

# Context and Culture of Online Gender-Based Violence Against LBQ People in Bangladesh



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## About Outright

Outright International works with partners around the globe to strengthen the LGBTIQ human rights movement, document and amplify human rights violations against LGBTIQ people, and advocate for inclusion and equality.

Founded in 1990, Outright works with civil society organizations, the United Nations, regional human rights monitoring bodies, governments, humanitarian and development institutions, and philanthropic and corporate partners to create lasting change. With staff in over fifteen countries, Outright holds consultative status at the United Nations, where it serves as the secretariat of the UN LGBTI Core Group.

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## Glossary

**Agender:** Someone who does not identify with any specific gender.

**Anti-Gender Movements:** These are transnational networks composed of diverse actors that oppose “gender ideology,” which they use as a blanket term for social, political, and cultural developments that they perceive as threats to cisheteronormative structures, such as gender-affirming care, marriage equality, and sexual and reproductive justice.

**Bisexual:** The word bisexual often refers to people who are attracted to women and men and/or to people who are attracted to more than one gender.

**Cisgender:** Denoting or relating to a person whose sense of personal identity and gender corresponds with their sex assigned at birth.

**Gay:** A synonym for homosexual in many parts of the world. In this report, gay is used specifically to refer to the sexual orientation of a man whose primary sexual and/or romantic attraction is toward other men.

**Gender:** The social and cultural codes (linked to but not congruent with ideas about biological sex) used to distinguish between society’s conceptions of “femininity” and “masculinity.”

**Gender-Based Violence:** Any type of violence that is perpetrated against a person or group of people because of their actual or perceived sex, gender, gender expression, sexual orientation, sex characteristics, or any perceived violation of gender norms.

**Gender Expression:** Gender expression is how we express our gender through actions and appearance, including attire, speech, and movement. Gender expression is on a spectrum. It can align with social constructs of what it means to be feminine, masculine, androgynous, or any combination thereof. It can also be fluid. For a lot of people, their gender expression aligns with characteristics that our societies deem to be appropriate for their gender or their sex assigned at birth. For other people, it does not. A person’s gender expression is not always linked to the person’s biological sex, gender identity, or sexual orientation.

**Gender Identity:** A person’s internal, deeply felt sense of being a woman or girl, a man or boy, a combination of these, neither, or something else.

**Heterosexual:** The sexual orientation of a person whose primary sexual and/or romantic attraction is toward men, if they are women, and toward women, if they are men.

**Hijra:** In South Asia, “hijra” refers to an identity category for people assigned male at birth who develop a feminine gender identity. Hijras are often considered a third gender. Some hijras identify as transgender, but many do not.

**Homophobia:** Fear of, contempt of, and/or discrimination against homosexuals or homosexuality, usually based on negative stereotypes of homosexuality. Homophobia can be both individual and institutional. Entrenched damaging opinions about same-sex attraction may influence the enactment of discriminatory laws and policies, and how individuals, the government, organizations, the media, and society in general behave towards people perceived as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer.

**Homosexual:** The sexual orientation of a person whose primary sexual and/or romantic attractions are toward people of the same sex.

**Intersex:** An umbrella term that refers to a range of traits and conditions that cause individuals to be born with chromosomes, gonads, and/or genitals that vary from what is considered typical for female or male bodies.

**LGBTIQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer):** An inclusive term used to categorize people whose identities or bodies do not meet cultural expectations of endosex, cisgender heteronormativity. Outright uses the term LGBTIQ as an umbrella term that includes people who may not themselves identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer.

**Men who have sex with men (MSM)/Women who have sex with women (WSW):** Terms to describe those who engage in sexual behavior with persons of the same sex but may not identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, or any other identity-based term.

**Nonbinary:** A term to describe the gender identity of someone who does not identify exclusively as a woman or girl or as a man or boy. This term is sometimes used interchangeably with the term “genderqueer.”

**Queer:** An inclusive umbrella term covering multiple identities, sometimes used interchangeably with “LGBTIQ.” It is also used to describe divergence from heterosexual and cisgender norms without specifying new identity categories. In this report, “queer men” is used to cover gay men, bisexual men, and other men of non-heterosexual sexual orientations, and “queer women” is used to cover lesbian women, bisexual women, and other women of non-heterosexual sexual orientations.

**Sex Assigned at Birth:** Classification of bodies at the time of birth as female, male, or other, based on factors such as external sex organs, internal sexual and reproductive organs, hormones, and chromosomes. Most individuals are “assigned female at birth” or “assigned male at birth.” Typically, the sex assigned at birth is recorded on a person’s birth certificate and some official identification documents. A person’s sex assigned at birth may or may not match their gender identity.

**Sexual Orientation:** The sexual, romantic, and emotional attraction that one has the capacity to feel for others. An individual’s sexual orientation is indicated by one or more of the following: how a person self-identifies their sexual orientation, a person’s capacity for experiencing sexual and/or affectional attraction to people of the same and/or different gender, and/or a person’s sexual behavior with people of the same and/or different gender.

**Sexual Violence:** Any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, or act directed against a person’s sexuality using coercion by any person, regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting.

**Transgender:** A term to describe people whose sex assigned at birth does not conform to their gender identity. A transgender person usually adopts, or would prefer to adopt, a gender expression in accordance with their gender identity, but may or may not desire to alter their physical characteristics to conform to their gender identity.

**Transgender Men:** People designated female at birth but who identify and may present themselves as men. Transgender men are generally referred to with male pronouns.

**Transgender Women:** People designated male at birth but who identify and may present themselves as women. Transgender women are generally referred to with female pronouns.



## Executive Summary

**T**his report on Bangladesh is part of a series that explores online gender-based violence against an often-ignored group of victims—lesbian, bisexual, and queer (LBQ) women and people. Attacks on LBQ people online are colored by both misogyny and homophobia. They take distinct forms, particularly in countries that criminalize consensual same-sex intimacy, that are currently missing from the literature on technology-facilitated, gender-based violence. Beginning in 2023, Outright undertook a study in five Asian countries—Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Vietnam—and surveyed and interviewed close to 500 respondents for a first-of-its-kind look at queer women’s experiences of gender-based violence online.

This report shares our findings from Bangladesh, based on 104 survey responses and 10 key informant interviews, and offers recommendations to policymakers and other stakeholders.

### **LBQ People in Bangladesh**

LBQ communities are often marked by fluidity and openness. Because both sexuality and gender are social constructs, people often relate to the sexual orientation categories “lesbian,” “bisexual,” or “queer,” as well as the gender category “woman,” along a spectrum and with some fluctuation, rather than as simple “yes/no” boxes to check. In Bangladesh, the category “LBQ” is often understood to embrace trans men and nonbinary persons, with 48 percent of all survey respondents identifying as trans men at the time of data collection. For this report, “LBQ people” therefore covers cis and trans LBQ women; LBQ persons who are nonbinary, genderfluid, agender, or genderqueer; and some trans men.

Bangladesh is a developing country in South Asia and one of the largest Muslim nations in the world. The designation of Islam as the official state religion has a significant impact on both state policy and the lives of religious and other minorities. A combination of legal discrimination and social prejudice relegates lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex, and queer (LGBTIQ) people in Bangladesh to second-class citizenship. While the country’s colonial-era “unnatural offenses” law criminalizes same-sex conduct between men, it has also contributed to the marginalization of LBQ people and trans people.

Bangladesh has made some advances toward gender equality, but stark inequalities persist. It ranks 24th in the world and first in South Asia in terms of gender parity according to the 2025 Global Gender Gap Index, which measures parity in

economic participation, educational attainment, health, and political empowerment.<sup>1</sup> However, in terms of reproductive health, empowerment, and the labor market, gender inequality in Bangladesh (0.487) remains higher than that in the rest of the world (0.455).<sup>2</sup> Men dominate the gender power structure and exercise control over women's labor, sexuality, income, and possessions through a system of dominance in both public and private spheres.<sup>3</sup> Patriarchal institutions, from families to the education system and the media, often exercise control over women's sexuality by denying them access to information about sex, sexuality, and reproduction.

Various forms of gender-based violence are prevalent in Bangladesh.<sup>4</sup> According to a 2024 national survey, 76 percent of women have experienced at least one form of intimate partner violence in their lifetime.<sup>5</sup> While less common, women also reported experiencing violence from non-partners: 15 percent suffered physical violence, while 2.2 percent experienced sexual violence.<sup>6</sup> Women also report

<sup>1</sup> World Economic Forum, *Global Gender Gap Report 2025*, June 2025, [https://reports.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_GGGR\\_2025.pdf](https://reports.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2025.pdf), 7.

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Development Programme, "Gender Inequality Index 2023," accessed November 27, 2025, <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/thematic-composite-indices/gender-inequality-index#/indicies/GII>.

<sup>3</sup> Shuchi Karim, "Living Sexualities and Not Talking 'Straight': Understanding Non-Heterosexual Women's Sexuality in Urban Middle Class Bangladesh," *OIDA International Journal of Sustainable Development* 1, no. 6 (2010): 67-78, [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=1672314#](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1672314#).

<sup>4</sup> In addition to the data mentioned, Bangladesh also has the highest rate of child marriage in Asia, a form and cause of gender-based violence, with 51.4 percent of women aged 20-24 having married before 18. See UNICEF Bangladesh, "Slow progress for adolescent girls in Bangladesh, including highest Child Marriage rate in Asia – UNICEF, UN Women and Plan International," March 8, 2025, <https://www.unicef.org/bangladesh/en/press-releases/slow-progress-adolescent-girls-bangladesh-including-highest-child-marriage-rate-asia>.

<sup>5</sup> Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics and UNFPA, "Three out of four women in Bangladesh experience violence, Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics survey finds," October 13, 2025, <https://bangladesh.un.org/en/303253-three-out-four-women-bangladesh-experience-violence-bangladesh-bureau-statistics-survey>.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.



alarming levels of sexual harassment in public spaces, such as in public transportation and the workplace.<sup>7</sup>

Online gender-based violence is a significant problem for women in Bangladesh. According to a 2022 survey of 359 women by ActionAid, 64 percent of women faced some form of online violence.<sup>8</sup> As our research found, this problem may be even more pronounced for LBQ people as a result of the compounding forms of discrimination and harassment that they experience online as well as offline:

- 73 percent of our survey respondents had experienced online gender-based violence in the 12 months preceding the survey.
- Respondents received lewd, offensive, sexual, or hateful comments or sexually explicit pictures, were solicited for sex, suffered attacks for speaking out on LGBTIQ people's rights, and were victimized by impersonation, cyberstalking, and nonconsensual dissemination of private photos.
- The impacts on victim-survivors are far-reaching, with 37 percent of respondents seeking professional mental health counseling and 21 percent feeling compelled to stop using social media due to their experience of online gender-based violence.

Legal discrimination and social marginalization further compound online gender-based violence against LBQ people, while gaps in the relevant legal framework and its implementation prevent victim-survivors from accessing justice.

Comprehensive legal, policy, political, and cultural interventions must be enacted in order to tackle the root causes of online gender-based violence and make online spaces safe for all. Bangladesh should decriminalize same-sex intimacy and ensure

<sup>7</sup> Abir Hakim, "Sexual harassment plagues Bangladesh's public transports," *Dhaka Tribune*, March 8, 2024, <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/341294/sexual-harassment-plagues-bangladesh-s-public>; Nawaz Farhin Antara, "Study reports 70% of nurses face gender-based violence at workplace," *Dhaka Tribune*, December 5, 2023, <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/333078/speakers-70%25-of-nurses-face-gender-based-violence>; ActionAid, "80% of garment workers in Bangladesh have experienced or witnessed sexual violence and harassment at work," June 10, 2019, <https://actionaid.org/news/2019/80-garment-workers-bangladesh-have-experienced-or-witnessed-sexual-violence-and>; Humayun Kabir, Myfanwy Maple and Kim Usher, "Prevalence and risk factors of sexual harassment in the workplace by female readymade garment workers in Bangladesh," *Frontiers in Public Health* 13 (2025): <https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/public-health/articles/10.3389/fpubh.2025.1580709>.

<sup>8</sup> ActionAid, "Research Findings: Online Violence Against Women in Bangladesh," 2022, <https://actionaidbd.org/storage/app/media/Research%20Findings%20Online%20Violence%20Against%20Women.pdf>.

that laws on discrimination, gender-based violence, and digital security equally protect LBQ people in line with human rights norms. The government must work with various stakeholders, including activist groups and online platforms, to develop accessible reporting systems and improve the prevention and detection of online abuse. In partnership with LBQ groups, the government should capacitate authorities, community groups, and service providers to strengthen support for *all* survivors of gender-based violence, regardless of their sexual orientation.

