

# Leonashia Leigh-Ann van der Merwe

East London, [REDACTED], [REDACTED]

Google Scholar Profile: [REDACTED]

With a strong background in social and sexual health activism, I am a passionate and dedicated qualitative health researcher, working at the intersection of identity, HIV and socio-cultural, economic and political determinants. Public health is a scarce skill in South Africa; I would like to contribute to research and teaching to develop a responsive and well capacitated health worker force, ultimately strengthening the healthcare system. My education, technical skills, personal and professional attributes would contribute positively to the goal of advancing research and training in a tertiary education setting.

## Education

- Current:           <sup>1</sup>PhD Public Health Medicine (candidate) University of Kwazulu-Natal  
Supervisors: Dr N Khuzwayo & Prof Mavhandu-Mudzusi  
Topic: *S.A.F.E-T Protocol: What Are The Perioperative Experiences of Transgender Women While Undergoing Sex Reassignment Surgery in South Africa?*
- 2022:               <sup>2</sup>Short course: Unisa Supervisor Capacity Development for Masters & Doctoral Supervision May – July 2022.  
<sup>3</sup>Excellence in Peer Review: Expert Peer Review Training by Taylor & Francis – May 2022
- July 2021:        Research ethics training from the University of Hong Kong (online) in the following modules:
- <sup>1</sup>Introduction to Research Ethics
  - <sup>2</sup>Research Ethics Evaluation
  - <sup>3</sup>Informed Consent
  - <sup>4</sup>Good Clinical Practice (GCP-E6(R2) 2016)
  - <sup>5</sup>HIV Vaccine Trials
  - <sup>6</sup>Adolescent Involvement in HIV Prevention Trials
  - <sup>7</sup>Public Health Research Ethics
- 2019-2021:       University of South Africa  
Master of Public Health  
Thesis: *The healthcare experiences of transgender women living with HIV in the Buffalo City Metro Municipality.*
- 2016-2017:       University of the Western Cape  
Postgraduate Diploma of Public Health
- 2011:              University of South Africa, Department of Communication Science  
Short course in community journalism

End-user computing skills

Advanced use of Microsoft Word, PowerPoint, Excel & Outlook

Well versed with virtual meeting platforms: Zoom, Skype, GoTo Meeting, MS Teams & Webex  
Qualitative research software Atlas.TI & Mendeley, NVivo & SPSS

### **Employment history**

2010: Founded Social, Health & Empowerment Feminist Collective of Transgender Women of Africa

2011: Gender DynamiX  
Outreach internship March to June 2011.

2011: Masimanyane Empilisweni HIV/Aids Organisation  
Report writer & data assistant in the HIV/Aids program implemented in the Buffalo City Metro Municipality.

2012: Registered Social, Health & Empowerment Feminist Collective of Transgender Women of Africa as a non-profit organisation.

Current: <sup>1</sup> Executive Director/Fundraiser & Research Lead at Social, Health & Empowerment Feminist Collective of Transgender Women of Africa.

<sup>2</sup> Commissioner (part time) at the Commission for Gender Equality deployed to Eastern Cape Province (term 2023 – 2028)

### **Professional experience**

#### *Curriculum development:*

2018: African Transformative Feminist Leadership Institute curriculum is a regional leadership training program to enhance African transgender women's capacity to engage with feminist constructs, ideologies, and methods, and to engage the women's and feminist movement in their respective countries.

2019: Thuli's Hub is an intervention designed to support the care journey for transgender women to be retained in HIV and gender affirming care.

2020: TranSpire curriculum for enhancing organisational capacity for nascent transgender led and focussed organisations.

2021: CHOICES intervention for trans and gender diverse persons to address the social determinants of HIV care among transgender women.

2024: Curriculum design for Generation Equality manual to integrate the issues of lesbian, bisexual and transgender women into the mainstream discourse on gender equality (current project).

