

**Longing to Belong:
Exploring Adolescents' Same-Sex-Attraction in Indonesia**

Benita Florentia

Introduction

It felt like a bolt of lightning struck me as I stared at the words on the test result in my trembling hands: *"HIV Positive."* My chest tightened, my body weakened, and my mind raced. *How could this happen? What will become of me?* The thought of family and friends discovering the truth filled me with fear and shame. *Will I die?* Questions flooded my mind, but one thing remained clear: I would not blame God. This was not his doing; it was the consequence of my choices.

Since I was a teenager, I have wrestled with same-sex attraction. As a pastor's child actively involved in church, I lived a double life that constantly robbed me of peace. Outwardly, I was the "good boy," but inwardly, I fought a battle that few knew. There was a time when, with the help of a spiritual mentor, I began walking away from that lifestyle. But when distance separated us, loneliness crept in. Desperate for connection and acceptance, I slipped back into old patterns, telling myself I was still in control—*still a Christian, serving*. But one compromise led to another, and eventually, my defenses collapsed.

As Nathan confronted King David, I felt the weight of my sin and its consequences. Psalm 51 became my cry: *"Create in me a clean heart, O God."* I realized how much I had tried to manage life on my own. Yet, God's love still reached me in the depths of brokenness.

During my first week of treatment, as I lay weak and in pain, I

cried out to God for mercy and forgiveness. At that moment, He gave me a powerful vision: my body was being consumed by worms and snakes—painful and terrifying—yet my heart was sealed in an iron box, covered by the light, power, and blood of Jesus. I wept. Though my body was suffering, God was guarding my heart. Then I saw Jesus on the cross, bleeding and wounded, and behind Him, I was crucified too. In that sacred vision, I understood that just as Christ suffered for the world, I, too, must die to sin so I can proclaim the message of the cross to the broken and lost. That encounter changed everything. The pain remains, but now my life is fueled by a purpose greater than myself—sharing His unfailing love.

One of my greatest struggles was telling my parents I had HIV. My father, a respected senior pastor, bore not just grief but also the heavy burden of shame. They had many questions about my illness and hospitalization. Yet God, in His faithfulness, held us. Through tears and heartbreak, my parents and siblings found comfort in His grace.

Z shared this powerful journey of transformation during an interview with the writer. Z is one of the founders of *Transformed Life Community (TLC)*, a ministry in Indonesia that supports individuals experiencing same-sex attraction. His spiritual journey, marked by significant inner renewal, has been radically transformed by the grace of God. The Holy Spirit has worked mightily in and through him. Having fully surrendered to the lordship of Christ, Z now walks in the freedom and fullness of God's indwelling Spirit. The Spirit of Christ removes him from the control of the flesh and its capitulation to the power of sin.¹

Backgrounded by the increasing same-sex attraction among Christian

¹ David A. Ackerman, 2019, *Transformation in Christ: Paul's Experience of the Divine Mystery* (Eugene: WIPF & Stock), 122.

adolescents and the urgent need for transformative ministry, the purpose of this paper is to explore same-sex attraction among adolescents in Indonesia through a theological lens, seeking to understand how Christian faith communities can respond with truth, compassion, and grace. By engaging with biblical texts and theological discourse, and by using Transformed Life Community as a case study, this paper aims to provide a framework for transformational ministry. Ultimately, the goal is to call the Christian communities in Indonesia to walk faithfully with adolescents, guiding them toward wholeness in Christ and inviting them to participate meaningfully in God's mission.

Same-Sex Attraction in Indonesia

The number of LGBT cases in Indonesia does not have a definite figure, as not all LGBT individuals are open or willing to acknowledge their sexual orientation honestly.² Research by Alfred Kinsey (1948, 1953) in the United States estimated that gay and lesbian individuals make up 10% of the total population. If using this formula, the number of gay, lesbian, and transgender people in Indonesia would be around 20 million.³ According to a survey conducted by the Ministry of Health in 13 cities across Indonesia from 2009 to 2013, the number of men engaging in same-sex relationships has increased dramatically.⁴ The increase in this group mainly occurred in

² Afdal Maulana, et.al., 2024, "Gambaran Risiko Lingkungan Sosial Lelaki Seks Lelaki di Sumatera Barat," *SENTRI: Jurnal Riset Ilmiah* 3, No. 10, 4750, ejournal.nusantaraglobal.or.id/index.php/sentry.