## Recommendations

Online gender-based violence poses a significant threat to LBQ people in Bangladesh, and the findings from the study highlight the urgent need for multifaceted solutions. Addressing this issue requires a comprehensive approach, encompassing individual, community, policy, and structural dimensions.

### Creating a Supportive and Inclusive Legal Framework

Addressing the lack of structural social and legal support is paramount for protecting LBQ people in Bangladesh. A supportive legal framework provides LBQ people with the assurance of protection and justice.

**Solutions:** Decriminalization of same-sex conduct, passage of anti-discrimination and other laws, establishment of legal frameworks to address online gender-based violence, and consistent progress toward a fair and equitable justice system.

#### Recommendations:

- The Ministry of Law, Justice, and Parliamentary Affairs should work with LBQ advocacy groups to draft and pass anti-discrimination and other laws that protect LBQ individuals from online gender-based violence.
- Parliament should decriminalize consensual same-sex conduct.
- Parliament should prioritize the passage of legislation addressing online gender-based violence and ensure that it provides adequate protection and justice for LBQ victims.
- Social media platforms should adhere to local laws and regulations concerning online gender-based violence and actively cooperate with law enforcement agencies in investigating and prosecuting perpetrators.

### Combating Recurrent Online Gender-Based Violence

The high prevalence (73 percent) of LBQ people experiencing online gender-based violence—especially when it occurs repeatedly (with 28 percent of respondents experiencing at least five instances of online gender-based violence in the last 12 months)—necessitates immediate attention to end the cycle of abuse. Recurrent online gender-based violence can severely affect the mental and emotional well-being of LBQ people, making it imperative to provide them with avenues for protection and support.

**Solutions:** Empowering LBQ people with digital literacy and skills to protect themselves from digital perpetrators, providing training on reporting mechanisms, creating user-friendly reporting platforms, and enforcing strict policies against gender-based violence on social media platforms.

**Recommendations:**

- The Ministry of Women and Children Affairs should collaborate with LBQ, LGBTIQ, and women's rights organizations to implement digital literacy and security training programs.
- The Ministry of Information and Communication Technology should work with social media platforms to create user-friendly reporting mechanisms and enforce policies against gender-based violence.
- The Ministry of Home Affairs should conduct specialized training programs for law enforcement personnel on recognizing, investigating, and addressing online gender-based violence cases in an efficient, human rights-based, and non-discriminatory manner.
- Social media platforms should establish dedicated reporting channels for online gender-based violence; explicitly prohibit online gender-based violence related to sexual orientation, gender identity, and sex characteristics; provide clear guidelines on reporting procedures; and promptly investigate and take action against perpetrators.

## Dealing with Anonymous and Unknown Perpetrators

The prevalence of anonymous profiles (42 percent) and strangers (61 percent) as perpetrators of online gender-based violence makes it challenging to identify and combat perpetrators. Unidentified perpetrators contribute to a culture of impunity and increased vulnerability for LBQ people.

**Solutions:** Collaborating with online platforms to improve safety and accountability through tools and policies to efficiently address anonymous harmful behavior while maintaining privacy safeguards, and ensuring that victims of online gender-based violence have accessible and effective recourse regardless of whether the perpetrator is anonymous or not.

**Recommendations:**

- The Ministry of Home Affairs should work with online platforms to develop platform-wide design and policy solutions to disincentivize, deter, detect,

and block harmful anonymous behavior, including by strengthening behavior-based tracking and persistent-abuse detection systems, while preserving privacy safeguards.<sup>9</sup>

- The Ministry of Law, Justice, and Parliamentary Affairs should advocate for reforms to digital security laws, allowing platforms and authorities to address anonymous online behavior in line with international human rights standards. Such reforms must guarantee online anonymity and privacy safeguards and affirm platforms' responsibility to provide quick, effective, and transparent responses to online gender-based violence, regardless of whether the perpetrator is anonymous or not.<sup>10</sup>

## Strengthening Support from LGBTIQ Organizations

LBQ people who reported incidents to LGBTIQ organizations found it very helpful to do so (75 percent). LGBTIQ organizations play a crucial role in providing support and assistance to LBQ people facing online gender-based violence.

**Solutions:** Centering and resourcing LGBTIQ organizations and grassroots groups in responses to online gender-based violence.

### Recommendations:

- LGBTIQ organizations should establish community support networks and helplines for LBQ individuals facing online gender-based violence, and provide resources and training on digital safety.
- Social media platforms should engage with LGBTIQ and LBQ organizations to develop and implement reporting systems for online gender-based violence cases, and provide support and resources for victims.

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<sup>9</sup> Platforms can, for example, implement “digital credential” tools that allow them to detect and block harmful anonymous behavior by multiple accounts linked to the same person or group, while preserving anonymity and privacy. See Andrew Bennett and Max Bevertson-Palmer, “Social Media Futures: How to Reconcile Anonymity, Abuse and Identity Online,” *Tony Blair Institute For Global Change*, March 15, 2021, <https://institute.global/insights/tech-and-digitalisation/social-media-futures-anonymity-abuse-and-identity-online>.

<sup>10</sup> Privacy International has proposed several recommendations on protecting online anonymity while ensuring accountability and redress for online gender-based violence. See Privacy International, “A gender lens to the anonymity on social media debate,” April 4, 2019, <https://privacyinternational.org/advocacy/2778/gender-lens-anonymity-social-media-debate>.

## Enhancing Mental Health and Well-being Support

The need for mental health counseling among victims (37 percent) underscores the psychological impact of online gender-based violence. Mental health support is vital for those affected by online gender-based violence, and it contributes to their overall well-being.

**Solutions:** LBQ-centered or inclusive support groups, sensitization of mental health professionals, and expanded mental health services.

### **Recommendations:**

- The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare should allocate resources for establishing mental health support groups and counseling services specifically tailored for LBQ individuals.
- Mental health professionals should undergo sensitivity training on LBQ issues and create safe and inclusive spaces for LBQ individuals seeking counseling.

In conclusion, addressing online gender-based violence against LBQ people in Bangladesh necessitates a multifaceted approach, involving individual empowerment, community support, policy advocacy, and structural change. By implementing these recommendations, we can work toward a future where LBQ people are free from the pervasive threats of online gender-based violence, can express themselves safely and freely online, and have the support and resources they need to thrive.

## Methodology

This is a mixed-method study where a cross-sectional survey and in-depth interviews were conducted among self-identified LBQ people using both online and offline data collection approaches. A mixed-methods approach was chosen to provide a comprehensive understanding of the prevalence and patterns of violence experienced by LBQ people. Qualitative interviews were deemed necessary to explore the impact of violence in depth and understand participants' decision-making processes, in addition to a quantitative-oriented survey. An extensive literature review informed the design of the survey questionnaire and interview guidelines. A total of 104 survey responses were obtained, and 10 in-depth interviews were conducted.

Respondents were invited through a network of queer organizations in Bangladesh, including through the distribution of an online survey through Google Forms, invitations for in-person form fill-outs, and interviews. They were informed about the study's objectives and purpose through a participant information sheet circulated online through the networks of established queer organizations. The invitation included a link to a Google Form survey with both Bengali and English questionnaires. Before proceeding to the survey, participants were required to provide consent by agreeing to a consent statement. To address the digital divide, offline participation options were offered through the organizations' executive members, and paper questionnaires were provided to those who preferred them. The study aimed to include as many willing respondents as possible to ensure diverse responses. The research team, as part of LGBTIQ communities, had existing relationships with active queer organizations and their leadership, facilitating outreach and collaboration. The researchers' identities as activists and their established relationships with queer organizations ensured trust and enabled the dissemination of research information.

While no specific measures were taken for stratified responses by factors such as age, region, or ethnicity, the diversity of participants naturally emerged from the samples collected. Survey respondents included members of intersectionally marginalized communities, with eight participants from Indigenous groups and four participants with disabilities.

Online data was collected using a bilingual Google Form survey that did not request identifying information from respondents, allowing them to maintain anonymity.



Respondents were provided with a link to the form through emails and social media platforms.

Respondents who preferred to fill out the form offline were also invited to a convenient location. In-person data collection allowed respondents who may not have had internet access or preferred face-to-face interactions to participate. Participants were offered support through email and phone communication for any questions or concerns. The members of the study team were readily available to address any issues or doubts regarding the questionnaire. Participants were assured that their identities and responses would be kept confidential.

Along with our quantitative survey, we formulated a semi-structured qualitative interview guideline. Face-to-face in-depth interviews were then conducted with 10 participants. They were not selected on the basis that they had experienced online gender-based violence, and were not aware of the subject of the report until the pre-interview phase, where their informed consent was secured. We digitally recorded our interviews and transcribed and translated them into English. We developed a codebook to facilitate the creation of a data matrix.<sup>11</sup> Based on the coded data, thematic analysis was used to identify and organize the main findings for this report.

All primary research was conducted in 2023. Precise dates of in-depth interviews were not consistently recorded and are not included in the citations.

## **Limitations of the Study**

The study's findings, based on a sample size of just over 100 participants, are limited in their generalizability. While insights gained from the research provide valuable perspectives, caution must be exercised in extrapolating these results to describe the experiences of the broader LBQ population in Bangladesh.

Additionally, the recruitment of participants through queer activist organizations introduces a potential sample bias, as these individuals may already possess a certain level of awareness and engagement with LGBTIQ issues. Consequently, the perspectives of LBQ people who are not members of such organizations or are unaware of the existence of community groups and activities may be underrepresented.

While we identified a significant prevalence of online gender-based violence among LBQ people and its detrimental effects on their mental health, there were

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<sup>11</sup> We had already identified some codes a priori, but we also found more new patterns in the data.

limitations in capturing associated factors for violence due to the study's sample size and scope.

Furthermore, the terms of reference (TOR) set out by Outright International for research consultants encompassed a wide range of questions on redress mechanisms. However, this country report encountered limitations in adequately addressing these inquiries due to the legal landscape in Bangladesh, which often renders formal complaint mechanisms inaccessible for marginalized communities.

# I. Introduction

## Situation of LGBTIQ People in Bangladesh

In Bangladesh, consensual same-sex sexual acts are a criminal offense through Section 377 of the Penal Code, a relic dating back to the British Indian Government statute enacted in 1860.<sup>12</sup> Section 377 has historically been understood as regulating male sexual relations, and thus is not applicable to women.<sup>13</sup> While the law is rarely enforced, its existence creates an environment where queer women and other LGBTIQ people are marginalized and denied equal rights. LGBTIQ individuals in Bangladesh are subject to “institutionalized discrimination in access to justice and public spaces” and are not seen as equal citizens.<sup>14</sup> According to a 2021 report, queer and trans persons experience assault, harassment, and bullying, fear police intervention, have poor self-esteem, and are unable to openly express their sexual identity.<sup>15</sup> This dual perspective, incorporating both legal analysis and lived realities, is crucial for comprehensively addressing the challenges faced by LGBTIQ individuals in Bangladesh and beyond.

While the constitution prohibits discrimination based on “religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth” and guarantees equal protection of the law, LGBTIQ people do not generally enjoy specific legal recognition and protection. There are no laws in Bangladesh that forbid discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity. Same-sex civil unions or marriages are not legally recognized, and same-sex couples are not allowed to adopt children.<sup>16</sup>

In 2013, the Bangladeshi government granted hijras legal recognition as members of a “third gender” for the “purposes of voting, travel, identity, and other key civic rights.”<sup>17</sup> In South Asian subcontinental culture, the term “hijras” refers to an identity category for people assigned male at birth who develop a feminine gender identity and are seen as a “third gender.” Many hijras identify as “neither man nor

<sup>12</sup> Outright International, “Country Overview Bangladesh,” accessed September 18, 2025, <https://outrightinternational.org/our-work/asia/bangladesh>.

<sup>13</sup> Lucas Ramon Mendos and ILGA World, *State-Sponsored Homophobia 2019: Global Legislation Overview Update*, December 2019, [https://ilga.org/downloads/ILGA\\_World\\_State\\_Sponsored\\_Homophobia\\_report\\_global\\_legislation\\_overview\\_update\\_December\\_2019.pdf](https://ilga.org/downloads/ILGA_World_State_Sponsored_Homophobia_report_global_legislation_overview_update_December_2019.pdf), 172.

<sup>14</sup> International Republican Institute, *Understanding the Lives of Bangladesh’s LGBTI Community*, [https://www.iri.org/wp-content/uploads/legacy/iri.org/bangladesh-lgbti\\_final.pdf](https://www.iri.org/wp-content/uploads/legacy/iri.org/bangladesh-lgbti_final.pdf), 2021, 2.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> ILGA World, *State-Sponsored Homophobia 2019*.