#### *Grant writing:*

Lead Fundraiser at Social, Health & Empowerment Feminist Collective of Transgender Women of Africa:

- 2018 – 2022: Wits Reproductive Health Institute funded our organisation in the amount of 4,178,921 ZAR in support of community mobilisation of the transgender community in the Buffalo City Metro and Nelson Mandela Bay Metro for a period of four years.
- 2019 - 2022: Beyond Zero grant to implement an HIV prevention combination program for men who have sex with men in the OR Tambo District Municipality and transgender women in the Garden Route Municipality. Total grant 24,411,731 ZAR over a period of three years.
- 2019 – 2022: Aids Foundation of South Africa 2,152,083 ZAR for the implementation of human rights programs that address challenges in relation to health rights for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex + community in HIV & TB services, for a period of three years.
- 2019 – 2021: Mama Cash general organisational support for S.H.E in the amount of €80,000
- 2020 – 2023: Baring Foundation awarded an amount of £100,000 to S.H.E as operational support to the organisation
- 2022 - 2023: Love Alliance Aidsfonds funding awarded to S.H.E to implement a capacity enhancement program for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender + organisations in the Sarah Baartman District Municipality in the amount of €61,665
- 2023 – 2025 OutrightAction International funding awarded to S.H.E to implement the Generation Equality project aimed at centering the voices of lesbian, bisexual and transgender women in the mainstream gender equality discourse in the amount of \$80,000.
- 2025-2026 United Nations Development Program funding awarded to S.H.E to implement #TransInPrEP project to supporting an advocacy agenda for transgender persons accessing long acting PrEP for HIV prevention in the amount of \$40,000.
- 2025-2026 Gender Based Violence & Femicide Response Fund awarded to S.H.E to implement an implementation science project on the experiences of violence against lesbian, bisexual and transgender women and to field testing a multi-level community based intervention in response to what works to address violence in the LBT community in the amount of 600,000 ZAR.

*Consulting projects:*

- 2022 - AVAC: Supporting AVAC Fellows with training and HIV/Aids advocacy project design (ongoing)
- 2024 - Wits Health Consortium – conducting qualitative interviews, transcribing and reporting on the Jabula Uzibone research project to determine the healthcare service experiences of transgender women in Buffalo City, Gqebera & Cape Town.
- Gender DynamiX – conducting qualitative interviews with constituents of the organisation as part of the strategic planning process.

2025 Matchboxology community consultations to inform the clinical control trial for a once-a-month PrEP pill. Consulting men having sex with men, transgender and non-binary individuals on their preferences related to marketing and promotional materials for this product.

**Media and Professional Appearances (Print & Digital)**

Gender Space DumisaTV on South African Women’s Access to Communal Land, July 2025

[REDACTED]

The State of Maternal & Neonatal Health in the Eastern Cape Province. Various media sources, September 2024

[REDACTED]

Transgender Persons Bathroom Debate in South Africa, April 2024

[REDACTED]

Transgender Women Who Have Transformed History, 18 March 2019

[REDACTED]

Leigh-Ann Aims to Bring Transgender Voice to the Gender Equality Commission, Go Express, 17 September 2022

[REDACTED]

Global March 31 celebrations shine a light on the lives and challenges of trans and gender diverse people, Daily Maverick, 4 April 2023

[REDACTED]

**Presentations**

*Training, facilitation & lecturing:*

2018: *<sup>1</sup>The Social Determinants of Health for Transgender Women in South Africa: Findings from a Mixed Methods Study, <sup>2</sup>Case Study of Change: The Role of Transgender Women Outreach Workers in the HIV Response of South Africa, presented at the International Aids Conference 2018, July 2018, Amsterdam, Netherlands.*

2018: *All Women Count Consortium – Facilitation of Global South convening on Gender Based Violence, 3-4 October 2018, Beirut, Lebanon.*

*Lessons Learnt from Transgender Women's participation in the HIV BBS South Africa* presented at the Expert Consultation on Advancing Methods for Bio Behavioural Surveys, Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, 17-18 September 2018, Atlanta, Georgia.

2019: *Research Among and With Transgender Women in the Global South: Positionality and Privilege*, a panel discussion at the Transgender Health Summit, 13-14 April 2019, Oakland, California.

*Transgender Health, Social and Epidemiologic Situations in Different Settings*, a panel discussion at Virology Education Transgender People and HIV, 20 July 2019, Mexico.