³ Michael W. P. Wenas, 2024, "Info LGBTIQ," <https://gayanusantara.or.id/info-lgbtiq/>.

⁴ Fitri Syarifah, 2014, "Jumlah Pria Bercinta dengan Pria Meningkatkan di Indonesia," <https://www.liputan6.com/health/read/2041428/jumlah-pria-yang-bercinta-dengan-pria-meningkat-di-indonesia>.

urban areas such as Bali, Jakarta, Surabaya, and Yogyakarta.⁵

Indonesian society generally responds negatively to the LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender) community because they are considered immoral and opposed to religious values and Pancasila (Indonesia's ideology that has five core principles). A survey by Manalastas et al. in 2017 indicated that homonegative attitudes persist in Southeast Asia, with survey data indicating that, on average, four out of 10 Southeast Asians reject neighbors who are lesbian or gay, and that Indonesia and Malaysia are the two countries with the highest levels of homonegativity.⁶

However, over the last few years, the public emergence of the LGBT community has become more noticeable, especially on digital platforms. Shaw observed that the gay community has moved from being a disregarded minority to an increasingly influential part of mainstream public life in just under twenty years.⁷ Previously, this group tended to be secretive for reasons such as shyness due to their different sexual orientation or awareness that expressing LGBT identity was viewed as deviant behavior.⁸ Research by Riadil (2020) showed an emerging trend of limited acceptance among Indonesian youth. These young generations are expressing that LGBTQ individuals can be tolerated in the sense that they are free to do

⁵ Toba Sastrawan Manik, et.al., 2021, "Eksistensi LGBT di Indonesia dalam Kajian Perspektif HAM, Agama, dan Pancasila," *Jurnal Kewarganegaraan* 18, No. 2 (September), 85, DOI: 10.24114/jk.v18i2.23639.

⁶ Susana Tjipto, Elisabeth Haksi Mayawati, and Allan B.I. Bernardo, 2019, "Perceived Threat of Homosexuals in Indonesia: Construct, Measurement, and Correlates," *Makara Human Behavior Studies in Asia* 23, No.2, 182, <https://doi.org/10.7454/hubs.asia.1111219>.

⁷ Ed Shaw, 2015, *Same-Sex Attraction and the Church: The Surprising Plausibility of the Celibate Life* (Downers Grove: IVP Books), 26.

⁸ Ari Wibowo, 2015, "Tinjauan Teoritis Terhadap Wacana Kriminalisasi LGBT," *Jurnal Cakrawala Hukum* XI, no. 1: 97, <https://ejournal.up45.ac.id/index.php/cakrawala-hukum/article/view/191>.

whatever they wish to do, given that they do not express their sexuality publicly.⁹

The majority of Indonesian Christian leaders, youth, and schools indicated that sex outside of heterosexual marriage is generally considered sinful, Christian young people are typically encouraged to maintain complete sexual abstinence, and LGBT sexualities are widely condemned.¹⁰ Some Christians believe it is a form of love expression, and they are entitled to do so.¹¹

The Challenge and Crisis

Adolescents with same-sex attraction may face unique challenges and experiences that can lead to crisis. Some studies indicate that same-sex-attracted adolescents are a group at risk for mental health problems.¹² Homosexual and bisexual youth and adults are more likely than their heterosexual counterparts to report negative mental health outcomes, such as depressive

⁹ Gary Collins Brata Winardy and Eva Septiana, 2023, "LGBTQ-Related Intervention in Indonesia: A Literature Review," *Psychological Research on Urban Society* 6 No.1: 60, DOI: 10.7454/proust.v6i1.1120.

¹⁰ Teguh Wijaya Mulia, 2021, "Agree to Disagree?: An Analysis of the Narrative of a Young Indonesian Gay Christian through the Lens of Intersectional and Poststructuralist Feminism," in *Intersecting Religion and Sexuality: Sociological Perspectives*, edited by Sarah-Jane Page and Andrew Kam-Tuck Yip: 48-49, Leiden: Brill.