<sup>17</sup> Aengus Carroll and Lucas Ramón Mendos, *State Sponsored Homophobia*, (ILGA World, 2017), [https://ilga.org/downloads/2017/ILGA\\_State\\_Sponsored\\_Homophobia\\_2017\\_WEB.pdf](https://ilga.org/downloads/2017/ILGA_State_Sponsored_Homophobia_2017_WEB.pdf)

woman,” and their identities cannot be fully captured using terminology from the West, such as “transgender” or “intersex.”<sup>18</sup> Despite legal recognition in Bangladesh, they experience social exclusion and discrimination, and typically live “in well-connected groups segregated from mainstream society with a distinct culture of their own.”<sup>19</sup> There is no legal recognition of people who are assigned female at birth and develop a masculine gender identity, including trans men, who made up a significant portion of respondents in this research.

As a result of discrimination and marginalization, people of queer experience in Bangladesh often grapple with severe mental health challenges.<sup>20</sup> While robust data is lacking, preliminary evidence shows more significant negative mental health outcomes among lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people compared to the rest of the population in Bangladesh.<sup>21</sup> The consequences can be fatal. While there is no official data on suicide among LGBTIQ people in Bangladesh, JMBF, a Bangladeshi human rights organization, recorded eight suicides among LGBTIQ people in 2023 and ten suicides in 2024 based on media and online reports.<sup>22</sup>

LGBTIQ organizing in Bangladesh has taken on various forms in recent years, gaining increased visibility in mid-2010. Bandhu Welfare Society, founded in 1996, started its work by serving the health needs of gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men, but has since expanded to include hijra, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people.<sup>23</sup> In 2002, Boys of Bangladesh was established primarily as an informal group of gay men, but it has since started providing health resources to queer communities and mobilizing the public in support of queer people’s human

<sup>18</sup> Serena Nanda, *Neither Man nor Woman: The Hijras of India* (Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1999).

<sup>19</sup> Paul Chaney, Seuty Sabur and Sarbeswar Sahoo, “Civil Society Organisations and LGBT+ Rights in Bangladesh: A Critical Analysis,” *Journal of South Asian Development* 15, no. 2 (2020): 184–208, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0973174120950512>.

<sup>20</sup> Share-Net Bangladesh, “Exploration of mental health needs and support systems among the LGBT population in Bangladesh,” 2015, <https://knowledgeproducts.share-netinternational.org/knowledge-products/exploration-of-mental-health-needs-and-support-systems-among-the-lgbt-population-in-bangladesh>.

<sup>21</sup> M. Kamruzzaman Mozumder, “Life under the rainbow: Self-harm and suicidality among LGBT community in Bangladesh,” preprint, *Research Square*, July 2024, <https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-4688367/v1>.

<sup>22</sup> I Sayed, “Losing Bangladeshi Queers to Suicide,” *iProBono*, accessed September 1, 2025, <https://i-probono.com/download/?id=5564>, 2–3; JusticeMakers Bangladesh in France, *Annual Report 2023: State of LGBTQ+ Rights*, May 2024, <https://www.scribd.com/document/733276261/JMBF-Annual-State-of-LGBTQI-Rights-in-Bangladesh-2023>, 34; JusticeMakers Bangladesh in France, *2024 Annual LGBTQ+ Rights Report of Bangladesh*, May 2025, <https://www.jmbf.org/2025/05/press-release-jmbf-releases-2024-annual.html>, 33.

<sup>23</sup> MenEngage Alliance, “Members Directory: Bandhu Social Welfare Society,” accessed December 11, 2025, <https://menengage.org/members/bandhu-social-welfare-society>.

rights on social media, especially around the mid-2010s.<sup>24</sup> In the same period, in 2014, Xulhaz Mannan and Mahbub Rabbi Tonoy founded Roopbaan, which launched the first Bengali-language queer magazine of the same name.<sup>25</sup> In 2015, Boys of Bangladesh and Roopbaan published the country's first-ever community survey of lesbian, gay, and bisexual people. 571 lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals participated in the survey, shedding light on the specific needs of these groups.<sup>26</sup>

With increased visibility came violent backlash. Organizing took a sharp turn in April 2016, when Islamist extremists killed Roopbaan's founders, Mannan and Tonoy, in a gruesome hate crime.<sup>27</sup> The murders led to growing fear about safety, with public activities discontinued and LGBTIQ activists and groups forced to go underground.<sup>28</sup> Several queer activists left the country to find safety, with some seeking asylum in other countries. The killings of Mannan and Tonoy were part of a pattern of attacks against other public figures espousing more liberal views on sexual and gender diversity. In February 2015, Islamist extremists killed Avijit Roy, a secular blogger who also wrote a book in Bangla about homosexuality, and a similar attack in October 2015 seriously hurt the atheist author and editor Ahmedur Rashid Chowdhury, also known as Tutul.<sup>29</sup> As a result of these violent attacks, public discussion of LGBTIQ people's rights dropped significantly.<sup>30</sup> The struggle for hijra rights largely reverted to advocating for the enforcement of

<sup>24</sup> Michele Benini, "Boys of Bangladesh: new spaces for LGBT visibility," *Il Grande Colibri*, March 13, 2014, <https://www.ilgrandecolibri.com/en/gay-homosexual-banglades>; Ibtisam Ahmed, "Decolonising Queer Bangladesh: Neoliberalism against LGBTQ+ Emancipation," *E-International Relations*, <https://www.e-ir.info/2019/08/16/decolonising-queer-bangladesh-neoliberalism-against-lgbtq-emancipation>.

<sup>25</sup> "First ever LGBT magazine launched," *Dhaka Tribune*, January 19, 2014, <https://www.dhakatribune.com/magazine/arts-and-letters/50788/first-ever-lgbt-magazine-launched>; Mahin E Alam, "রূপবান (Roopbaan): How Queer Bangladeshi students at UBC found freedom and acceptance," *The Ubyyssey*, June 28, 2022, <https://ubyssey.ca/features/roopbaan>.

<sup>26</sup> Boys of Bangladesh and Roopbaan, *Bangladesh LGB Needs Assessment Survey Report*, March 2015, <https://mondro.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/lgb-survey-report.pdf>; Ibtisam Ahmed, "Decolonising Queer Bangladesh."

<sup>27</sup> Ruma Paul, "Bangladesh sentences six militants to death for killing gay activists," *Reuters*, August 31, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/bangladesh-sentences-six-militants-death-killing-gay-activists-2021-08-31>.

<sup>28</sup> Prima Alam and Cicely Marston, "'Bending' against Straightening Devices: Queer Lived Experiences of Sexuality and Sexual Health in Bangladesh," *BMC Public Health* 23, no. 1 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-023-15085-0>.

<sup>29</sup> Inge Amundsen, "The ruins of Bangladesh's LGBT community," *East Asia Forum*, March 23, 2018, <https://www.cmi.no/publications/6489-the-ruins-of-bangladeshs-lgbt-community>.

<sup>30</sup> Pragyna Mahpara, Iffat Jahan Antara, Shrivasti Roy Nath, Nuha Annoor Pabony, "Tracking gender-based violence and backlash against women's rights in the digital space: Cases from Bangladesh," *BRAC Institute of Governance and Development Gender and Social Transformation Series*, <https://dspace.bracu.ac.bd/xmlui/handle/10361/23768>, 40.

government directives, as opposed to the broader community engagement that commenced in the early 2010s.<sup>31</sup>

Recent political events have further impacted LGBTIQ communities. A new wave of anti-LGBTIQ backlash immediately followed the January 2024 general elections, when organized anti-gender actors targeted trans and hijra communities as a reaction to a government textbook that told the story of a trans woman.<sup>32</sup> A few months later, the July Revolution that led to the resignation of longtime prime minister Sheikh Hasina became a “space for dialogue and unity,” where young women and LGBTIQ people led and participated in protests.<sup>33</sup> However, the post-Hasina transition period has emboldened conservative fundamentalists, who have ramped up violence against women and girls, ethnic and religious minorities, and groups perceived to be allied with the Hasina regime.<sup>34</sup> Anti-LGBTIQ violence reportedly increased in 2025, and some LGBTIQ people are fearing for their safety in a country grappling with lawlessness and an “atmosphere of insecurity.”<sup>35</sup>

Despite legal and social prejudice, queer-friendly content is increasingly spreading across social media platforms. Ethnographic research shows that social media has enabled some young people with economic and cultural capital to freely express themselves online, mostly in English.<sup>36</sup> However, aside from those without such capital, this development may not have been equally inclusive of LBQ people. The absence of solid networks excludes LBQ people outside of Dhaka from being reached by LGBTIQ advocacy. Few lesbian and bisexual women hold positions of responsibility in the majority of LGBTIQ groups in Bangladesh, according to an ILGA Asia report in 2021.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>31</sup> For example, in 2014, advocates held the first Hijra Pride and developed the “Dhaka Declaration” to raise the human rights issues of Hijra communities. See Md. Fosiul Ahsan and Zahid Al Amin, “Celebration of the third gender,” *The Daily Star*, September 1, 2015, <https://www.thedailystar.net/op-ed/politics/celebration-the-third-gender-135667>; Aaron Day, “Bangladesh: Third gender hijra groups hold country’s first ever Pride march,” *Pink News*, November 10, 2014, <https://www.thepinknews.com/2014/11/10/bangladesh-third-gender-hijra-groups-hold-countrys-first-ever-pride-march>.

<sup>32</sup> Outright International, *Queering Democracy: The Global Elections in 2024 and How LGBTIQ People Fared*, September 2025, <https://outrightinternational.org/our-work/human-rights-research/queering-democracy-global-elections-2024-and-how-lgbtqi-people-fared>, 43–44.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 45.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 46–48.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 47–49.

<sup>36</sup> Mashaekh Hassan, “The queerization of social media platforms in Bangladesh,” *Dhaka Tribune*, May 7, 2023, <https://www.dhakatribune.com/opinion/longform/310565/the-queerization-of-social-media-platforms-in>.

<sup>37</sup> ILGA Asia, *An Unsafe Haven: Challenges of Bangladeshi LGBTIQ people inside and outside the community*, 2021.

## Zooming In: LBQ People in Bangladesh

LBQ people in Bangladesh face compounded discrimination based on both their gender and sexual orientation, with legal and policy frameworks often failing to adequately protect their rights.<sup>38</sup> In a country where patriarchal norms and customs prevail, LBQ people are subjected to violence as women, on top of violence on the basis of their sexual orientation. The lack of enforcement of protective laws and delays in the justice system create a culture of impunity, leaving perpetrators unchecked. For example, LBQ people “are pressured to enter heterosexual marriages” and, like all women, “are less likely than men to have social and economic independence.”<sup>39</sup> They also lack access to sexual and reproductive health care.<sup>40</sup> Like other LGBTIQ people, LBQ people have turned to online platforms. However, these spaces have seen a rise in hate and intolerance, leading to more threats and negative comments.<sup>41</sup>

Police have used Section 377, generally understood as only applicable to men, as a pretext for harassing, intimidating, and detaining individuals of all genders on the basis of their actual or perceived sexual orientation. In late October 2020, the Rapid Action Battalion, a paramilitary force, arrested two young lesbian women in Patuakhali during a raid. After meeting online, the two left their homes to live together, but the family of one of the women reported an “abduction,” and both were hauled in for an inquiry.<sup>42</sup> In 2024, twelve women and girls were arrested or detained for being in same-sex relationships, attempting to “marry,” or fleeing their homes to be with their partner, according to JMBF, a Bangladeshi human rights organization registered in France.<sup>43</sup>

[https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5a84777f64b05fa9644483fe/t/60b5f55ce39ebd529578e968/1622538224862/Bangladesh+Country+Report\\_ILGA+Asia2021\\_opt2.pdf%20,16](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5a84777f64b05fa9644483fe/t/60b5f55ce39ebd529578e968/1622538224862/Bangladesh+Country+Report_ILGA+Asia2021_opt2.pdf%20,16).

<sup>38</sup> Sida - Styrelsen för internationellt utvecklingssamarbete, “The Rights of LGBTI people in Bangladesh,” December 2014, <https://cdn.sida.se/app/uploads/2021/05/07095104/rights-of-lgbt-persons-bangladesh.pdf>, 1; Prima Alam and Cicely Marston, “‘Bending’ against straightening devices: queer lived experiences of sexuality and sexual health in Bangladesh,” *BMC Public Health* 23, no. 173 (2023): <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1186/s12889-023-15085-0>.

<sup>39</sup> UK Government, “Country policy and information note: sexual orientation and gender identity, Bangladesh,” September 2023, updated June 17, 2025, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/bangladesh-country-policy-and-information-notes/country-policy-and-information-note-sexual-orientation-and-gender-identity-bangladesh-september-2023-accessible>, 10.5.