*Global and African politics: Implications for building and strengthening trans movement(s) in Africa*, a presentation to the 4th Gender Dynamix Trans Health, Advocacy Research Conference, 24 October 2019, Johannesburg.

2020: *Ending Violence Against Women and Girls* presented at the Women's Networking Zone of the International Aids Conference, virtually, 6 July 2020.

*Human Rights and HIV with the intersection of Sexual and Gender diversity Sensitisation* workshop, facilitator, A virtual event conducted to civil society stakeholders of the Aids Foundation of South Africa, 6-7 August 2020.

*Increasing Access to Information and Service Provision on Contraception, Abortion and Cervical Cancer*, panelist, Ibis Reproductive Health and Global Health Strategies Webinar - 28 Sept 2020

*Diversity Management*, A presentation delivered to the Human Sciences Research Council Stigma Index Training for data collectors, 9 November 2020.

2021: *Integrated healthcare for trans people: Structural impediments, Trans\*forming care* presented at the International Aids Conference virtually, 8 & 9 July 2021.

*From elimination to ensuring: A paradigm shift for meeting the sexual and reproductive health and rights needs of women living with HIV; Inclusive Considerations About Women and Diversity*, A Presentation to the International Aids Conference, virtual, 20 July 2021.

*Integrated Service Delivery for Transgender Community in South Africa*, Differentiated Service Delivery for Key Populations, Virtual Meeting, 25 August 2022.

2022: *Why Gender Data Matters in Public Health*, panelist, virtual meeting hosted by Johns Hopkins University, 28 January 2022.

*The context of transgender health in South Africa*; A presentation to Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, virtually, 4 March 2022.

*The Healthcare Experiences of Transgender Women Living with HIV in the Buffalo City Metro: An Interpretative Phenomenological Study*, presented at the Department of Social Development “Sexual and Reproductive Justice for Underserved Population” Seminar at the Nelson Mandela University, Gqebera, 18 October 2022

2023: Keynote Address – *Gender DynamiX Launch of our Annual Human Rights Report (HRR) and TGD Refugees and Asylum Seekers Media Advocacy Campaign with a focus on rehumanising human rights*, 31 March 2023, Cape Town.

*HIV & Culture* Lecture presented to the Africa Centre Postgrad Diploma Summer School, University of Stellenbosch, virtually, 20 May 2023

*Inclusive HIV Prevention & Treatment for Youth: Focus on Transgender Youth*. [REDACTED] Zambia, on 5 October 2023.

Keynote Address – *Garden Route Pride Festival*, 14 June 2023 George,

Keynote Address - *Biennial Regional Trans Health, Advocacy & Research Conference themed 'Reimagining and Driving Innovative Possibilities: Gender Equity in Health & Law in Africa'*. Double Tree Hotel, Woodstock, Cape Town, 1 December 2023

*Trans/feminist training on the inclusion of trans women in feminist organising* presented to the global staff of The Kvinna Till Kvinna Foundation virtually, 7 December 2023

AVAC Co-facilitation of *monthly thematic sessions for the transgender HIV prevention fellows*

2024: *Remarks on the issues facing women in the economy of the Eastern Cape Province* at the International Women’s Day Commemoration, Port Alfred, 8 March 2024

*Presentation on crimes against women and children in the Eastern Cape* at the SAPS Strategic Planning Session conducted at Walter Sisulu University, Mthatha, 22 April 2024

*Facilitation of the CHOICES Workshop* to transgender participants at S.H.E Offices, Quigney, East London, 20 – 24 May 2024

AVAC Co-facilitation of *monthly thematic sessions for the transgender HIV prevention fellows*.

*The Role of The Commission for Gender Equality in Facilitating Access to Quality Higher Education* presented at the lecture series of the Dept

of Justice and Constitutional Development, Walter Sisulu University, virtually, 17 July 2024.

*The Role of The Commission for Gender Equality in Facilitating Access to Quality Higher Education* presented at the lecture series of the Dept of Justice and Constitutional Development, University of Fort Hare, 19 July 2024.

*Gender Based Violence Prevention Strategies Implemented by the Commission for Gender Equality* at the South African Local Government Association Women's Lekgotla, Port Alfred, 28-29 August 2024.