¹¹ Eka Putri Jayanti, 2023, "Suatu Analisis Kritis terhadap LGBT dengan Perspektif Kekristenan," *Jurnal Salvation* 3 No.2: 169, <https://doi.org/10.56175/salvation.v3i2.97>.

¹² Brent Teasdale and Mindy S. Bradley-Engen, 2010, "Adolescent Same-Sex Attraction and Mental Health: The Role of Stress and Support," *Journal of Homosexuality* 57, No.2: 288, doi: 10.1080/00918360903489127.

symptoms, suicidal ideation and attempts, anxiety, and substance abuse.¹³ They might experience physical and sexual health problems as well, such as the incidence of HIV.¹⁴ Generally, several factors can contribute to a sense of crisis among adolescents with same-sex attraction.

Adolescence is a critical period for identity formation, including the development of sexual orientation and gender identity. Adolescents who experience same-sex attraction may struggle with understanding and accepting their sexual orientation amidst societal norms and expectations, leading to confusion, isolation, and distress. Developing a separate identity as a sexual minority may create additional, significant, and seemingly insurmountable mental health obstacles.¹⁵

Social stigma, discrimination, and rejection from peers, family, and communities due to their sexual orientation through bullying or violence can have significant negative impacts on the adolescents' mental health and well-being. Violent victimization at the hands of peers is a severely stressful event for same-sex attraction teens, which leads to symptoms of depression, anger, anxiety, and posttraumatic stress.¹⁶

The other factor that can contribute to the sense of crisis is the lack of

¹³ Brent Teasdale and Mindy S. Bradley-Engen, 2010, "Adolescent Same-Sex Attraction and Mental Health: The Role of Stress and Support," *Journal of Homosexuality* 57, No.2: 289, doi: 10.1080/00918360903489127.

¹⁴ Dylan Gilbey, Helen Morgan, Ashleigh Lin, and Yael Perry, 2020, "Effectiveness, Acceptability, and Feasibility of Digital Health Interventions for LGBTIQ+ Young People: Systematic Review," *Journal of Medical Internet Research* 22, No.12: 1, doi: 10.2196/20158.

¹⁵ Suzanne E. Degges-White and Jane E. Myers, 2005, "The Adolescent Lesbian Identity Formation Model: Implications for Counseling," *Journal of Humanistic Counseling, Education and Development* 44: 186, https://libres.uncg.edu/ir/uncg/f/J_Myers_Adolescent_2005.pdf.

¹⁶ Teasdale and Bradley, 290-291.

supportive resources. Many adolescents with same-sex attraction lack access to supportive resources, such as affirming healthcare providers, mental health services, and LGBT support groups. The absence of these resources can leave adolescents feeling isolated, unsupported, and unable to seek help during times of crisis.

These individuals are also at increased risk for suicide and self-harm compared to their heterosexual peers. A study from Lucassen identified that sexual and gender minority youth were more than three times as likely to express symptoms of depression and more than twice as likely to have self-harmed as their heterosexual peers.¹⁷ The inability to disclose sexual or gender orientation, fear of “coming out,” and negative experiences following disclosure were also found to be strong predictors of depression and suicidality.¹⁸ The combination of social stigma, rejection, and lack of supportive resources can thus contribute to feelings of hopelessness and despair, leading to elevated rates of suicidal ideation and behavior.

Biblical Perspectives on Same-Sex Attraction

Same-sex attraction is a complex and deeply personal aspect of an individual’s identity. The nature of a person’s sexual attractions defines his or her sexual orientation. If a person’s primary sexual attraction is toward the opposite sex, the person’s orientation is heterosexual. If a person’s primary sexual attraction is toward the same sex, the person’s orientation is homosexual.¹⁹ Same-sex attraction is a term often used instead of homosexuality,

¹⁷ Clare Wilson and Laura A. Cariola, 2020, “LGBTQI+ Youth and Mental Health: A Systematic Review of Qualitative Research,” *Adolescent Research Review* 5: 188, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40894-019-00118-w>.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 200, 202.