<sup>40</sup> U.S. Department of State, *2020 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Bangladesh*, 2020, <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/BANGLADESH-2020-HUMAN-RIGHTS-REPORT.pdf>, 33.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 12.3

<sup>42</sup> ILGA World, *Our Identities Under Arrest*, 2023, [https://ilga.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Our\\_Identities\\_Under\\_Arrest\\_2021.pdf](https://ilga.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Our_Identities_Under_Arrest_2021.pdf), 144.

<sup>43</sup> JusticeMakers Bangladesh in France, *An Updated State of LGBTIQ+ Rights in Bangladesh 2024*, May 2025,

Bangladesh has not taken steps to promote public awareness about and acceptance of LBQ people and other LGBTIQ people, train government officials or law enforcement authorities on their issues, or record data on discrimination and violence against them. LBQ people who are also hijras may enjoy limited legal recognition and protection as a third gender, but they continue to experience marginalization, discrimination, and violence.

## Digital Bangladesh

Online communication has rapidly expanded as a result of a government commitment to building a “digital Bangladesh,” the emergence of online news portals, and the extensive usage of social media. By January 2025, there were 77.7 million internet users, including 60 million social media users or 34 percent of the country’s population.<sup>44</sup> However, studies show that women use the internet less than men.<sup>45</sup> The digital space has arisen as a “new space,” mediating all facets of social, economic, and political life as a result of increasing internet use and the global spread of social media platforms. This report defines digital space as any website or application where users can communicate, exchange experiences, opinions, and perspectives, gain knowledge about events occurring both domestically and abroad, and access spaces for organizing, business, and other activities.<sup>46</sup>

During the COVID-19 lockdowns, as everyday activities like working, studying, and communicating were restricted to online platforms, the value and power of the digital sphere became more apparent.<sup>47</sup> For example, Facebook and other social media platforms such as Instagram have grown very popular in Bangladesh during the last ten years, mirroring global developments.<sup>48</sup> As of early 2025, there are 60 million Facebook users in Bangladesh according to advertising data by Meta, the company that owns Facebook.<sup>49</sup> However, this group is skewed toward men, who

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<https://www.scribd.com/document/862935280/JMBF-State-of-LGBTQI-Rights-in-Bangladesh-2024>, 39–44.

<sup>44</sup> Simon Kemp, “Digital 2025: Bangladesh,” *DataReportal*, March 3, 2025, <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2025-bangladesh>.

<sup>45</sup> “Survey finds more Bangladeshis now use mobile phone, browse the internet,” *bdnews24.com*, June 14, 2023, <https://bdnews24.com/business/5x51213r36>.

<sup>46</sup> Pragyna Mahpara et al., “Tracking gender-based violence,” 5.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Fayika Farhat Nova, MD. Rashidujjaman Rifat, Pratyasha Saha, Syed Ishtiaque Ahmed, Shion Guha, *Online Sexual Harassment Over Anonymous Social Media in Bangladesh* (Association for Computing Machinery, 2019), <https://dl.acm.org/doi/10.1145/3287098.3287107>

<sup>49</sup> Simon Kemp, “Digital 2025: Bangladesh.”



account for 63.2 percent of all users. Instagram hosts 9.3 million users in Bangladesh, accounting for just 5 percent of the population.<sup>50</sup>

## Online Gender-Based Violence in Bangladesh

Cyber violence against women and girls is emerging as a global problem with drastic implications for communities.<sup>51</sup> In 2022, research commissioned by ActionAid Bangladesh revealed that nearly 64 percent of female participants had experienced online violence in the last 12 months, up from 50 percent in 2021.<sup>52</sup> According to the survey, in 2022, women experienced online gender-based violence on Facebook (47.60 percent), Messenger (35.37 percent), Instagram (6.11 percent), imo (3.06 percent), WhatsApp (1.75 percent), YouTube (1.31 percent), and other digital platforms (4.80 percent).<sup>53</sup> According to the Cyber Crime Division of Dhaka, 70 percent of women victims of online harassment who filed complaints are between the ages of 15 and 25.<sup>54</sup> Some internet users lack knowledge about the legal restrictions placed on online activities. Even for lawyers, activists, or law enforcement agencies, the possible legal responses to online gender-based violence are not particularly apparent.

Victims face several obstacles to accessing justice for online gender-based violence. Many women who experience violence in private and public settings “in real life” or offline face social and legal hurdles that prevent them from accessing justice, which also extends to online contexts.<sup>55</sup> Online spaces serve as extensions of societal norms and power dynamics, amplifying existing inequalities and vulnerabilities. Discriminatory attitudes and entrenched gender biases often influence how online harassment and abuse against women are perceived and addressed, with victims frequently facing victim-blaming and a culture of disbelief when seeking recourse. Additionally, legal frameworks may lag behind technological advancements, rendering certain forms of online harassment inadequately addressed or

<sup>50</sup> NapeleonCat, “Instagram users in Bangladesh: August 2025,” accessed September 20, 2025, <https://napoleoncat.com/stats/instagram-users-in-bangladesh/2025/08>.

<sup>51</sup> Bangladesh Legal Aid & Services Trust, *Report of Expert Consultation Responding to Violence against Women and Girls in the Cyber Age*, February 2016, <https://blast.org.bd/content/report/Report-of-Expert-Consultation.pdf>.

<sup>52</sup> Tribune Desk, “Study: 63.51% of Women in Bangladesh Face Online Violence,” *Dhaka Tribune*, November 27, 2022, <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/299185/study-63.51%25-of-women-in-bangladesh-face-online>.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. The “other” category includes text messages, cell phones, video calls, and more.

<sup>54</sup> “70% of Women Facing Cyber Harassment Are 15–25 Years in Age,” *Dhaka Tribune*, September 24, 2019, <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/dhaka/188444/70%25-of-women-facing-cyber-harassment-are-15-25>.

<sup>55</sup> Bangladesh Legal Aid & Services Trust, *Report of Expert Consultation*, 6.

overlooked. The intersectional nature of these obstacles further compounds the difficulties faced by marginalized women, including those from minority communities. Within this broader context, LBQ people face unique challenges, as discrimination based on both gender and sexual orientation further compounds violence and strengthens barriers to justice.<sup>56</sup>

## Overview of Legal Context as Related to Online Gender-Based Violence

### Laws Against Gender-Based Violence

The Penal Code of Bangladesh contains several provisions that could be interpreted to prohibit forms of gender-based violence. In accordance with **Section 354**, anybody who attacks or uses unlawful force against a woman with the intent to “outrage her modesty” or with knowledge that such an act may “outrage her modesty” is subject to a maximum two-year jail sentence and a fine. However, this colonial-era law must be subject to scrutiny due to its reliance on the vague concept of “modesty,” particularly within patriarchal contexts where notions of bodily autonomy and integrity are often constrained. This raises concerns about the subjective application of the law, especially regarding behaviors perceived as deviating from societal norms, such as same-sex sexuality or “immodesty.”

Other sexual offenses that do not involve physical contact are punishable under **Section 509**. According to the clause, anybody who intentionally “insults the modesty of any woman” or “utters any word, makes any sound or gesture, or exhibits any object, intending that such word or sound shall be heard, or that such gesture or object shall be seen, by such woman, or intrudes upon the privacy of such woman” is subject to up to a year in jail, a fine, or both. “Privacy” here pertains to the violation of a woman’s personal space or intimate sphere without her consent. This could include actions such as unauthorized intrusions into her private residence, covert surveillance, or any other form of unwanted intrusion that compromises a woman’s sense of personal autonomy and security. This clause allows for the filing of a criminal complaint against alleged abusers, but women

<sup>56</sup> Human Dignity Trust, *Breaking the Silence: Criminalisation of Lesbians and Bisexual Women and its Impacts*, May 2016, <https://www.humandignitytrust.org/resources/breaking-the-silence-the-criminalisation-of-lesbian-and-bisexual-women-and-its-impacts>; Human Rights Watch, “This Is Why We Became Activists” Violence Against Lesbian, Bisexual, and Queer Women and Non-Binary People, February 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2023/02/14/why-we-became-activists/violence-against-lesbian-bisexual-and-queer-women-and-non>.

who experience sexual harassment rarely file complaints on the basis of Section 509, since it lacks a precise definition of what constitutes sexual harassment.<sup>57</sup>

In Bangladesh, the **Women and Children Repression Prevention Act (WCRPA)** is the primary law that criminalizes and imposes penalties for various forms of violence against women, including trafficking, abduction, rape, sexual assault, and dowry violence.<sup>58</sup>

## Digital Security Laws

The country's legislative and policy framework on cyber crimes has evolved in recent years. At the time of data collection in 2023, the **Information and Communication Technology Act (ICT) (2006)** and the **Digital Security Act (2018)** were in force:

- The ICT Act of 2006 criminalized “publishing fake, obscene or defaming information in electronic form” (Section 57). Furthermore, it punished unauthorized disclosure of personal data by up to two years in prison, a fine of up to Tk200,000 [US\$1,640], or both.
- The Digital Security Act, which supersedes some of the provisions of the ICT Act, was passed in 2018. It prohibited the sharing or publication of any digital material that is offensive, menacing, or fraudulent (Section 25), or that intends to slander someone (Section 29) or “hurt religious values or sentiments or to incite hatred and hostility among different classes or communities” that may weaken law and order (Section 31).<sup>59</sup>
- Section 499 of the Penal Code of 1860 governs defamation, which stipulates that an act constitutes defamation if it, among other things, has the effect of damaging someone's reputation. In accordance with the Digital Security Act, a person who defames another person on a digital platform will be penalized by a period of imprisonment not exceeding three years, as

<sup>57</sup> International Labour Organization, *Overview of Laws, Policies and Practices on Gender-based Violence and Harassment in the World of Work in Bangladesh*, 2020, [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/---ilo-dhaka/documents/publication/wcms\\_757149.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/---ilo-dhaka/documents/publication/wcms_757149.pdf), 25.

<sup>58</sup> People's Republic of Bangladesh, The Prevention of Oppression Against Women and Children Act 2000, Act No VIII of 2000, [https://iknowpolitics.org/sites/default/files/prevention\\_act\\_bangladesh.pdf](https://iknowpolitics.org/sites/default/files/prevention_act_bangladesh.pdf).

<sup>59</sup> Section 21 of the Digital Security Act also prohibits negative propaganda against the liberation war of the country from Pakistan in 1971. See Front Line Defenders, “Two years since coming into force, Bangladesh's Digital Security Act continues to target human rights defenders and suppress free speech,” October 8, 2020, <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/pt/node/6150>.

opposed to a maximum sentence of two years' imprisonment under the Penal Code.<sup>60</sup>

These laws granted authorities broad discretionary powers, which they used in some cases to target activists and undermine freedom of expression.<sup>61</sup> Journalists, activists, and other citizens have publicly opposed the governments' efforts to use these laws to silence their voices and censor their activities.<sup>62</sup> On the other hand, authorities have claimed that cybercrime legislation will deter criminal actors.<sup>63</sup>

Since the data collection ended, Bangladesh has reformed its cyber legal regime at least twice. In September 2023, the Digital Security Act was repealed, with the enactment of the **Cyber Security Act (2023)**. However, instead of addressing human rights concerns, the 2023 law retained the 2018 law's draconian provisions, including those criminalizing vaguely defined offenses mentioned above and granting authorities overbroad powers to arrest and detain suspects.<sup>64</sup>

In May 2025, the interim government, led by Nobel Peace Laureate Muhammad Yunus, following the popular uprisings that led to the resignation of Sheikh Hasina, repealed the 2023 law and passed the **Cyber Security Ordinance**. While the

<sup>60</sup> Arifur Rahman, "Cyber harassment - What to do if someone is harassing you online," *The Daily Star*, October 18, 2022, <https://www.thedailystar.net/law-our-rights/news/cyber-harassment-what-do-if-someone-harassing-you-online-3136216>.

<sup>61</sup> Front Line Defenders, "Two years since coming into force, Bangladesh's Digital Security Act continues to target human rights defenders and suppress free speech," October 8, 2020, <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/pt/node/6150>; Humna Rights Watch, "Bangladesh: Scrap Draconian Elements of Digital Security Act," February 22, 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/02/23/bangladesh-scrap-draconian-elements-digital-security-act>.

<sup>62</sup> See International Federation of Journalists, *South Asia Press Freedom Report 2022-2023: Bangladesh*, 2023, <https://samsn.ifj.org/SAPFR22-23/bangladesh>; Amnesty International, "Bangladesh: New Digital Security Act is attack on freedom of expression," November 12, 2018, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/11/bangladesh-muzzling-dissent-online-2/>; Andrew Anderson, "The DSA's assault on civil rights," *New Age Bangladesh*, October 20, 2020, <https://www.newagebd.net/article/119428/the-dsas-assault-on-civil-rights>; ARTICLE 19, "Bangladesh: Digital laws must be transparent and protect free expression," February 26, 2025, <https://www.article19.org/resources/bangladesh-digital-laws-must-be-transparent-and-protect-free-expression>.