*Key Populations Front and Centre* at the Key Populations Summit of South Africa, Johannesburg 30 September to 1 October 2024.

*Understanding the dynamics of the LGBTIQ+ community in the context of equality and equity: A lecture* to the University of Zululand Engineering Faculty, 10 October 2024

2025

Outright Global Trans Program Event, *A discussion on the rising hostility and regressive policies against trans-feminine individuals, aims to foster cross-movement cooperation between feminist and trans-rights movements.* New York, 13 March 2025.

South African Human Rights Commission Climate Change Dialogue, Virtual. *A Gendered Lens in the Climate Change Discourse.* 12 March 2025.

The CREA Global Dialogue Feminist Waves and Fault Lines: Charting the Shifts and Struggles. Tbilisi. 14 – 16 May 2025.

Organiser of the *TransHealth Sexual and Reproductive Health Symposium* in East London 28 & 29 June 2025. GrandView Conference Center.

South African Human Rights Commission Disinformation Summit, *Disinformation as a strategy to perpetuate harmful gender rhetoric and the rise of the anti-gender movement.* Virtual, 8 & 9 July 2025.

African Women Against Corruption Network (AWACN) Conference, East London – *The gendered nature of and corruption impact on women.* 14 August 2025.

Commonwealth Equality Network Conference. *Exploring human rights mechanisms for LGBTI communities in Africa,* Pretoria, 21 August 2025.

Commission for Gender Equality and Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality – *Keynote Address on the State of the LGBTI community in the metro,* Gqebera, 3 September 2025.

Eastern Cape Provincial Legislature – *Bringing the legislature to the people for a discussion on socio-political and economic issues in the province.* East London. 21 – 23 October 2025.

Do Not Check That Box - Impacts from the Assault on Transgender Communities and DEI + Strategies to Sustain and Rebuild, Virtual – Panelist – reflecting on the impact of the Trump Executive Orders in South Africa. 29 October 2025.

*Academic Mentoring & Training*

2017	
Mthombeni Nolusizo	Social Work field training supervision and mentoring
Magwentshu Liso	Social Work field training supervision and mentoring
2018	
Mcenge Z.	Social Work field training supervision and mentoring
Gelese P.	Social Work field training supervision and mentoring
2019	
Madlingozi S.	Social Work field training supervision and mentoring
Sidawo S.S.	Social Work field training supervision and mentoring
Ndema Z.	Social Work field training supervision and mentoring
Ngqoleka A.	Social Work field training supervision and mentoring
2020	
Zodwa Ngqalo	Social Work field training supervision and mentoring
Athini Tshangela	Social Work field training supervision and mentoring
Nosipho Tete	Social Work field training supervision and mentoring
Wandisile Gadallana	Social Work field training supervision and mentoring
2021	
Ziyabukwa Majamani	Social Work field training supervision and mentoring
Pheliswa Maciti	Social Work field training supervision and mentoring
2022	
Emihle Mtshoyitsho	Social Work field training supervision and mentoring
Mpo Pakies	Social Work field training supervision and mentoring
Simfune Hobe	Social Work field training supervision and mentoring
2023	
Sihle Nkohli	Social Work field training supervision and mentoring

Lisa Jevu	Social Work field training supervision and mentoring
2024	
Siphokuhle Masizana	Social Work field training supervision and mentoring
Nompumelelo Dladla	Social Work field training supervision and mentoring
2025	
Whitney Booysen (BA Hons – UWC)	Literature Review Training and mentoring
Nwabisa Ethell Zwabeko (Masters Social Work- UNISA)	Literature Review Training and mentoring
Nthuthu Fuzile (Mphil – Gender Studies)	Proposal review and mentoring

### **Leadership & mentoring**

- 2016 – present: Additional board member for the Sisonke Sex Worker Movement.
- 2018 – present: Vice-chair of communication & social media elect of the Innovative Response Globally to Transgender Women and HIV.
- 2021 – 2024: Chair-elect of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex + sector of the Eastern Cape Aids Council Civil Society Forum.
- 2024 - present Elected to the Country Co-Ordinating Mechanism for oversight of the grant to respond to HIV, STI's, Aids & TB from the Global Fund for Aids, TB & Malaria as a sector representative of the LGBTI sector nationally.
- 2024 – present Aids Vaccine Advocacy Coalition – board member.