¹⁹ Joe Dallas and Nancy Heche, 2010, *The Complete Christian Guide to Understanding Homosexuality: A Biblical and Compassionate Response to Same-Sex Attraction* (Eugene: Harvest House Publishers), 98-99.

as it is more accurate and acceptable than homosexuality. It describes feelings, whereas homosexuality seems to describe them as people.²⁰ It usually develops over time and is not initially a process of conscious awareness.²¹

Proponents of homosexuality are challenging Christianity. Gay classics scholar John Boswell argued that homosexual unions represent the highest form of love compared to heterosexual marriages, which primarily serve the purpose of reproduction and minimize pleasure.²² For many in today's culture, 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 is considered offensive because it contains homophobic bigotry.²³ Vines and Wilson claim that scholarly research into the historical background shows that biblical authors were not forbidding all same-sex relationships, but only exploitative ones – pederasty, prostitution, and rape. They argue that Paul and other biblical writers had no concept of an innate homosexual orientation, knowing only exploitative homosexual practices, and therefore had no concept of mutual, loving same-sex relationships.²⁴

The Bible clearly condemns homosexuality/same-sex relationships as

²⁰ Joe Dallas and Nancy Heche, 2010, *The Complete Christian Guide to Understanding Homosexuality: A Biblical and Compassionate Response to Same-Sex Attraction* (Eugene: Harvest House Publishers), 107.

²¹ Harding University, n.d., "Same-Sex Attraction," April 15, 2025, <https://www.harding.edu/student-life/counseling-center/same-sex-attraction.html>.

²² Toby Johnson, 2004, *Gay Spirituality: The Role of Gay Identity in The Transformation of Human Consciousness*, New Jersey: Lethe Press, 45-46.

²³ Ian Paul, 2016, "Sexuality and Same-Sex Relationships," <https://www.bethinking.org/christian-beliefs/sexuality-and-samesex-relationships>.

²⁴ Timothy Keller, 2015, "The Bible and Same-Sex Relationships: A Review Article," https://www.redeemer.com/redeemer-report/article/the_bible_and_same_sex_relationships_a_review_article.

immoral. Leviticus 18:22 shows same-sex relationships as detestable. Romans 1:26-27 declares homosexual lust as shameful, unnatural, and evil. 1 Corinthians 6:9 states that the effeminate and men who have sex with men are not righteous and will not inherit God's kingdom. Nothing in the Bible encourages humans to give sex an exalted status. Jesus is the fullest example of what it means to be human, so how did we come to think that the most intense emotional attachments and the most fulfilling aspects of life can only be expressed with sexual intimacy?²⁵ Contrary to Vines and Wilson, Keller explains that the ancients also knew about mutual, non-exploitative same-sex relationships. In Romans 1, Paul describes homosexuality as men burning with passion "for one another" (verse 27), indicating mutuality and not representing rape, prostitution, or pederasty.²⁶

Faithful Christians who adhere to the Bible clearly and unanimously oppose homosexual behavior. However, when it comes to issues of same-sex attraction, debates arise. This is a layer of the debate that is sometimes overlooked: the concept of "homosexuality" may or may not be understood to include desires that are not acted upon.²⁷ Burk and Lambert, in their book *Transforming Homosexuality*, seek to look at the question, "Is same-sex attraction sinful, even if it's not acted on?" They explain:

The only sex desire that glorifies God is that desire that is ordered to the covenant of marriage. When sexual desire or attraction fix on any kind of non-marital erotic activity, it falls short of the glory of God and is, by

²⁵ Kevin DeYoung, 2015, "Putting Sex in Perspective," TGC Blogs, February 3, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/putting-sex-in-perspective/>.

²⁶ Timothy Keller, 2015, "The Bible and Same-Sex Relationships: A Review Article," https://www.redeemer.com/redeemer-report/article/the_bible_and_same_sex_relationships_a_review_article.