<sup>63</sup> Faisal Mahmud, "Bangladesh to tone down 'draconian' digital security law," *Al Jazeera*, August 7, 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/8/7/bangladesh-to-tone-down-draconian-digital-security-law>.

<sup>64</sup> Amnesty International, *Repackaging Repression: The cyber security act and the continuing lawfare against dissent in Bangladesh*, August 2024, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa13/8332/2024/en>; Amnesty International, "Bangladesh: Government must remove draconian provisions from the Draft Cyber Security Act," August 31, 2023, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/08/bangladesh-government-must-remove-draconian-provisions-from-the-draft-cyber-security-act>.

government acknowledged the excesses of previous laws, the ordinance retains the provision allowing police to conduct warrantless arrests.<sup>65</sup> Following a meeting with Yunus in October 2025, Human Rights Watch and other international human rights organizations urged his government to repeal the Cyber Security Ordinance, which they say “fails to meet international standards and contains overbroad and ambiguous terms that pose serious risks of state overreach.”<sup>66</sup>

Another area that could reinforce the legal response to online gender-based violence is privacy protection. While existing data privacy protections are limited, there is some optimism with the introduction of the draft Personal Data Protection Ordinance in 2025, a significant policy milestone aiming to safeguard users’ privacy and other rights online.<sup>67</sup> This legislation could address concerns related to data misuse and other intrusions into users’ data, and could therefore respond to some forms of violence. Human rights and digital rights organizations have called on the government to ensure that the law upholds rights-based approaches to data privacy and protection.<sup>68</sup>

In addition to these legal measures, the Bangladeshi police in 2020 launched Police Cyber Support for Women, a unique support program for women victims of cybercrimes or harassment. Through this mechanism, women can get female officers’ technical and legal assistance, enhancing their sense of security and safety online.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>65</sup> “ Bangladesh scraps controversial Cyber Security Act, introduces new AI-focused Cyber Safety Ordinance,” *BDnews24.com*, May 22, 2025, <https://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/a275a547a07a>.

<sup>66</sup> CIVICUS et al., “ Joint Letter to Bangladesh Chief Adviser Yunus Regarding Follow-up on Human Rights CSO Meeting during UNGA 2025,” October 19, 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/10/19/joint-letter-to-bangladesh-chief-adviser-yunus>.

<sup>67</sup> Article 19, “ Bangladesh: Draft data protection law must protect freedom of expression,” May 30, 2025,

<https://www.article19.org/resources/bangladesh-draft-data-protection-law-must-protect-free-dom-of-expression>;

<https://www.thedailystar.net/slow-reads/big-picture/news/bangladeshs-new-data-protection-act-brittle-shield-or-blunt-sword-2174371>.

<sup>68</sup> Article 19, “ Bangladesh: Draft data protection law”; TechGlobal Institute, “ Statement on the Draft Personal Data Protection Ordinance, 2025 and the Draft National Data Management Ordinance, 2025,” October 13, 2025, <https://techglobalinstitute.com/announcements/tgis-statement-on-the-draft-personal-data-protection-ordinance-2025-and-the-draft-national-data-management-ordinance-2025>;

Human Rights Watch et al., “ Joint Statement on Emerging Digital Laws in Bangladesh,” February 25, 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/02/25/joint-statement-emerging-digital-laws-bangladesh>.

<sup>69</sup> Bangladesh Police, “ Police Cyber Support For Women,” accessed September 1, 2025, [https://www.police.gov.bd/en/police\\_cyber\\_support\\_for\\_women](https://www.police.gov.bd/en/police_cyber_support_for_women).

## II. Findings

### Profiles of Respondents

#### Sociodemographic Profile of Survey Respondents

A total of 104 survey responses were collected. The majority of the LBQ people who participated in the survey were between 20 and 30 years of age (71 percent), with a significant proportion of them being Muslim (79 percent). In terms of education, a considerable number had attained a bachelor's degree (46 percent), while 31 percent declared having a master's degree or higher—making the survey sample a much more highly educated group than the Bangladeshi population on average.<sup>70</sup> Employment status varied, with those with service-related jobs being the largest group (38 percent), while students also constituted a substantial portion (27 percent). Concerning household income, a sizable proportion had a monthly income of less than 20,000 Bangladeshi Taka [US\$164] (38 percent), meaning respondents were generally poorer than average.<sup>71</sup> The majority were never married (79 percent).

**Table 1.** Sociodemographic Profile of Survey Respondents

| Variable           | N (%)    |
|--------------------|----------|
| <b>Age</b>         |          |
| 18-19 years        | 14 (13%) |
| 20-25 years        | 30 (29%) |
| 26-30 years        | 44 (42%) |
| 31-39 years        | 12 (12%) |
| 40 years and above | 4 (4%)   |
| <b>Religion</b>    |          |
| Muslim             | 82 (79%) |
| Hindu              | 6 (6%)   |
| Christian          | 4 (4%)   |
| Buddhist           | 4 (4%)   |
| Other              | 8 (8%)   |
| <b>Education</b>   |          |
| Primary and below  | 2 (2%)   |
| Secondary          | 8 (8%)   |

<sup>70</sup> In 2023, only 7.5 percent of Bangladeshis aged 25 and above had attained at least a bachelor's degree or its equivalent. World Bank Group, "Educational attainment, at least Bachelor's or equivalent, population 25+, total (%) (cumulative)," accessed November 24, 2025, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.TER.CUAT.BA.ZS>.

<sup>71</sup> Average monthly household income in 2022 was Tk. 32,422. "Households income doubled in 6 years: BBS," *The Business Standard*, December 27, 2023, <https://www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/households-income-doubled-6-years-bbs-765050>.

|                                          |          |
|------------------------------------------|----------|
| Higher secondary                         | 14 (14%) |
| Bachelor's                               | 48 (46%) |
| Master's and above                       | 32 (31%) |
| <b>Employment</b>                        |          |
| Student                                  | 28 (27%) |
| Service sector, including public service | 40 (38%) |
| Business                                 | 2 (2%)   |
| Self-employed                            | 8 (8%)   |
| Part-time employment                     | 6 (6%)   |
| Unemployed                               | 16 (15%) |
| Others                                   | 4 (4%)   |
| <b>Monthly Household Income (in BDT)</b> |          |
| Less than 20,000 BDT [US\$164]           | 40 (38%) |
| 20,000–40,000 BDT [US\$164–328]          | 36 (35%) |
| More than 40,000 BDT [US\$328]           | 28 (27%) |
| <b>Marital Status</b>                    |          |
| Never married                            | 82 (79%) |
| Currently married                        | 12 (12%) |
| Others (divorced/separated/widowed)      | 10 (10%) |
| <b>Indigenous Status</b>                 |          |
| Yes                                      | 8 (8%)   |
| <b>Disability</b>                        |          |
| Yes                                      | 4 (4%)   |

While the limitations of the sample pool mean that this cannot be taken as a representative profile of LBQ people in Bangladesh, it is our hope that the conclusions of the research can adequately capture the experiences of a wide range of LBQ people across the country.

## Gender and Sexuality of the Respondents

This section highlights the sexual and gender diversity within the LBQ community in Bangladesh, shedding light on their relationship status and the varied ways in which they choose to come out to others about their gender and sexuality. In Bangladesh, because both sexuality and gender are social constructs, people often relate to the sexual orientation categories “lesbian,” “bisexual,” or “queer,” as well as the category gender “woman,” along a spectrum and with some fluctuation, rather than as simple “yes/no” boxes to check. For this report, “LBQ people” covers cis and trans LBQ women; LBQ persons who are nonbinary, genderfluid, agender, or genderqueer; and some trans men.

**Table 2.** Gender and Sexuality of Respondents

| <b>Variable</b>                                                                         | <b>N (%)</b> |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|
| <b>Gender identity</b>                                                                  |              |
| Cis Woman                                                                               | 30 (29%)     |
| Trans Woman                                                                             | 4 (4%)       |
| Trans Man                                                                               | 50 (48%)     |
| Nonbinary/Genderfluid/Agender/Genderqueer                                               | 16 (15%)     |
| Others                                                                                  | 4 (4%)       |
| <b>Sexually or romantically interested in which gender</b> (multiple responses allowed) |              |
| [Cisgender] Woman                                                                       | 70 (67%)     |
| [Cisgender] Man                                                                         | 20 (19%)     |
| Trans Woman                                                                             | 2 (2%)       |
| Trans Man                                                                               | 6 (6%)       |
| Nonbinary/Genderfluid/Agender/Genderqueer                                               | 12 (12%)     |
| Don't know/Don't want to respond                                                        | 10 (10%)     |
| <b>Relationship status</b>                                                              |              |
| Single                                                                                  | 52 (50%)     |
| With a female partner                                                                   | 38 (37%)     |
| With a male partner                                                                     | 10 (10%)     |
| Other                                                                                   | 4 (4%)       |
| <b>Out as LBQ to (multiple response)</b>                                                |              |
| No one                                                                                  | 12 (12%)     |
| Parents                                                                                 | 32 (31%)     |
| Siblings                                                                                | 28 (27%)     |
| Friends                                                                                 | 68 (65%)     |
| Professional network<br>(employer/colleagues/collaborators)                             | 20 (19%)     |
| Open to the public                                                                      | 4 (4%)       |
| Others (doctor/lawyer/extended family, teachers, etc.)                                  | 22 (21%)     |

A significant proportion of participants identified as trans men or trans boys (48 percent), followed by women or girls (29 percent) and nonbinary or genderqueer individuals (15 percent). A substantial number reported being interested in women or girls (67 percent), while a sizable portion also expressed interest in men or boys (19 percent).

In terms of relationship status, half of the participants identified as single (50 percent), while a substantial portion were in relationships with female partners (37 percent). Additionally, a majority had disclosed their gender and sexuality to friends (65 percent) and, to a lesser extent, to their parents (31 percent) and siblings (27 percent). Only four percent were open to the public about their gender and sexual identity. These findings provide important insights into the diversity and openness of this group of LBQ people in Bangladesh, which is crucial for understanding the dynamics of online gender-based violence within this context.



**Table 3.** List of In-Depth Interview Participants

| ID | Pseudonym | Age | Education Background                      | Profession           | Sexual Orientation | Gender Identity | Assigned Sex at Birth |
|----|-----------|-----|-------------------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------|-----------------|-----------------------|
| 1  | Farzana   | 32  | Master's                                  | Lawyer               | Lesbian            | Woman           | Female                |
| 2  | Sabiha    | 30  | Bachelor's                                | Development work     | Lesbian            | Woman           | Female                |
| 3  | Nupur     | 29  | Higher Secondary School certificate (HSC) | Social work/Politics | Trans Man          | Trans Man       | Female                |
| 4  | Rebeca    | 40  | Master's                                  | Development work     | Lesbian            | Woman           | Female                |
| 5  | Taslima   | 26  | Master's                                  | NGO work             | Lesbian            | Woman           | Female                |
| 6  | Khadija   | 24  | Master's                                  | Unemployed           | Queer              | Nonbinary       | Female                |
| 7  | Zarin     | 25  | Master's                                  | Journalist           | Queer              | Nonbinary       | Female                |
| 8  | Salma     | 37  | Bachelor's                                | NGO work or Business | Lesbian            | Woman           | Female                |
| 9  | Ruma      | 35  | HSC                                       | Showroom Manager     | Queer              | Nonbinary       | Female                |
| 10 | Laila     | 23  | Bachelor                                  | Student              | Trans Man          | Trans Man       | Female                |

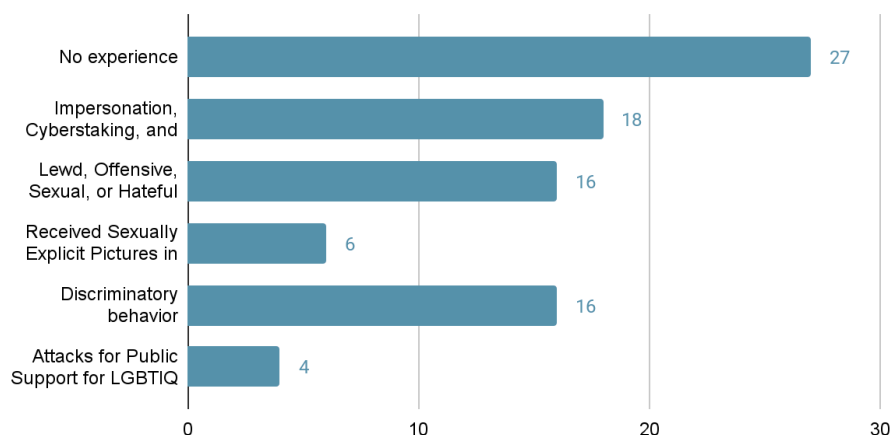
While the pool of survey respondents is representative of the ethnic, religious, and geographic diversity of LBQ people in Bangladesh, the group of interview participants was less diverse. None of the respondents told us that they had a disability or belonged to an indigenous group. Only one respondent, Khadika, lived outside Dhaka, in the Rajshahi division.