### **Strategy and strategic planning**

- 2012: Co-led development of Social, Health & Empowerment's first ever strategic plan 2013 – 2016.
- 2017: Co-led development of Social, Health & Empowerment second strategic plan 2017 – 2020
- 2019: Co-developed phase I of the strategic plan for the International Trans Fund
- 2022: Co-leading the current strategic planning process for Social, Health & Empowerment strategic plan 2022 – 2026

### **Research, writing & publishing**

#### *Research projects:*

- 2016 – 2018: Co-Principal investigator of *Botshelo Ba Trans*, the first study to determine HIV prevalence among transgender women in three South African cities.

- 2016 – 2018: Co-principal investigator of *Transgender Women Mobilising and Preparing for High Impact Prevention* study to gauge HIV pre-exposure (PrEP) knowledge, attitudes and practices among transgender women in three South African cities.
- 2019 – 2021: Investigator for MPH research project: *The healthcare experiences of transgender women living with HIV in the Buffalo City Metro Municipality*.
- 2020 – 2022: Literature review lead on *Violence Against Transgender People in Southern Africa* as a consultant for Gender Dynamix.
- 2021 – present: PhD study on the development of an intervention that will improve perioperative care provided to transgender women undergoing sex reassignment surgery in South Africa, currently in ethics application.
- 2022 – 2024: Health status of transgender people globally: A systematic review of research on disease burden and drivers from 2020-2021
- 2023 - Project Director - Generation Equality Project – An Implementation Study on Centering the Voices of Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Women in the Mainstream Discourse on Gender Equality.
- 2024 - Project Director - Thandanani: A Research Study on The Service Experiences When Accessing Post Sexual Violence Services at the Thuthuzela Care Centers in Two Districts of the Eastern Cape Province.
- 2025 - Project Director – Thandanani Phase II: An Implementation Science Project to Field Test a Multi-Level Community Based Intervention to Generate Evidence on What Works to Address Violence Among Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Women.

*Publications 2012 – 2025:*

*Books/Book Chapters*

Zaynab Essack, Natasha Van der Pol, Sandile Ndelu, Joshua Schoole, **L Leigh Ann van der Merwe**, Heidi van Rooyen. *Putting the T in LGBT: Trans and Gender Diverse 9(in)Visibility and Activism in South Africa*. 2018. In *Civil Society in the Global South*. Pg 140-157

Aparna Arora, K Brindaalakshmi, Bren Miaira Kutch, Erika Rydergaard, **Leigh Ann van der Merwe**, Agli Zavros-Orr. *Collecting Data for Equity and Justice: Approaches and Methods for Collecting Sex and Gender Data*. 2023. In *Handbook of Research on Exploring Gender Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Through an Intersectional Lens*. Pg 236-263.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-6684-8412-8.ch012.

*Peer-reviewed Journal Articles*

Poteat, T., Ackerman, B., Diouf, D., Ceesay, N., Mothopeng, T., Odette, K. Z., Kouanda, S., Ouedraogo, H. G., Simplicite, A., Kouame, A., Mnisi, Z., Trapence, G., **van der Merwe, L. L. A.**, Jumbe, V. and Baral, S. (2017) 'HIV prevalence and behavioral and psychosocial factors among transgender women and cisgender men who have sex with men in 8 African countries: A cross-sectional analysis', *PLoS medicine*, 14(11), p. e1002422. doi:

10.1371/journal.pmed.1002422.

Scheibe, A., **van der Merwe, L. L. A.**, Cloete, A., & Grasso, M. A. (2018). Transgender Women Outreach Workers and Their Role in South Africa's HIV response. *South African Health Review*, 69–76.

Hale, F., Bell, E., Banda, A., Kwagala, B., **van der Merwe, L.L.A.**, & Yuvaraj, A. (2018). Keeping our core values ALIV[H]E . Holistic, community-led, participatory and rights-based approaches to addressing the links between violence against women and girls and HIV. *Journal of Virus Eradication*, 1–4.