²⁷ Aleiah Jones, 2013, "Querying the Church: Christian Church Leaders' Perspectives on Homosexuality," M.A. Thesis, The University of Toledo, 44, https://etd.ohiolink.edu/acprod/odb_etd/ws/send_file/send?accession=toledo1365073437&disposition=inline.

definition, sinful. Again, this principle applies to every one of our desires, including opposite-sex and same-sex desires. The difference is that opposite-sex desire may have the covenant of marriage as its end, or it may not, but same-sex desire can never have the covenant of marriage as its end.²⁸

Burk and Lambert argue that any sexual desire not ordered toward biblical marriage falls short of God's design. Even though the Bible recognizes that we all experience a mix of good and bad desires and that we will all continue to experience sinful desires throughout this life (Romans 6:12; Galatians 5:16), the Bible calls us to handle them rightly, to abstain from them (1 Peter 2:11), to be sober and alert (1 Peter 5:8); and put them to death (Colossians 3:5).²⁹ Same-sex attraction is the result of a broken creation, and in that sense it is "sinful." However, experiencing same-sex attraction is not the same as sinning. Rather, it should be treated like any temptation to sin. It should be fought in a way that recognizes the deceitfulness of the heart and the finitude of the mind.³⁰ For people who experience same-sex attraction, self-denial becomes a daily cross-carrying. Many are laying down desires for sexual and romantic fulfillment for the greater pleasure of Christ, for "in your presence, there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore" (Psalm 16:11 [ESV]).³¹

²⁸ Denny Burk and Heath Lambert, 2015, *Transforming Homosexuality: What the Bible Says about Sexual Orientation and Change*, New Jersey: P&R Publishing Company, 48.

²⁹ Andrew Bunt, 2021, "Transforming Homosexuality: A Review," <https://www.livingout.org/resources/reviews/32/transforming-homosexuality-a-review>.

³⁰ Nick Roen, 2017, "What Is Really Best for Me? Applying the Bible to the Same-Sex-Attracted." <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/what-is-really-best-for-me>.

³¹ Ibid.

A Safe Place

“Lily” was crushed. She had told just one member of her church her secret, and that member warned her that if anyone else found out, she would probably lose her position teaching the youth. She thought she was doing the right thing, that trusting a member of her church family vulnerably in this way was a step of mature growth and accountability, but now she was worried she had ruined everything. What was this secret so potentially harmful that she would be warned to hide it? Lily experiences same-sex attraction.³²

Many Christians and churches still struggle to respond to individuals experiencing same-sex attraction. During a question-and-answer session at the 2014 Together for the Gospel conference, seminary president Al Mohler confessed what he called “the sins of evangelicalism” in responding to the gay community with fear, bravado, and stereotypes.³³ In general, Christians in Indonesia also look down on and consider those attracted to the same sex as great sinners. The church has been in the habit of viewing same-sex sexual sin as more deviant than heterosexual sexual sin.³⁴ Deep down, they long to be heard and accepted. However, the cynical views of society and even the church make them afraid to come out, choosing instead to keep the cries of their heart tightly locked away.

As a Christian community, what does it mean to be a safe space for “Lily” and others like her? First, being a safe space for same-sex-attracted Christians does not mean we condone someone taking the name of Christ

³² Rachel Gilson, 2018, “Loving Christians Who Experience Same-Sex Attraction,” *Christian Research Journal* 41, No. 4, <https://www.equip.org/christian-research-journal/is-civil-discourse-possible/>.

³³ Nick Roen, 2017, “What Is Really Best for Me? Applying the Bible to the Same-Sex-Attracted.” <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/what-is-really-best-for-me>.

³⁴ Gilson, 2018.

and then not obeying his Word.³⁵ Secondly, it means that those who experience same-sex attraction and want to live in obedience would be able to speak without fear of judgment about their reality so that they could receive the support we all need in our walk of faith.³⁶ The Christian community is to treat these individuals as beloved brothers and sisters instead of as second-class citizens, just as Christ also loved and gave himself for his children (Ephesians 5:2). When persons disclose that they are same-sex attracted, Christians should listen and affirm their love for them, as well as remind them that Jesus also loves them. It is not the time to run a theological litmus test or to demand perfection, but a time to bear each other's burdens in love—perhaps a burden this Christian has been shouldering silently for decades.³⁷ Even though the church and Christian communities do not affirm same-sex unions, they should support those with same-sex attraction and their families in constructive, God-honoring ways.³⁸ The Christian community can be a safe place God uses to carry out transformative ministry.