## Landscape of Online Violence: Prevalence and Types

Seventy-three percent of the LBQ people we surveyed in 2023 reported experiencing online gender-based violence in the last 12 months. The prevalence of online gender-based violence among this group is therefore nearly 10 percent higher than the national prevalence of online gender-based violence against women reported by ActionAid in 2022.

**Chart 1.** Forms of Online Gender-Based Violence

**Forms of Online Gender-Based Violence Experienced by LBQ People in Bangladesh (%)**



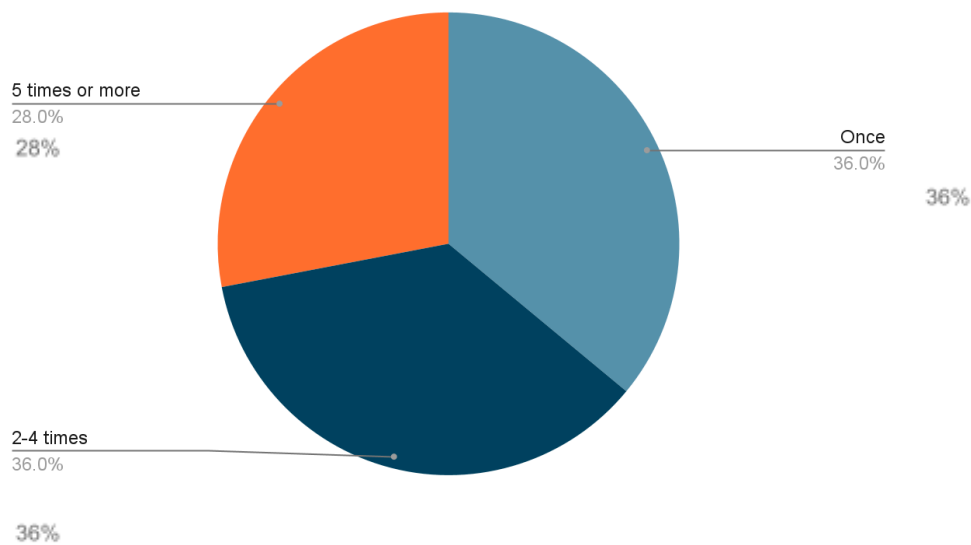
Sixteen LBQ respondents (16 percent) reported receiving “lewd, offensive, sexual, or hateful comments,” while six respondents (6 percent) reported receiving sexually explicit pictures in their inboxes or being asked for sex, underscoring the issue of unwanted advances.<sup>72</sup> “Discriminatory behavior” was experienced by sixteen respondents (16 percent), while four (4 percent) faced attacks for speaking out on LGBTIQ people’s rights, highlighting challenges in advocating for equality.<sup>73</sup> Eighteen respondents (18 percent) reported other negative experiences, including impersonation, being followed in cyberspace, and having their photos posted without consent. Only 28 respondents (27 percent) indicated that they had not encountered any negative experiences.

<sup>72</sup> This portion of the survey did not require respondents to state whether these forms of violence and harassment targeted them on the basis of gender, sexual orientation, both, or on other grounds.

<sup>73</sup> These respondents claimed they “received discriminatory behaviour” in response to the question, “Did you face any of the following in the last 12 months?”

**Chart 2.** Frequency of Online Gender-Based Violence

### Frequency of Experiences of Online Gender-Based Violence

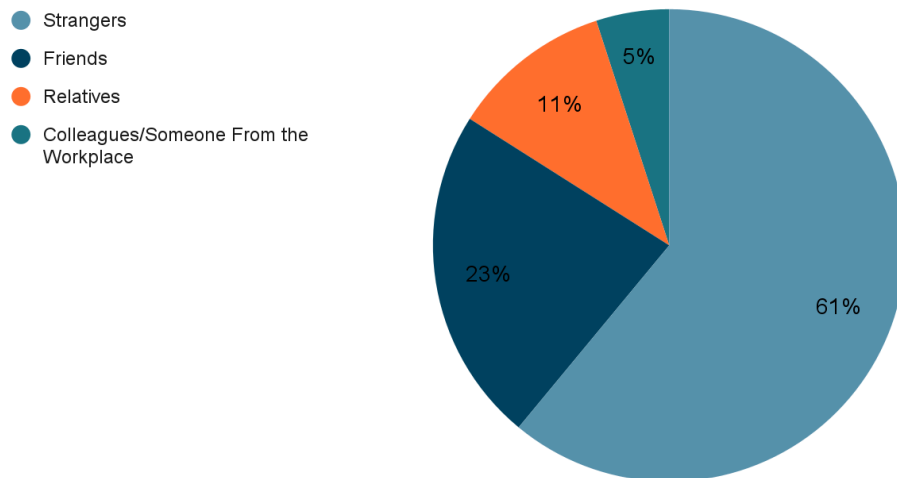


Among those who experienced online gender-based violence, 36 percent reported having experienced it once, while an equal number reported having experienced it on two to four occasions. Notably, 28 percent reported having faced online gender-based violence at least five times, highlighting the distressing and recurrent nature of these harmful experiences. The platforms through which it occurred were primarily Facebook (69 percent), followed by Instagram (20 percent), and WhatsApp (17 percent), with other platforms (Snapchat, Telegram, Viber, Discord) amounting to 5 percent.

In the experience of 42 percent of respondents, the perpetrators were anonymous users, further complicating the identification and resolution of these issues. Furthermore, for 61 percent of respondents, the perpetrators were not previously known to them, indicating the frequency of threats of online violence from strangers. When the perpetrator was known to the respondents, they had only been acquainted with the perpetrator for a relatively short period, with 78 percent of respondents reporting having known the perpetrator for less than a year.

**Chart 3.** Relationship with the Perpetrator

### Respondents' Relationship with the Perpetrator



The relationship with the perpetrators varied, with strangers accounting for 61 percent of cases, followed by friends (23 percent), relatives (11 percent), and colleagues/workplace associates (5 percent). The majority of perpetrators were cisgender men.

All 10 in-depth interview participants told us they had experienced online gender-based violence.<sup>74</sup> All of them declared having been targeted by online bullying, while many of them had received sexually explicit messages, threatening calls and messages, or nude photos without their consent, or experienced cyberstalking, doxing, and losing access to their social media accounts through hacking and blackmail. All of them shared that the perpetrators used anonymous accounts with no photos or personal information. Their perceived motives will be discussed in detail below.

All interview participants said that these experiences took place on Facebook, while a few cases shared that dating apps such as Tinder and Grindr played a pivotal role. Facebook remains the most widely used social media platform in the country, with over 73 million users.<sup>75</sup> One interviewee, Zarin (pseudonym, like all names in the following sections), shared that it is very common among cisgender heterosexual men to harass LBQ people on Facebook due to their diverse gender expressions. Another interviewee, Sabiha, shared:

<sup>74</sup> They were not selected to be interview participants on the basis that they had experienced online gender-based violence, and were not aware of the subject of the report until the pre-interview phase securing their informed consent.

<sup>75</sup> NapeleonCat, "Facebook users in Bangladesh: August 2025," accessed September 20, 2025, <https://napoleoncat.com/stats/facebook-users-in-bangladesh/2025/08>.

It happens both inside and outside the [LBQ] community, mostly by the men. When they find out about our orientation, they get fascinated. Oh, she is a lesbian, so let's explore her...The men who commit these kinds of violence never share their identity. They always use fake accounts. The violence I have gone through, all of them have been committed on Facebook. WhatsApp and Signal are far more secure.

Most of our respondents experienced online harassment and bullying from unknown persons on Facebook, as anyone can send other users messages there. However, it is also evident from our interviews that LBQ people also get unwanted messages from known heterosexual men who are already connected to them on Facebook. Facebook is a widely used platform among community members, and the frequency of online gender-based violence against LBQ people is high on this platform due to its lower security and the ease of access to personal information. As a result, LBQ community members are transitioning to other, less commonly used social media platforms, such as Instagram, that are perceived to offer greater security than Facebook. As Zarin shared:

I have an Instagram account online. I spend very little time on Facebook. If I talk about sexual identity, gender, or sexuality, I would say Facebook has less scope for respect. If I post something on Facebook, it reaches so many people, and that's why the number of hate commenters is also very high. Then, I started using Instagram as there are fewer people here and it's more secure than Facebook.

## **Perpetrator Profiles and Perceived Motives**

The qualitative data give a clear picture of perpetrators and their perceived motives. Based on our participants' feedback, most perpetrators come from outside LGBTIQ communities. They are primarily perceived to be cisgender heterosexual men and perpetrate online abuse through anonymous or fake accounts. Gender is perceived as a motivating factor. Participants and respondents shared that perpetrators get upset when they encounter someone who is not conforming to traditional gender expectations.

Factors like ethnicity or skin color can also further compound violence. Two participants shared that they faced more severe bullying due to their ethnicity or skin color. For instance, Nupur, who is a trans man and belongs to a tribal ethnic group, faced intense levels of discrimination and harassment because he was a transgender man belonging to an ethnic minority indigenous group. Nupur revealed:

I get threatened very often on social media. They are super curious about my gender, whether I am a man or a woman. I'm surviving every moment from death threats, as I'm into politics as well. No one becomes friends with me online, and whoever does, bullies me later on due to my manly clothing. I got stalked by people in my real life as well. One time, I came to Dhaka for a political activity. A man asked me online, 'Are you in Dhaka? Are you in so and so station?' People harass me not only for my gender identity but also for my ethnicity, as they don't consider me as one of them.

Nupur further described the social attitudes that give rise to online gender-based violence:

I don't think I would face cyber-bullying if I would act like other women, talk like them, or dress like them. But I want to show myself outside what I feel inside. The people who commit these heinous things, most of them are men. They think that the birth of people like us is a sin. They just can't accept the diversity in society and consider the non-conventional or nonbinary [expression] as a sin.

Khadija, a queer woman, described an organized group that includes men who pretend to be LBQ in order to enter online LBQ groups and harass community members. Khadija recounted:

Whoever sends me messages, all of them are men. There is a religious fundamentalist group here in Bangladesh. They have a huge headache about our LBQ community...they will chop us off like anything if we hold a Pride march, or if they see us. We were planning to do a Pride march on the road through an organization. But...they threatened us that they would harm us. So, we couldn't hold that Pride later on...When we were preparing for the Pride, we got messages from random people in the group inbox that they would chop us and kill us if we got out.

Similarly, Sabiha, a lesbian woman, shared that some perpetrators are members of organized fundamentalist groups, while others have no clear organizational affiliation, but blackmail victims for money or to extort sex.

Aside from these common profiles, some reported facing harassment from intimate partners, former partners, or even fellow LGBTIQ activists. Some reported experiencing blackmail involving the use of past intimate conversations or pictures, as well as cyberstalking that eventually escalates to offline harassment. Ruma revealed:

I experienced an event of blackmail by my ex-partner. She is actually demanding money from me; otherwise, she threatened to publish our intimate chats and pictures. She harassed me for a long time. I did nothing but share it with our common friends. They intervened and solved the problem. I used to be very anxious and restless at that time. It took a toll on me.

## Impact of Online Gender-Based Violence

The survey reveals notably impactful consequences of online gender-based violence among LBQ people in Bangladesh. Of those who reported experiencing online gender-based violence, 37 percent sought professional mental health counseling, underscoring the psychological toll such incidents can take on victims. Moreover, 21 percent felt compelled to stop using social media and digital platforms after their experience of online gender-based violence.

Interview participants also shared that they suffered from severe mental and physical distress due to online gender-based violence. Each participant spoke about the impact on their mental health, while some revealed they frequently had thoughts of committing suicide. All of them shared that they had experienced depressive symptoms, and a significant portion, four out of 10 participants, recounted delayed progress in their education due to the instability of their mental health. Additionally, all participants noted a drop in their work performance. Some respondents also endured various physical issues as a result of the mental stress they faced.

Sabiha shared that she had experienced intense mood swings as a result of online violence, leading her to withdraw from both online and offline environments out of fear of harassment. This impact still lingers in her life, significantly affecting her education and professional career.