Poteat, T., Malik, M., **van der Merwe, L. L. A.**, Cloete, A., Adams, D., Nonyane, B. A. S. and Wirtz, A. L. (2020) 'PrEP awareness and engagement among transgender women in South Africa : a cross-sectional , mixed methods study', *The Lancet HIV*, 3018(20), pp. 1–10.

Ayala, G., Sprague, L., **van der Merwe, L. L. A.**, Chang, J., Arreola, S., Davis, S. L. M., Taslim, A., Mienies, K., Nilo, A., Mworeko, L., Hikuam, F., De Leon Moreno, C. G. and Izazola-Licea, J. A. (2021) 'Peer- And community-led responses to HIV: A scoping review', *PLoS ONE*, 16(12 December). doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0260555.

Kennedy, C. E., Yeh, P. T., Byrne, J., **van der Merwe, L. L. A.**, Ferguson, L., Poteat, T. and Narasimhan, M. (2022) 'Self-administration of gender-affirming hormones: a systematic review of effectiveness , cost , and values and preferences of end-users and health workers', *Sexual and Reproductive Health Matters*, 23(9). doi: 10.1080/26410397.2022.2045066.

Bothma, R., O'Connor, C., Nkusi, J., Shiba, V., Segale, J., Matsebula, L., Lawrence, J. J., **van der Merwe, L. L.-A.**, Chersich, M. and Hill, N. (2022) 'Differentiated HIV services for transgender people in four South African districts : population characteristics and HIV care cascade', *Journal of the International AIDS Society*, 25, pp. 68–76. doi: 10.1002/jia2.25987.

**van der Merwe, L. L. A.**, Cloete, A., Savva, H., Skinner, D., November, G., & Fisher, Z. Z. (2023). Engaging transgender women in HIV research in South Africa. *BMC Public Health*, 23(1), 1–9. [REDACTED]

Cloete, A., Mabaso, M., Savva, H., **van der Merwe, L. L. A.**, Naidoo, D., Petersen, Z., Kose, Z., Mthembu, J., Moyo, S., Skinner, D., Jooste, S., Fellows, I. E., Shiraishi, R. W., Mwandangi, S. L., & Simbayi, L. C. (2023). The HIV care continuum for sexually active transgender women in three metropolitan municipalities in South Africa: findings from a biobehavioural survey 2018–19. *The Lancet HIV*, 10(6), e375–e384. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2352-3018\(23\)00059-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2352-3018(23)00059-0)

**Leigh-Ann van der Merwe, L.**, Moyo, I., & Mavhandu-Mudzusi, A. H. (2024). Determinants of antiretroviral therapy among transgender women in South Africa. *South African Family Practice*, 66(1). [REDACTED]

Scheim, A. I., Rich, A. J., Zubizarreta, D., Malik, M., Baker, K. E., Restar, A. J., **van der Merwe, L. A.**, Wang, J., Beebe, B., Ridgeway, K., Baral, S. D., Poteat, T., & Reisner, S. L. (2024). Health status of transgender people globally: A systematic review of research on disease burden and correlates. In *PLoS ONE* (Vol. 19, Issue 3 March). Public Library of Science. [REDACTED]

Daniels J, **van der Merwe LL**, Portle S, Bongo C, Nadkarni S, Petrus Peters R. Tailoring a Skills-Based Serostatus Disclosure Intervention for Transgender Women in South Africa: Protocol for a Usability and Feasibility Study. *JMIR Res Protoc*. 2025;14:e52121.