Transformed Life Community as A Case Study

Believing that any sexual relationship or activity outside of heterosexual marriage violates God-given boundaries and that to overcome this sinful nature, one must acknowledge and accept Christ, who has conquered the power of sin, Transformed Life Community (TLC) Indonesia was initiated

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Rachel Gilson, 2018, "Loving Christians Who Experience Same-Sex Attraction," *Christian Research Journal* 41, No. 4, <https://www.equip.org/christian-research-journal/is-civil-discourse-possible/>.

³⁸ Gene Haas, 2002, "Perspectives on Homosexuality: Review Article on 6 Books Dealing with Christian Views on Homosexuality," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 45 (September): 509, https://www.academia.edu/2762701/_Perspectives_on_Homosexuality_Review_article_on_6_books_dealing_with_Christian_views_on_homosexuality_Journal_of_the_Evangelical_Theological_Society_45_September_2002_497_512.

to support those who struggle with and wish to leave the LGBT lifestyle.³⁹

Transformed Life Community (TLC) began unexpectedly when Z assisted a friend's ministry in organizing a retreat for transgender individuals in Jakarta in 2017. Following the retreat, several attendees converted, leading to the establishment of weekly cell groups. These groups expanded to include not only transgender individuals but also those with same-sex attractions. Within this community, Z met two men who would later co-found TLC.

On February 11, 2019, Transformed Life Community (TLC) was established in Jakarta, a community aimed at helping individuals struggling with LGBT lifestyles in Indonesia, particularly Christians, to find renewal in Christ's love and experience restoration. They then formulated their mission statement accordingly:

- Reaching out to those struggling with same-sex attraction and/or gender dysphoria to provide comprehensive and biblically informed information on LGBT issues.
- Walking alongside those struggling with same-sex attraction and/or gender dysphoria, guiding them out of the LGBT lifestyle to become growing disciples of Christ within a healthy and constructive community.
- Assisting family and friends of LGBT individuals in developing skills to support their loved ones during the healing process.
- Equipping the church to minister to those struggling with same-sex attraction and/or gender dysphoria.⁴⁰

They began by meeting with around 15 attendees weekly and created a

³⁹ Transformed Life Community, n.d., "Pandangan Kami tentang Seksualitas," April 12, 2025, <https://www.tlc-indonesia.com/>.

⁴⁰ Transformed Life Community, n.d., "Pandangan Kami tentang Seksualitas," April 12, 2025, <https://www.tlc-indonesia.com/>.

website for contact purposes. When the pandemic struck, face-to-face meetings ceased, prompting the transition to Zoom sessions. This shift enabled them to connect with individuals beyond Jakarta who had reached out to them. By 2022 and 2023, the ministry reached its zenith. Digital platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook proved instrumental in engaging more people grappling with same-sex attraction issues.

The backbone of the ministry is discipleship, in which individuals are helped one-on-one to leave their old lifestyles and learn to be faithful disciples of Christ. The senior mentors are training selected members who have demonstrated growth to become junior mentors, and these junior mentors are responsible for caring for members in a certain region. Over the past five years, they have seen the fruits of this ministry. Individuals have changed their thinking patterns and relationships with friends of both genders and have developed their relationship with God. Approaching with compassion and understanding, ministry to individuals experiencing same-sex attraction has the potential to transform not just their lives but also the lives of their families.