Online violence can also be linked to, or lead to, violence offline or “in real life.” Only a minority of survey respondents reported such links. Nineteen percent reported that online violence was linked to preexisting or concurrent offline abuse, while online violence led to offline abuse for 11 percent of respondents. The other 70 percent reported that their experience of online gender-based violence was not linked to violence offline. A different pattern emerged among interview participants. The majority, seven out of the 10 participants, revealed that their experiences of online gender-based violence escalated into offline abuse, often exacerbating its impacts. Farzana, who experienced harassment both over email and in person from colleagues, recounted:

I already had problems with periods. After the incident of harassment that I faced, it got triggered. Heavy bleeding made me anemic. I had to take hormone injections to arrest the bleeding. That very hormonal injection stopped my period, which I haven't gotten back yet. This was a severe physical manifestation of my mental trauma...I had a huge dream and enthusiasm for working dedicatedly and learning. And after that event, I lost all the energy. I was not fit for work. Altogether, I got into a severe depression. There was a time I used to think of killing myself, that it would have been better if I would die.

## Help-Seeking Behavior: Responses and Impact

Responses from the LBQ people who have experienced online gender-based violence in Bangladesh about their health-seeking behavior reveal several notable trends. Among the 75 survey respondents who experienced online gender-based violence, only 16 (21 percent) chose to report the incidents to any organization or entity, while none reported to government channels. This reluctance to report was primarily driven by a lack of trust in the existing systems (21 percent of the 59 respondents who experienced online violence and did not report) and a lack of knowledge about the proper channels for reporting (18 percent). Instead, a significant portion opted to handle the issue by themselves or with the support of family and friends (15 percent). Among the 16 people who did report, 12 chose to report to the social media or digital platform in which the incident occurred, while four reported the incidents to LGBTIQ organizations. While a majority (eight out of 12) of those who reported to social media platforms found the action taken by the platform unhelpful, three out of the four respondents who reported the incident to LGBTIQ organizations found the support provided to be very helpful.<sup>76</sup> These findings highlight the challenges LBQ people face when seeking redress for online gender-based violence, emphasizing the need for more trustworthy and effective reporting mechanisms, as well as the crucial role of community organizations in providing support and assistance in such cases.

Findings from interviews support the patterns revealed in the survey results. When it comes to seeking assistance, nine out of 10 participants mentioned that they lack a safe space to open up about their mental well-being. All 10 interviewees expressed a strong desire for counseling support that is friendly and welcoming to their community and that allows them, at the very least, to share their emotional

<sup>76</sup> Respondents were asked to rate the support they received through a Likert scale (from not satisfied/helpful to very satisfied/helpful).



burdens. Sometimes, they find support within their own community, helping each other through difficult times.

In the patriarchal context of Bangladesh, it is exceedingly challenging for LBQ people to access formal mental health support from various institutions, and when they do, they may face judgment or ignorance from medical professionals. Sabiha, a lesbian woman in Dhaka and a survivor of online gender-based violence, said that when she experienced panic attacks as a result of online gender-based violence, doctors in four clinics that she visited were “not aware of panic attacks” and unable to help her. In one case, a medical professional treated her violently:

The male doctor slapped me. I was between consciousness and unconsciousness. I couldn't say anything. They pressed me here [pointing to the breast] so badly that I was feeling like dying. They said I was pretending, because mental illness is not an illness, according to them.

Ultimately, Sabiha said, “No one was there to share my sufferings.”

Ruma, a queer woman in Dhaka, also emphasized the need for public mental health care services:

The government is our first resort when seeking help. But the government won't do anything for us, as they don't accept our existence. I long for an organization that would work for our mental health. Whenever we visit their psychiatrists or gynecologists, they would welcome us, and they would listen to us!

However, the legal and policy landscape in Bangladesh is unfavorable or even hostile to LBQ people. An unspoken fear pervades due to Section 377 of the Penal Code, forcing people of queer experience to live discreetly and compromising their online safety. Laws and policies designed to protect women and children from both online and offline gender-based violence lack provisions for specific support to address the needs of LBQ individuals, and as noted above, the Digital Security Act may contribute to censoring the speech of marginalized groups. As Farzana expressed:

The existing law can't protect us against online gender-based violence. We have digital security acts that completely go against our LBQ community. It will not give us protection; rather, it will get us arrested at any moment. So, if we want to get protected, we need to decriminalize LGBTQ activity first. Penal Code Section 377 should be removed at once. At the same time, we

need to modify the law related to digital security to ensure our freedom of speech.

With this sociopolitical context, the security guidelines and policies of online platforms are not enough to protect LBQ people from online gender-based violence. More than half of the participants said that government officials and lawmakers are not well aware of the existence and needs of the people with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities. Participants think that public authorities do not have a basic understanding of LBQ people's lives and the violations they experience. To solve that problem, they stressed that the government should consult with LBQ community representatives to make laws that are effective, realistic, and inclusive. As Ruma suggested:

Whatever policy we have in Bangladesh, including Facebook and peer organizations, they are not enough to control the online gender-based violence against the LBQ community. The legislative body itself does not have awareness about the rights of LBQ people. So, we need not just the modification of laws, but we need to start from the beginning. If any LGBTQ law comes in, they need to go through a series of discussions with the LGBTQ people. This inclusion is very essential because the community people know best what they need.

## **Coping Mechanisms of Victim-Survivors**

The 10 interviewees shared various precautions they took to shield themselves from the effects of online gender-based violence. A common coping strategy was withdrawal from social media platforms. Four of the ten key informants have deactivated social media accounts, while others have removed posts or comments supporting LBQ communities. They have reduced their social media presence by refraining from sharing their thoughts or limiting their activities, constraining their freedom of expression. Many have concealed their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. They now carefully consider each post before sharing it on their social media profiles. They have shortened their friend lists and are cautious about adding unknown individuals. Furthermore, a significant portion of our interviewees have sought alternatives to Facebook due to concerns about its safety. As Rebecca, a lesbian woman in Dhaka, shared:

I never thought too much before posting on Facebook. But now I think at least 10 times before posting anything. I think about who this post is reaching and how they will react. I've lost my spontaneity... Suppose I'm reading news of a gay marriage, I just see the comments Bangladeshi

people make. This kind of hatred prevents me from going online. It is not only hampering my social presence, it affects my real life as well. I keep on thinking about it even when I am walking on the streets...I restricted my social media account and stopped adding unknown persons to my friend list. If anyone makes unwanted comments and judges me, then I remove them immediately.

LBQ interviewees demonstrated strength and resilience even without support from society and family. They shared that they experienced trauma due to online gender-based violence, compounded by isolation caused by harmful social attitudes. However, they did not give up. Two interviewees mentioned that they turned to self-education, learning extensively about sexual orientation and gender identity, which significantly contributed to their mental growth. This self-education journey, coupled with a deliberate effort to boost self-confidence, led to a transformative change in perspective. They came to accept their identity as natural, no longer feeling burdened by societal pressure. Nupur, a trans man in Chittagong division, described his journey toward self-acceptance:

We do not get support from society [or] family. All the events of online gender-based violence had weakened me from the inside. But I studied a lot about the LGBTQ community. I've grown up mentally. I myself boosted my confidence. I thought to myself that I need to work against this discrimination. I have to be established. Then I started believing the truth. If men and women are the gift of nature, then we [trans people] are also the gift of nature. I don't mind these things nowadays.

### III. Conclusion

This study has documented the forms and extent of online gender-based violence against LBQ people in Bangladesh. While existing research has provided valuable insights into the prevalence and nature of online gender-based violence in the country, our report enriches this understanding by focusing specifically on LBQ experiences. By zooming in on this marginalized demographic, we contribute a crucial layer of nuance to the discourse on digital violence in Bangladesh, shedding light on how intersecting identities shape experiences of violence in the digital space. It aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of online gender-based violence in Bangladesh and highlight the need for targeted interventions and support services tailored to the needs of LBQ communities. As Ruma puts it:

I'm tired of reiterating the same thing. We just want a regular life like [any other] normal human being...I expect from the heart that society accepts us and gives us our due recognition. We want to say so many things. We just want someone there to hear us.

The findings indicate areas that would benefit from further research and targeted intervention. We observed a lack of digital security knowledge among participants, indicating a need for targeted education and support in this area. Future efforts should focus on conducting more robust surveys with larger samples to better understand the complex factors contributing to online gender-based violence against LBQ individuals. Moreover, engaging policymakers through key informant interviews would provide a richer understanding of the policy landscape and contribute to strengthening support systems and advocating for policy changes based on research findings. Establishing formal and safe spaces for queer mental health counseling and ensuring ethical reporting practices by media agencies are also critical areas for future intervention and research. By building on the findings of this report, future research can inform targeted actions and policy initiatives aimed at combating online gender-based violence and promoting the well-being of LBQ individuals in Bangladesh.

# Annex

## Annex 1. Online GBV Against LBQ People in Bangladesh: Survey Questionnaire

### Section 1. Sociodemographic Information

|                                                             | Response category & skip                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Q101. How old are you?</b>                               | Completed age in years _ _                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <b>Q 101 a. What is your nationality?</b>                   | Bangladeshi: 1<br>Bangladeshi with other nationality: 2<br>Only other nationality: 3 ☐ END                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <b>Q102. What is your religious background?</b>             | Muslim: 1<br>Hindu: 2<br>Buddhist: 3<br>Christian: 4<br>Other (specify): [space for text]                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>Q103. What is your educational qualification?</b>        | No formal education: 1<br>Primary: 2<br>Secondary: 3<br>Higher secondary: 4<br>Bachelor: 5<br>Masters: 6<br>Doctoral: 7<br>Vocational or technical: 8<br>Other (specify) .... [space for text]                                                                              |
| <b>Q104. What is your employment status now?</b>            | Government service holder: 1<br>Non-government service holder: 2<br>Small to medium business: 3<br>Large business: 4<br>Seasonal/Periodic/Part-time employee: 5<br>Homemaker: 6<br>Self-employed: 7<br>Unemployed: 8<br>Student: 9<br>Other (Specify) .... [space for text] |
| <b>Q105. What is your total household income per month?</b> | _ _   _ _   _ _   _ _   currency                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>Q106. How do you identify your gender identity?</b>      | Woman/Girl: 1<br>Man/Boy: 2<br>Trans woman/Trans girl: 3<br>Trans man/Trans boy: 4<br>Nonbinary/Genderqueer/Agender/Gender fluid: 5<br>Don't know: 6<br>Prefer not to say: 7<br>Other (please specify): [space for text]                                                    |

|                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Q107. Which gender are you interested in?</b>                                                   | Woman/Girl: 1<br>Man/Boy: 2<br>Trans woman/Trans girl: 3<br>Trans man/Trans boy: 4<br>Nonbinary/Genderqueer/Agender/Gender fluid: 5<br>Don't know: 6<br>Prefer not to say: 7<br>Other (please specify): [space for text]                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>Q108. What is your current partnership status?</b>                                              | Single: 1<br>With Male Partner: 2<br>With Female Partner: 3<br>Other (please specify) [space for text]                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>Q109. What is your marital status?</b>                                                          | Never Married: 1<br>Married: 2<br>Divorced: 3<br>Separated: 4<br>Widowed: 5<br>Remarried: 6                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>Q117. Who are the people you have told or who know about your being lesbian/bisexual/queer?</b> | No one: 1<br>Mother: 2<br>Father: 3<br>Sister: 4<br>Brother: 5<br>Children (son/ daughter - specify): 6<br>Extended family (specify): 7<br>Friends: 8<br>Teacher: 9<br>Employer: 10<br>Colleagues at work: 11<br>Employees: 12<br>Doctor: 13<br>Lawyer: 14<br>Landlord: 15<br>Neighbors: 16<br>Open to public: 17<br>Others (Please specify) ... [space for text] |

### Section 1.1: Exposure to Media & Digital Literacy

|                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                            |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Q118a. Do you have any social media account?</b>                          | Yes: 1<br>No: 2 → <b>Q123</b>                                                                                                                              |
| <b>Q118. What social media do you use?</b><br><br><b>[multiple response]</b> | Facebook: A<br>Instagram: B<br>Twitter: C<br>YouTube: D<br>WhatsApp: E<br>Viber: F<br>We Chat: G<br>TikTok: H<br>LinkedIn: I<br>Telegram: J<br>Snapchat: K |

