who were around age 15. The attackers proceeded to beat him due to his perceived "gayness". One of his roommates saw the commotion and tried to intervene but he was also hit. Eventually, the organizer of the summer camp was informed and she called the police.

While the camp coordinator did ensure that Roy was given diagnostic care, she fell short of recognizing that she shared legal liability for the injuries that he had sustained. Furthermore, the coordinator of the camp facilitated the transport of the nine attackers allowing them to leave the camp before the police arrived. Her decision undermined the police investigation, and the assault remains stalled within the police department.

All of these incidents go directly to the heart of this study. They highlight how traditional gender expectations and ideologies surrounding ‘femininity’ and ‘masculinity’ increases bias and vulnerability- even when the victim is a child.

## **Discussion:**

The mother is a Garifuna woman, who left formal education at the primary level, but is also the main breadwinner and the head of her household. The son is male, of afro-descendant, bisexual and youth. While there is a historical context to mother and son to struggle to thrive and enjoy their ESC concerns, it is her access to limited resources, working-class status, deficient systems of justice support, community homophobia, the lack of institutional protection in law that impacts her quality of life issues to sufficiently deconstruct traditional ideas about gender and sexuality.

An interplay of identity and issues can be seen in the form of pay differential in SIB data collection processes for equal pay, employment rates, and reasons for not working that is grounded in taking care of the family along with data on violence. This working-class single mother overcame intersecting issues of intimate partner violence, family economic in the removal of title to her land, advocating for justice for her son at primary and secondary levels for the first fifteen years of The Youth life. While navigating the identity concerns of sexual orientation, socio-economic status, ethnicity and gender. She has sought to advocate for her child’s access to school, health care and justice with limited knowledge of the justice system and have leveraged social networks and institutional support, despite having limited resources to provide for her son.

While the constitution and international obligations call for the state to invest in ESC concerns of its citizens, the state has been slow to extend resources to operationalize rights mechanisms that promote equity among its citizens. While the constitution has an equal protection clause working class single mothers and their children continue to navigate and demand enforcement of that equal protection clause.

What is clear the Education ACT and Rules are inconsistent with the equal protection clause of the constitution and need to be revised, change is not forthcoming. While the Anti- Sexual Harassment Act and the Inter-American Convention on Protecting Older Person are signs of progress by the state, its investment in comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation remains an aspiration for marginalized and vulnerable groups in this country.

The mother is part of a larger history of women health champions that can be acknowledged in HIV and recognized as contributors to the health response. Add union champions and justice advocates, all are born out of a need to solve ESC Rights violations with limited resources. This mother with limited resources navigated the barriers of structural functionalism, Conflict theory issues and unlearn symbolic interactionism. The mother specifically challenges the historical and societal inequality in protecting her son from harm and violence (a primary struggle) out of necessity leveraging all social or institution support that could be provided, even an L.G.B.T organization. Her emotional labour continues to be misrecognized within Belize’s court system.

**Emotional labour** is the sustained, embodied, and often invisible work performed primarily by mothers to safeguard the psychological, physical, and developmental wellbeing of their children. It includes affective presence, nurturing, soothing, listening, and strategic caregiving: coordinating health care, education, nutrition, safety, and emotional regulation.

The Family Court and the laws used to adjudicate family cases implicitly affirm that mothers are tasked with this special labour, entrusting them with the full responsibility for their children's wellbeing. Yet this trust is conditional and heavily scrutinized. Socially, it is monitored through moral expectations and legally it is tied to women's financial management and perceived propriety. Despite this surveillance, women are still expected to perform the emotional labour of parenting, strategic, sacrificial, and invisible. It is this labour, shaped by contradiction and expectation, that this case study also seeks to make more visible by highlighting Grace's role as her son's rights defender.

It remains a battle for her son to overcome the social stigma associated with his sexual orientation. Only fifteen years old, he continues to struggle internally, not because he feels it is wrong, but because his peers and experiences at school have shown him that he is wrong and is the "other" at his school.

His mental and emotional wellness remains vulnerable. He has suffered from witnessing his father abuse his mother, he has had the bare the death of his father and now suffers with migraines that require weekly medication-demanding more financial strain on his mother.

The right to health care and dignity of life is found in the Belize Constitution and within the state's international obligations under several United Nations conventions. Yet, it has been Roy's mother who has advocated for his care and safety. In doing so, Grace had paid for it by being based in the court, ostracized at her workplace, and "branded" as a would be troublemaker within her community. Despite these hardships, Grace has not relented. Cultural norms would have us believe that Grace is simply doing her job as a "mother". Even if that is true, what is the responsibility of the state to her son and her when their constitutional and human rights are being ignore?

Why did the school keep eight-year-old son at the school instead of taking him to the hospital for care? Why did the school principal call Grace but did not call the police to inform them of the teacher's assault on her student? Why did the doctor, the police, and ultimately the magistrate point the blame at Grace instead of her son's perpetrator? Finally, how might Grace and her son remained silenced if not for the help of UNIBAM? All of these questions go towards a larger pervading question: How has Grace's ethnicity, gender, social status, and he son's sexual orientation contributed to bias and discrimination she has experienced?

This study underscores the gap between women's *de jure* and *de facto* equality. Grace's experiences outline how institutional processes fail to safeguard women and children, how processes without gender sensitivity reproduce emotional harm through procedural neglect, how victims of IPV can be silencing through legal misrecognition, and how mothers bare the silence, unpaid burden of emotional labour.