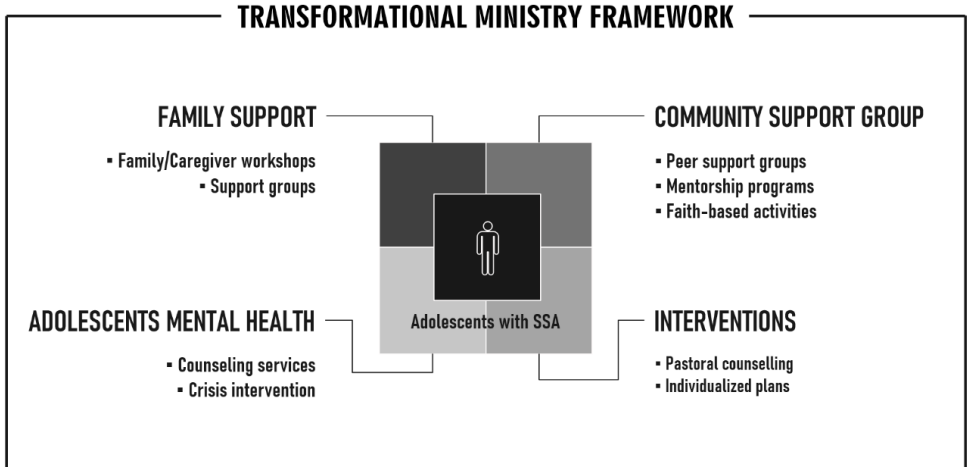
Aside from one-on-one mentoring, either via Zoom meetings or in person, TLC currently operates several ministries. These include a weekly Monday fellowship for TLC members and their families, a Thursday Bible study meeting exclusively for the LGBT, a monthly fellowship for the families and caregivers of TLC members, an annual retreat, and seminars open to the public in collaboration with churches and parachurch ministries. The mentors occasionally speak at different churches across Indonesia as well. Now more recognizable, TLC is expanding its offerings to serve adults, teenagers (TLC Youth), and women (TLC Ladies).

Transformational Ministry Framework

Ministry to adolescents struggling with same-sex attraction has the potential to transform lives profoundly, both the individuals themselves and their

families. By providing acceptance, support, and recognition to these individuals, this ministry can create a safe and nurturing environment where they can explore their feelings and experiences without judgment.

The following is a proposed framework that may be suitable for transformation services for adolescents with same-sex attraction in Indonesia.



Family Support

Family support and acceptance are crucial for same-sex-attracted adolescents’ well-being, as rejection and conflict within the family can exacerbate feelings of crisis. Adolescents with same-sex attraction may feel isolated from their family members or feel hostility associated with their identity. Moreover, they may feel pressured to conceal their identity or relationships from family members, thus producing increased family-based stress. These teens may consider running away from home to cope with anxiety, rejection, isolation, or other family-related difficulties.⁴¹ A young

⁴¹ Brent Teasdale and Mindy S. Bradley-Engen, 2010, “Adolescent Same-Sex-

man whom the writer spoke with was not only in constant fear of his parents discovering his HIV diagnosis but also faced a dilemma over whether to tell them.

Since parental rejection has significantly deleterious impacts on depression, suicidality, risky drug use, and sexual risk behaviors, parental support as a major protective factor against mental ill-health is one key intervention.⁴² The importance of parental acceptance points towards the necessitation of psychoeducation for parents on the positive potential of parental support, the negative impacts of parental rejection, and also psychosocial factors underlying sexual orientation and gender identity.⁴³ In the case of TLC, adolescents experiencing same-sex attraction are encouraged to disclose their struggles to their parents, who are then encouraged to join the parents/caregivers group that meets monthly. Through this group, parents and caregivers can learn from other families with children with SSA. Family support and acceptance have been linked to lower levels of depression, substance abuse, suicidal ideation, and greater self-esteem and physical health.⁴⁴

Community Support Group

Community support groups, where adolescents with same-sex attraction can connect with peers and access resources, can greatly help these teens. A Bible-based support group provides a space for individuals to con-

Attraction and Mental Health: The Role of Stress and Support,” *Journal of Homosexuality* 57, No. 2: 292, doi: 10.1080/00918360903489127.

⁴² Emily Van Der Pol-Harney and John McAloon, 2018, “Psychosocial Interventions for Mental Illness among LGBTQIA Youth: A PRISMA-Based Systematic Review,” *Adolescent Research Review*: 2-3, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40894-018-0090-7>.

⁴³ Pol-Harney, 3.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

nect with others who share similar experiences, build supportive relationships, and find acceptance and belonging within the Christian community. Support from caring, non-judgmental individuals aims to help adolescents change their habits and practice self-control. Some individuals experience a dramatic change in their sexual attractions through a healthy discipleship group, but most changes occur gradually over a long period.⁴⁵

Digital platforms can be one of the means for this group. In particular, Steinke et al. (2017) suggest that a lack of any such supportive community for some sexual and gender minority youth is a valid driver of the need for online LGBTQI+ community groups. This is further supported by Higa et al. (2014), who point out that connecting via online interventions would be especially beneficial for those sexual and gender minority youth who are geographically isolated or who are either not “out” or who are not supported by their families to attend LGBTQI+ groups.⁴⁶ In the context of TLC, the writer has observed that solid support groups have developed both in person and online. They have regular Zoom meetings, one-on-one mentoring, and a WhatsApp group chat, where they can share their burdens, prayer requests, Bible verses, and even discuss trivial matters such as new dining spots. A national retreat is held once a year as a time for spiritual refreshment and fellowship for all support groups.

