

THE AVERSION PROJECT

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The Aversion Project was a medical torture program during apartheid led by Dr. Aubrey Levin.

It identified homosexual soldiers as conscripts who used drugs in the South African Defence Force (SADF). At this time homosexuality was punishable by law. This was supported by psychiatrists with the idea that homosexuals were mentally ill, which was stated in the American Psychiatric Association's "Diagnostic and Statistical manual of mental disorders". The SADF considered homosexuality to be disruptive so it authorized a program which attempted to cure gay soldiers of their homosexuality. Gay soldiers were conscripted into this program either without consent or through manipulation. The methods utilized included chemical

castrations and electric shock therapy. If these rehabilitations failed, the soldiers then suffered a gender reassignment procedure. As a general practice soldiers were often deserted naked on the operating table after these surgeries. When the project later failed to exterminate homosexuality, it was abandoned and a

number of soldiers were forsaken having received only half of the prescribed gender reassignment surgeries. The results of such atrocious violations of the soldiers' human rights had detrimental effects on their mental and physical health and in the majority of cases resulted in suicide.(1)



It violated many of the rights described in the South African Bill of Rights including the right to: (3)

- ▶ Security and control over one's own body
- ▶ Not be subjected to medical or scientific experiments without informed consent
- ▶ Not be unfairly discriminated against based on sexual orientation
- ▶ Not be tortured or punished in a cruel, inhuman or degrading way
- ▶ Make decisions concerning reproduction
- ▶ Have one's dignity respected and protected
- ▶ Be equal in the eyes of the law, to equal protection and benefit of the law.
- ▶ Life.

Biological impact:

- Hormone treatments such as chemical castration that have permanent effects on physical health including infertility.
- Gender reassignment surgery, which permanently changes the chemical composition of their bodies and their physical appearance.
- The project was abandoned and patients were left having received only half of the gender reassignment treatment resulting in patients that are now half male and half female.

Multiple patient's rights were violated too, including the right to: (4)

- ▶ Participate in decision making on health policies and issues affecting your health
- ▶ Choose a particular health facility for treatment
- ▶ Privacy and confidentiality
- ▶ Informed consent – to be given full and accurate information so that you can make a decision on testing and treatment
- ▶ Refuse treatment as long as this refusal does not endanger the health of others
- ▶ Not be abandoned by a health care professional worker or a health facility which initially took responsibility for your health
- ▶ Complain about health care and have these complaints investigated, and to receive a full report of the investigation

Psychological impact:

- Post-traumatic stress, depression and in some cases even suicide.
- Reduced self-esteem and self-worth.
- Sexual orientation and identity confusion.

Social impact:

- The sexuality of individuals was exposed at a time when homosexuality was illegal and these members of society were abused, shunned and considered to be inhuman

**NO JUSTICE
NO PRIDE**

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2. Free Vector Art, Images, Graphics & Clipart. (2019). Best Medical Cross Snake Clip Art Cdr - Free Vector Art, Images, Graphics & Clipart. [online] Available at: <http://www.ooga-zone.com/2018/best-medical-cross-snake-clip-art-cdr/> [Accessed 1 May 2019].

3. Republic of South Africa. 1996. Bill of Rights (section 7 to 39). In Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. 13th Ed. Cape Town: Juta Law
4. Liebenberg, S. & Pillay, K. Eds. 2000. Socio-Economic Rights in South Africa: a resource book. Cape Town: The Socio-Economic Rights project, Community Law centre, University of the Western Cape. 242