Overview of the Mystery Shopper Assessment Report

Three LGBTQ individuals were selected and trained to undertake mystery shopper assessments of health care facilities in Kingston, St Andrew and St Catherine to ascertain what, if any, level of discrimination or difficulty queer individuals, people living with or affected by HIV would face.

A trans woman who identifies as queer, a trans. woman who identifies as lesbian and man who identifies as gay carried out the mystery shopper assessment. Diversity in sexual orientation and gender identity was included and necessary to allow for a more comprehensive analysis of the experiences and reports from the mystery shoppers.

The participants visited the government-run Comprehensive Health Clinic and Kingston Public Hospital (KPH) and the privately operated Jamaica AIDS Support for Life (JASL), all located in Kingston and St Andrew and also the government-run St. Jago Park Health Centre in St Catherine. Mystery Shoppers accessed services at the aforementioned healthcare facilities between October 30 and 31, 2019.

All these facilities were visited for the 2019 Mystery Shopper Assessment Report and so this report will give some insight into how thing have changed since then. CHARES, UWI and St. Ann's Bay Health Centre are two other facilities assessed in 2019 that are not featured in this latest report.
General Assessment

Mystery shoppers in this year’s assessment believed that services were easily accessible at the various health care facilities they visited. They indicated in their respective evaluations that healthcare workers, security guards and other support staff only asked them questions relevant to their respective visits. In most instances, it was reported that healthcare workers showed respect for their gender identity or sexual orientation. This echoes last year’s findings which revealed that there were positive experiences and that healthcare workers engaged were largely respectful and helpful and did their best to provide professional and courteous services. While these were the highlights of the report, unfortunately, the participants are either on the fence or have said that they would not recommend the healthcare centre they went to. JASL was the only facility that mystery shoppers said they would recommend to LGBTQ people. There were issues, too, about the lack of trans-inclusive forms and the lack of official recognition of trans people.

A summary report of the assessment carried out of each health care facility is below:
Two individuals, both of whom identify as trans women, participated in the assessment of the Kingston Public Hospital. Both women, between the ages of 25 and 34 years, went to the facility to access HIV testing/treating. In their respective assessments, the women agreed that it was neither easy or difficult to get assistance at the KPH. One said the healthcare professionals were somewhat respectful towards her gender identity/sexual orientation. She went on to say that her experience with frontline workers was very natural. In last year’s report, shoppers rated the service satisfactorily as they felt that the healthcare workers they interacted with was good. However, that was not the case this time around as documented by the second visitor to the facility. She said in her report that although she did not experience any difficulty to get assistance, respect was not shown for her sexual orientation/gender identity. She further said that her experience with frontline workers was “difficult, especially because of how I witnessed them treating other people.” She did, however, say that both the security and the janitors were pleasant to her and the security kept an eye on her to ensure her safety. Shoppers recommended that the hospital create trans-inclusive forms, train staff in privacy protocols and improve bathroom facilities.
Jamaica AIDS Support for Life

Kingston & St Andrew

Both a trans woman and gay man went to access HIV testing/treating services at the Jamaica AIDS Support for Life based in St Andrew. The trans woman between the ages of 25 and 34 years, said that she was somewhat comfortable with sharing information with the health care workers there. She said that she felt respected as everyone who came and saw her greeted her. She said, “my visit to the health facility I felt comfortable and welcoming and I was respected. And the facility was clean.” She also gave a thumbs up to the customer services representative who she said was pleasant. The gay man aged 18 to 24 years who also visited JASL had a similar assessment of the facility’s service delivery. She said that the staff at JASL was vert welcoming and efficient. He also described his experience with frontline workers as “very profound and professional”. These experiences are similar to those document in the 2019 report where the experience was largely positive for the shoppers and all of them would recommend JASL Kingston to others. In the current report, it is noteworthy that JASL was the only location was that was recommended. Despite their positive experiences, the mystery shopper recommended that JASL hires security guards to ensure safety of clients and to better market their services to the public.
The gay man, aged 18 to 24 and the trans woman, aged 25 to 34, had different experiences on their visit of the Comprehensive Health Centre. The gay man said he was somewhat comfortable with the health care workers, but he did not feel the same in relation to a security guard and porter at the facility. He said, “hey kept on staring at me whenever I walked pass them and also I could hear them making small chatter about me. I found that to be very unprofessional and disgusting.” Contrastingly, he said his experience was mostly good. Last year’s report had a similar account where one shopper, who was a feminine presenting trans woman, did not feel her identity was respected as staff were snickering and staring as she waited to be seen by the medical staff. For the trans woman who visited the facility in this year’s report, she described her overall experience as disappointing. Although her assessment of the facility acknowledged that it was easy for her to get assistance, she did not feel comfortable sharing her information. She also indicated that at no point was she asked about her gender identity and appropriate pronouns that ought to be used. It was recommended that administrators should seek to have a capacity training session/workshop which includes aspects of professionalism with all staff members and install more cameras around the compound so as to monitor the actions of workers who are disrespectful and unprofessional to patients.
St Jago Park Health Centre

St Catherine

A trans woman, aged 25 to 34 years was the only person to visit this health centre. She went there to access HIV testing services. She said it was easy to get assistance and that all the staff members she encountered asked her relevant questions that got her the assistance she needed, despite being “visibly queer”. The trans woman said she was able to state her gender identity and preferred pronouns. However, she said that frontline workers need to work on how to handle queer people. This is in comparison to the 2019 report, where it was generally felt that the frontline workers were cordial and welcoming, with the exception of one shopper who reported that the security guards “had an attitude”. The shopper this year said the overall experience was described as wonderful with the assessor indicating “they tried their best to be as welcoming as possible.” The mystery shoppers recommended the staff needs a bit of work to make sure that the services are improved to trans-inclusive needs, but they are ahead of most when dealing with LGB people.
Conclusions and Recommendations

Generally, mystery shoppers had positive feedback for the health care facilities they visited with very few of them experiencing any real difficulty in accessing services at the respective locations. The need for trans-inclusive forms was highlighted with some mystery shoppers taking issue with their absence. There are still instances where respect was not shown for a mystery shopper’s sexual orientation/gender identity. There were also an instance where a security guard and janitor acted unprofessionally towards the mystery shopper.

With those issues at the forefront, the following recommendations are thus being made:

1. Carry out mystery shopper assessments across a wider cross-section of health care facilities across the island to get a better picture of what is happening island-wide.
2. Conduct human rights sensitisation sessions among security guards and other frontline support staff.
3. The creation and use of trans-inclusive forms at health facilities across the island.
This report was prepared by JFLAG in April 2020. For additional information feel free to email us at admin@jflag.org.