The case study exposes a profile of systemic coercion and gender bias within the judiciary. Court procedures minimized non-physical forms of abuse, the lack protections for post-separation abuse, they often re-victimize victims though a lack of sensitivity, and the exacerbate women's emotional and economic burdens through bureaucratic delay.

The case study remains ongoing and UNIBAM continues to document developments concerning Roy's struggles and experiences at school. The organization continues to be a support system for Grace as she fights for her son's human rights as she *also* comes to grip with her son's sexuality. The direction that these events will take is uncertain; what is clear is that This case study can go in any direction at this point depending on Grace's willingness and ability to keep fighting for justice and Roy's ability to cope with the treatment from his peers and school community. What is clear is the human rights for mother and son has been repeatedly violated and the state's is obligated to protect them.

## **Conclusion**

Currently Belize does not have hate crime legislation, any comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation, or anti-bullying guidelines in the Ministry of Education Regulations. There are also no enforcement mechanisms for protocols at the school level. The criminal code, as it stands, is separated into common assault, wounding and harm without regard for applying sentences for violence committed based on sexual orientation.

Age, sexual orientation, perceived gender expression and low socio-economic status are multiplying identities that play a role in the level of violence that both Grace and her son experience and the son depends on his mother to be his advocate for accessing health services, education and justice. The mother has tried to shield both of her sons from abuse by leaving her abusive marriage; however, the son mentioned in this investigation will have to navigate homophobia and bullying.

Sociological theories offer insights for how Grace can navigate intersectional discrimination and intimate partner violence as she advocates for her son. Grace experienced psychological and economic abuse from different partners who sought to control her through intimidation, criticism and complaints about her son's sexual orientation. Her son continues to struggle with internal conflicts over his sexuality, bullying from his peers, and difficulty with gender expression. He uses silence and anger to express his hurt and frustration with being treated differently.

The experiences of both mother and the son challenge societal norms about gender and sexuality as they confront these discriminations in court and refuse to be isolated from their human rights. Their actions for personal safety are defiant and traumatic. The mother uses institutional support to navigate the judiciary system while her son is left to confront his bullies at school. Grit becomes a commodity!

While sociological theory, specifically, bisexual theory argues that sexuality is fluid, the mother and son journey to internally accept, value and assert their right to dignity is confronted with societal attitudes that gender nor sexuality is believed to be fluid, both are binary in nature, leaves a systemic vacuum. The state investment in administrative data for marginalized populations remains limited to women experiencing domestic violence and binary approaches to data collection. Its inability to capture disaggregated data based on additional characteristics, is helping to cultivate an atmosphere of exclusion.

The son remains in a fragile place as his emotions, awareness, and experiences with socio-cultural stigma force him to seek clarity about his sexual orientation and character as a very young age. As the son comes to terms with his feelings about his sexual orientation and gender expression, Grace continues to worry about his safety and security.

Grace and son have experienced different forms of violence all based in misogyny. Sexism is the common thread where femininity is undervalued and considered weak. Due to his sexual orientation, this perceived weakness and undervalue is transferred to the son. Both are of afro-descendant which has another layer of barrier for full access to their Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

The state has not improved access to justice for working-class women. The Legal AID Act was to provide access; it remains suspended. While the Ombudsman Office is open to help, its function is limited in defending the rights of Grace's son to an education where he is not discriminated against or bullying at

school. The burden of justice remains with the mother going to court despite the lack of help and intersectional discrimination.

The experiences that Grace and her son have had as individuals and as a unit, have been traumatic- enough for her son to possibly induce self-harm, depression, and social isolation. Grace continues to advocate for her son despite the uncertainties- uncertainties underscored by Belize's de jure equality for women but its failure to address de facto disparities.

## **Recommendations**

1. Advance comprehensive Anti-discrimination legislation like the Equal Opportunities bill (EOB) and hate crime legislation to improve access to justice for vulnerable populations.
2. Produce a gender-sensitive legal report that looks at the Education Act and Rules to assess the institutionalisation of discrimination, inequalities impacting LGBT Youth access to education and to establish redress mechanism and data collection procedure in the education sector.
3. Develop an LGBTQ+ research agenda that establishes a population size estimate; the economic cost of discrimination; track ESC Rights inequality, leveraging a Knowledge Attitude and Perception Study of LGBTQ+ population; homophobia in the education sector impacting young people and a youth L.G.B.T. Q+ poverty study. This can be done in coordination with SIB, the NGO sector and University system.
4. Improve the education sector capacity in dealing with homophobic bullying and violence within the education sector that is impacting LGBTQ+ youth targeting teachers and managers of schools.
5. Conduct policy review for state policy and procedure that amplify discrimination in the accessing of state services affecting young people ability to fully enjoy their health, education or social services.
6. Increase the budget of the Belize Crime Observatory to develop a national administrative data collection strategy that feeds into the country sustainable development priorities by age, sexual orientation gender identity, race, socio-economic status.
7. Strengthen redress mechanisms that provides legal support services for working class, single mothers impacted by E.S.C injustices.
8. Establish a monitoring and evaluation system that looks at the impact of state national strategies that impact the ESC Rights of LGBTQ+ Youth and single working single mothers.

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