Adolescents' Mental Health

Adolescents need mental health support to address issues such as depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation. In the wake of increased public attention to the LGBT issues in Indonesia, numerous studies were conducted to address the importance of intervention, training, and psychoeducation

⁴⁵ Focus on the Family, “Struggling with Same-Sex-Attractions,” last updated 2014, <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/family-qa/struggling-with-same-sex-attractions/>.

⁴⁶ Clare Wilson and Laura A. Cariola, 2020, “LGBTQI+ Youth and Mental Health: A Systematic Review of Qualitative Research,” *Adolescent Research Review* 5: 200, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40894-019-00118-w>.

to provide groundwork for educators, parents, and mental health professionals.⁴⁷ Studies examining healthy development among youth with same-sex attraction have documented the fundamental importance of “internal and external assets” (e.g., social competency, familial and extra-familial contexts that offer support, limits, and positive expectations) deemed critical to healthy adolescent development.⁴⁸

Because mental health is vital in holistic care and discipleship, partnering with psychologists and other Christian mental health professionals is important. Equipping teens with tools to handle emotional distress, shame, rejection, and identity confusion is essential for supporting their emotional well-being. The church can play a crucial role through Bible teaching, pastoral care, and educational programs.

Interventions

Effective interventions can significantly enhance the mental and emotional well-being of same-sex-attracted adolescents. One-on-one pastoral care and group therapy focused on identity in Christ, repentance, and spiritual growth can bring about transformation. In healing from past trauma, trauma-informed care is needed for those with histories of abuse, neglect, or early exposure to sexual content.

Interventions will also include the adolescent-family relationship and support for families. Lothwell et al. suggested that, in planning treatment, practitioners should consider opportunities to strengthen the relationship between the child and family or caregiver, guide caregivers in providing

⁴⁷ Gary Collins Brata Winardy and Eva Septiana, 2023, “LGBTQ-Related Intervention in Indonesia: A Literature Review,” *Psychological Research on Urban Society* 6 No.1: 61, DOI: 10.7454/proust.v6i1.1120.

⁴⁸ Carolyn T. Halpern, 2011, “Same-Sex-Attraction and Health Disparities: Do Sexual Minority Youth Really Need Something Different for Healthy Development?” *Journal of Adolescent Health* 48: 6, [https://www.jahonline.org/article/S1054-139X\(10\)00517-3/pdf](https://www.jahonline.org/article/S1054-139X(10)00517-3/pdf).

support, help manage family crises, and decrease interpersonal and familial conflicts.⁴⁹

Conclusion

Adolescents who experience same-sex attraction in Indonesia often wrestle silently with confusion, shame, and a longing to belong—both socially and spiritually. This paper has sought to engage this complex reality through a theological lens, calling the Christian community to respond not with fear or condemnation but with truth, compassion, and transformative love. Drawing on Scripture, theological reflection, and the real-life ministry of Transformed Life Community, this paper presents a holistic framework for transformational ministry that includes family support, mental health care, community-based discipleship, and pastoral interventions.

At the heart of this ministry is the conviction that every adolescent is deeply loved by Christ and invited into a redemptive journey of identity and purpose in Christ. The Christian community in Indonesia is called to walk with these young people—creating safe spaces for honest conversation, fostering healing relationships, and discipling them into wholeness. As the Body of Christ, we are called not only to uphold biblical truth but also to embody God’s grace in ways that restore hope, dignity, and belonging until they find their true identity, their place in God’s family, and their role in his mission.

⁴⁹ Lothwell, et al., 2020, “Mental Health Care for LGBT Youths,” *Focus* 18, No. 3 (Summer): 272, <https://psychiatryonline.org/doi/epdf/10.1176/appi.focus.20200018>.

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