Restar, A. J., Lucas, R., Nfn, S., Alpert, A. B., Phipps, A., Wang, G., Operario, D., Radix, A., **van der Merwe, L. A.**, Lindström, S., Everhart, A., Gamarel, K. E., & Streed, C. G. (2025). Underinvested, Under-Referred, and Underserved: Applying a Gender Equity Continuum Framework in Cancer Control Continuum Programs and Policies to Expand to Transgender and Nonbinary Populations. *JCO Oncology Advances*(2). [REDACTED]

Tonia Poteat , Yi Liu , Darya Adams , **L. Leigh-Ann van der Merwe** , Allandise Cloete , Lauren E. Howard & Janice McCarthy (26 Jul 2025): Social determinants of HIV status and viral load suppression among transgender women in South Africa: a cross-sectional analysis, *AIDS Care*, DOI: 10.1080/09540121.2025.2535471

Sarah Sarandos, **Leigh Ann van der Merwe** & Joseph Daniels (18 Jan 2026): "I promise your secret is safe to me": Understanding the intersections of disclosing HIV status, associated violence, and loved one's support as a transgender woman in rural South Africa, *International Journal of Transgender Health*, DOI: 10.1080/26895269.2026.2615647

#### *In Review*

Anna Bowring, Ayden Scheim, Iliassou Mfochive Njindam, **Leigh Ann van der Merwe**, Carrie Lyons, Oluwasalape Olawore, Guy Christian Fako Hendji, Daniel Levitt, Gnilane Turpin, Ubald Amoufe, Sandra Georges, Serge C Billong, Oudou Njoya, Anne-Cécile Zoung-Kanyi Bissek, Stefan Baral. ***Stigma, violence, HIV prevention and treatment outcomes among transgender women and men who have sex with men in Cameroon: a cross-sectional study***. *PLOS Global Public Health*

#### *In-press*

**"I Believe in My Ancestors, and I Participate and Believe:" Negotiating Identity, Tradition, and HIV-Related Health Among SGM Communities in the Eastern Cape**  
Kelly Rutt<sup>1</sup>, Lindsey de Vos<sup>2</sup>, Aphiwe Metula<sup>3</sup>, Remco P. H. Peters<sup>4</sup>, Cikizwa Bongo<sup>3</sup>, Leigh Ann van der Merwe<sup>3</sup>, Joseph Daniels<sup>5</sup>. *SSM – Qualitative Research in Health*.

#### *Non peer-reviewed*

**van der Merwe, L. A.**, & Padi, T. (2012). Transgender Feminism. *New Voices in Psychology*, 8(2).

Chakuwamba, A. K., **van der Merwe, L. L.** (2015) Transilience, the reality of violence against transgender women in South Africa.

**van der Merwe, L.** (2015) African Trans Feminist Charter: published 2016 in *Transgender Studies Quarterly*, a journal of Duke University.

**Trans women and feminism: the struggle is real.** (2016) *Open Democracy and The Seattle Star* [REDACTED]

**van der Merwe, L.**, Graves, N., Nduna, M., (2018). Xhosa Manhood Initiation and the Identity Nexus for Male-To-Female Transgender Women in the Eastern Cape Province.

**van der Merwe, L. L. A.** (2018). Transfeminism(s) from the Global South: Experiences from

South Africa. *Development*, 1–6. [REDACTED]

Poteat, T. C., **van der Merwe, L. L. A.**, Sevelius, J. and Keatley, J. (2021) 'Inclusion as illusion : erasing transgender women in research with MSM', *JIAS*, pp. 10–11. doi: 10.1002/jia2.25661.

Poteat, T. C., Logie, C. H. and **van der Merwe, L. L. A.** (2021) 'Advancing LGBTQI health research', *The Lancet*, 6736(21), pp. 6–8. doi: 10.1016/s0140-6736(21)01057-6.

**van der Merwe, L. L.-A.**, Cloete, A. and Skinner, D. (2022) 'How HIV advocacy can be used to ensure quality transgender health care : lessons from South Africa', *Lancet*.

Poteat, T. C., & **van der Merwe, L. L. A.** (2022). Stigma reduction is key to improving the HIV care continuum. *The Lancet HIV*, 9(3), e144-e145.

Logie, C. H., **van der Merwe, L. L. A.** and Scheim, A. I. (2022) 'Measuring sex , gender , and sexual orientation : one step to health equity', *The Lancet*, 6736(22), pp. 8–10.

#### *Policy briefs*

2021: Access To Gender-Affirming HIV, STI And TB Services For Transgender Women In South Africa [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

#### *Academic writing review activities:*

2023: ***Social and Structural Drivers of HIV Vulnerability among a Respondent-driven Sample of Feminine and Non-feminine Presenting Transgender Women Who Have Sex with Men in Zimbabwe***

Parmley, Lauren; Miller, Sophia; Chingombe, Innocent; Mappingure, Munyaradzi Paul; Mugurungi, Owen; Rogers, John ; Musuka, Godfrey; Samba, Chester; Hakim, Avi; Harris, Tiffany

2024: ***Addressing HIV-Related Stigma and Discrimination: Building on what we know and promoting community-driven research and action.***

Laura Ferguson, PhD, Sibongile Nkosi, MA, Sanny Mulubale, PhD, Brent Allan, Lucy Stackpool-Moore, PhD.

***Lessons Learned from Syndemic HIV Research in an Immigrant, Latinx Sexual and Gender Minority Community.***

Nicholas Metheny, Dalton Scott, Sandor Santana, Rosa Pache

#### **HIV program & intervention design**

Led the design of HIV programming with over 10 years experience. Most recently:

2018 – 2022: Integrated HIV and gender affirming care program for transgender women in the Buffalo City Metro, co-implemented with the Wits Reproductive Health Institute; co-developing community based interventions to enhance transgender women living with HIV's engagement in healthcare.

2019 – 2022: HIV combination prevention program for men who have sex with men in the OR Tambo District Municipality and for transgender women in the Garden Route Municipality.

2021: Contributor to the development of the first ever Gender Affirming Guidelines for South Africa

### **Professional service**

#### *Participation in advisory panels and working groups:*

2021 - Global Community Advisory Group to Gilead on the new Long-Acting PrEP (Lenacapavir) trial in cisgender men, transgender women, transgender men, and gender non-binary individuals who have sex with men.

2020 – 2021: Grant review committee of ViiV Healthcare's Positive Action Program for maternal and child health.

2020 – 2021: Member of the World Health Organisation Guideline Development Group on Self-Care Interventions for Sexual and Reproductive Health & Rights.

2020 - AVAC No Data No More: Crafting A Research Agenda for HIV Prevention Among Transgender and Gender Non-Binary Persons.

2016 – 2020: Grant review committee of ViiV Healthcare's Positive Action Program for men having sex with men, and transgender persons.

2020 – Technical Advisory Committee for the transgender health program implemented in four metro municipalities by the Wits Reproductive Health Rights Institute, funded by a cooperative agreement with the Presidents Emergency Plan for Aids Relief (PEPFAR)/USAID.

2020 – Getting to the Heart of Stigma Expert Working Group: Consensus building on concepts and measures of HIV-related stigma coordinated by the International Aids Society and the Human Sciences Research Council of South Africa.

2019 - Virology Education: Organising committee member for Transgender People and HIV conference.

2019 - South African National Aids Council Human Rights Working Group member.

2017 - South African National Aids Council LGBTI+ Technical Working Group member.

2016 – 2017: Advisor to the development of Transit: Implementing Comprehensive HIV and STI Programmes with Transgender People

#### *Professional memberships:*

- 2018 - Public Health Association of South Africa member
- 2019 - South African Monitoring & Evaluation Association (SAMEA) member

*Awards:*

- 2012 Recognised by Masimanyane Women's Right International as a Women's Human Rights Defender.
- 2016 Recognised as a Woman of Courage by Women have Wings  
[REDACTED]
- 2017 Top Three Finalist in the Category of Social Entrepreneur of the Eastern Cape Business Women's Association.
- 2023 Appreciation for Activists and Human Rights Defenders in East Africa Award for Achievement in Health and Human Rights for LGBTIQ+ Persons and Sex Workers.
- 2025 Wits Reproductive Health Institute – Recognition for personal and professional contribution to the HIV work implemented by the four transgender clinics in South Africa as funded by USAID/PEPFAR.

**References**

Dr Pelisa Dana  
Senior HIV Researcher Eastern Cape Aids Council  
Email: [REDACTED]  
Mobile: [REDACTED]

Prof Mzikazi Nduna  
Email: [REDACTED]  
Mobile: [REDACTED]

Prof Tonia Poteat  
Email: [REDACTED]  
Mobile: [REDACTED]