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Discord: L<br>Others (specify).... [space for text]                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>Q119. How much time do you spend in social media in 24 hours?</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | _ _ hours _ _ minute                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>Q120. How much time do you spend in social media in a week?</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | _ _ hours _ _ minute                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>Q120. For what purpose do you use social media platforms?</b><br><br><b>[check all that apply]</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Entertainment: A<br>Communication: B<br>Work: C<br>Education: D<br>Information: E<br>Activism (participation in movements, especially of a 2 political or social nature): F<br>Others (please specify) [space for text] |
| <b>Q121.What type of information do you share on digital platforms?</b><br><br><b>[multiple response]</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Profile information: A<br>Contact information: B<br>Status Update: C<br>Credit information: D<br>Employee record information: E<br>Photographs: F<br>Video: G<br>Others(specify)... [space for text]                    |
| <b>Q121a. On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means “I don’t know what this is or what it means” and 5 means “I know how to do this and could teach others”, to what extent do you think you have the technical skills to...</b>                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>A) Install/Uninstall basic programs and applications for your needs?</b><br>I know how to do this and could teach others- 5<br>I know how to do this by myself -4<br>I would know how to do this with help- 3<br>I know what this is but I don’t know how to do it- 2<br>I don’t know what this is or what it means- 1<br>Does not know- 0<br>Does not answer- 8               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>B) Set up digital services and use tools to increase online privacy and anonymity?</b><br>I know how to do this and could teach others- 5<br>I know how to do this by myself -4<br>I would know how to do this with help- 3<br>I know what this is but I don’t know how to do it- 2<br>I don’t know what this is or what it means- 1<br>Does not know- 0<br>Does not answer- 8 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>C) Check the reliability and truthfulness of the information you come across?</b><br>I know how to do this and could teach others- 5<br>I know how to do this by myself -4<br>I would know how to do this with help- 3<br>I know what this is but I don’t know how to do it- 2<br>I don’t know what this is or what it means- 1<br>Does not know- 0<br>Does not answer- 8      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><b>D) Display self-control when interacting with others on social media and digital forums so as not to react impulsively?</b></p> <p>I know how to do this and could teach others- 5</p> <p>I know how to do this by myself -4</p> <p>I would know how to do this with help- 3</p> <p>I know what this is but I don't know how to do it- 2</p> <p>I don't know what this is or what it means- 1</p> <p>Does not know- 0</p> <p>Does not answer- 8</p> |
| <p><b>E) Identify users who act explicitly in a provocative manner?</b></p> <p>I know how to do this and could teach others- 5</p> <p>I know how to do this by myself -4</p> <p>I would know how to do this with help- 3</p> <p>I know what this is but I don't know how to do it- 2</p> <p>I don't know what this is or what it means- 1</p> <p>Does not know- 0</p> <p>Does not answer- 8</p>                                                           |
| <p><b>F) Know when you are interacting with a bot on social media or digital forums?</b></p> <p>I know how to do this and could teach others- 5</p> <p>I know how to do this by myself -4</p> <p>I would know how to do this with help- 3</p> <p>I know what this is but I don't know how to do it- 2</p> <p>I don't know what this is or what it means- 1</p> <p>Does not know- 0</p> <p>Does not answer- 8</p>                                          |
| <p><b>G) Manage the various profiles that make up my digital identity (social media accounts)?</b></p> <p>I know how to do this and could teach others- 5</p> <p>I know how to do this by myself -4</p> <p>I would know how to do this with help- 3</p> <p>I know what this is but I don't know how to do it- 2</p> <p>I don't know what this is or what it means- 1</p> <p>Does not know- 0</p> <p>Does not answer- 8</p>                                |
| <p><b>H) Adapt my behaviour based on the standards of each platform?</b></p> <p>I know how to do this and could teach others- 5</p> <p>I know how to do this by myself -4</p> <p>I would know how to do this with help- 3</p> <p>I know what this is but I don't know how to do it- 2</p> <p>I don't know what this is or what it means- 1</p> <p>Does not know- 0</p> <p>Does not answer- 8</p>                                                          |
| <p><b>Q121b. On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means "Nothing at all" and 5 means "a lot," how much do you know about...</b></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <p><b>A) The basic features of the digital services you use (e.g., open/closed source, free/private software, etc.)?</b></p> <p>A lot- 5</p> <p>A fair amount- 4</p> <p>An average amount- 3</p> <p>A little bit- 2</p> <p>Nothing at all- 1</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                          |



|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Does not know- 0<br>Does not answer- 8                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>B) The use of personal data by technology companies (Google, Facebook, Apple, Twitter, Amazon, Microsoft, etc.)?</b><br>A lot- 5<br>A fair amount- 4<br>An average amount- 3<br>A little bit- 2<br>Nothing at all- 1<br>Does not know- 0<br>Does not answer- 8 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>Q122.What are the digital security measures you employ?</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Strong Password: A<br>Safe browsing practice: B<br>Multifactor authentication measures: C<br>Being careful in sharing personal information with others: D<br>No digital security measures taken: X<br>Others (specify) [space for text] |
| <b>Q123. Are you connected to any activist groups or civil society organizations?</b>                                                                                                                                                                             | Yes: 1<br>No: 2                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |

## Section 2: Experience of Online Gender-Based Violence

|                                                                                                                                                                                                | Response category & skip                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Q201a. Did you face any of the following online in the last 12 months?</b><br><b>[Please specify in 'others' if you face any negative experience in online other than those mentioned.]</b> | Received lewd, offensive, sexual, or (to women) hateful comments: A<br>Received sexually explicit pictures in inbox, were asked for sex: B<br>Received discriminatory behaviour: C<br>Fake ID created in their name: D<br>Had their activities continuously followed in cyberspace: E<br>Were personally attacked for speaking out on LGBT rights: F<br>Had their private photos or videos posted without their consent: G<br>Received threats of sexual assault: H<br>Received sexually suggestive comments or gestures during Facebook LIVE or educational sessions: I<br>Photographed or recorded during sexual assault and the photo or recording were posted later in online platforms: K<br>Getting trolled for LBQ identity: L<br>Getting trolled for any other issue: M<br>Spreading rumors: N<br>Others (specify) ... [space for text]<br><br>Did not face any negative experience: X → <b>Q318</b> |
| <b>Q201b. How many times have you faced the above-mentioned issues in the last 12 months?</b>                                                                                                  | Single time: 1<br>2-4 times: 2<br>5 or more times: 3                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>Q201c. Do you think these experiences are related to/you faced these because of your gender/sexual identity?</b>                                                                            | Yes: 1<br>No: 2                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <b>Q201. Did the perpetrator make the occurrence anonymously?</b>                                                                                                                              | Yes: 1 → <b>Q204</b><br>No: 2                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <b>Q202. Was the perpetrator known to you before the occurrence?</b>                                                                                                                           | Yes: 1<br>No: 2                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <b>Q202a. How long have you known the perpetrators?</b>                                                                                                                                        | Days _ _<br>or<br>Months _ _<br>or<br>Years _ _                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <b>Q202b. What is your relationship with the perpetrator?</b>                                                                                                                                  | Father: A<br>Step-father: B<br>Mother: C<br>Step Mother: D<br>Brother: E<br>Sister: F<br>Other family members/Relatives: G                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |

|                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                                                                  | Partner: H<br>Ex-partner: I<br>Teacher: H<br>Friend: I<br>Classmate/peers: J<br>Neighbors: K<br>Police/Member of other law enforcement agencies: L<br>Stranger (added in social media account): M<br>Stranger (not added in social media account): N<br>Others (Please specify)... [space for text] |
| <b>Q203. Is/are the person/persons known personalities in the digital platform?</b>                              | Yes: 1<br>No: 2                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>Q204. Did you have prior interactions with the perpetrator before the occurrence?</b>                         | Yes: 1<br>No: 2                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>Q205. What was the gender of the perpetrator?</b>                                                             | Woman/Girl: 1<br>Man/Boy: 2<br>Trans woman/Trans girl: 3<br>Trans man/Trans boy: 4<br>Nonbinary/Genderqueer/Agender/Gender fluid: 5<br>Don't know: 6<br>Prefer not to say: 7<br>Other (please specify) [Space for text]                                                                             |
| <b>Q206. What digital/social media platforms were used for these incidents?</b><br><b>[Check all that apply]</b> | Facebook: A<br>Instagram: B<br>Twitter: C<br>YouTube: D<br>WhatsApp: E<br>Viber: F<br>We Chat: G<br>TikTok: H<br>LinkedIn: I<br>Telegram: J<br>Snapchat: K<br>Discord: L<br>Others (specify).... [space for text]                                                                                   |

### Section 3: Response & Impact of Gender-Based Violence

|                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                             |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                                       | <b>Response category &amp; skip</b>                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>Q301. Did you or anyone else report these incidents?</b>                           | Yes, I did: 1 → <b>Q303</b><br>Yes, someone else did: 2 → <b>Q303</b><br>No: 3<br>Don't know: 4<br>Prefer not to say: 5                                                     |
| <b>Q302. Why did you not report these incidents?</b><br><b>[check all that apply]</b> | It did not occur to me: A<br>I didn't know how or where to report it: B<br>I dealt with it myself or with help from family or friends: C<br>I was too upset to report it: D |

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | <p>I was ashamed, embarrassed or didn't want anyone to know: E</p> <p>I didn't want to reveal my sexual orientation or gender identity: F</p> <p>I was afraid of intimidation or retaliation by the perpetrator(s): G</p> <p>I didn't want the perpetrator(s) to get into trouble: H</p> <p>I felt it wasn't worth it or nothing would happen or change: I <b>Q318</b></p> <p>I thought it was too minor, not serious enough or 'happens all the time': J</p> <p>I thought I wouldn't be believed: K</p> <p>I thought it wouldn't be taken seriously enough: L</p> <p>I had a bad experience reporting an incident in the past: M</p> <p>Someone stopped or discouraged me: N</p> <p>Prefer not to say: X</p> <p>Other (please specify) [space for text]</p> |
| <p><b>Q303. Where was this/these incident/s reported to?</b></p> <p><b>[check all that apply]</b></p>                                                                                                                | <p>Social media/digital platform where it occurred: A</p> <p>Government authorities implementing digital security act/policy: B</p> <p>Non-gov authorities implementing digital security act/policy: C</p> <p>Police: D</p> <p>LGBT organization or charity: E</p> <p>Other external organization or charity: F</p> <p>Prefer not to say: G</p> <p>Other (please specify): [space for text]</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <p><b>Q304. How helpful were social media authorities in handling your report?</b></p> <p><b>[Answer only if you reported to social media platform]</b></p>                                                          | <p>Very helpful: 1</p> <p>Somewhat helpful: 2</p> <p>Neither helpful nor unhelpful: 3</p> <p>Not very helpful: 4</p> <p>Not at all helpful: 5</p> <p>Prefer not to say: 6</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <p><b>Q305. How satisfied or unsatisfied were you with how the social media platform handled your incident/report?</b></p> <p><b>[Answer only if you report to social media platform]</b></p>                        | <p>Very satisfied: 1</p> <p>Somewhat satisfied: 2</p> <p>Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied: 3</p> <p>Not very satisfied: 4</p> <p>Not at all satisfied: 5</p> <p>Prefer not to say: 6</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <p><b>Q306. How helpful were national digital security implementing authorities in handling your report?</b></p> <p><b>[Answer only if you reported to any national digital security implementing authority]</b></p> | <p>Very helpful: 1</p> <p>Somewhat helpful: 2</p> <p>Neither helpful nor unhelpful: 3</p> <p>Not very helpful: 4</p> <p>Not at all helpful: 5</p> <p>Prefer not to say: 6</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                             |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><b>Q307. How satisfied or unsatisfied were you with how the national digital security implementing authorities handled your incident/report?</b></p> <p><b>[Answer only if you reported to any national digital security implementing authority]</b></p> | <p>Very satisfied: 1<br/>Somewhat satisfied: 2<br/>Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied: 3<br/>Not very satisfied: 4<br/>Not at all satisfied: 5<br/>Prefer not to say: 6</p> |
| <p><b>Q308. How helpful were LGBT organizations in handling your report?</b></p> <p><b>[Answer only if you reported to LGBT organization]</b></p>                                                                                                           | <p>Very helpful: 1<br/>Somewhat helpful: 2<br/>Neither helpful nor unhelpful: 3<br/>Not very helpful: 4<br/>Not at all helpful: 5<br/>Prefer not to say: 6</p>              |
| <p><b>Q309. How satisfied or unsatisfied were you with how the LGBT organization handled your incident/report?</b></p> <p><b>[Answer only if you reported to LGBT organization]</b></p>                                                                     | <p>Very satisfied: 1<br/>Somewhat satisfied: 2<br/>Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied: 3<br/>Not very satisfied: 4<br/>Not at all satisfied: 5<br/>Prefer not to say: 6</p> |
| <p><b>Q310. How helpful were other NGO/organizations in handling your report?</b></p> <p><b>[Answer only if you reported to other NGO/organization]</b></p>                                                                                                 | <p>Very helpful: 1<br/>Somewhat helpful: 2<br/>Neither helpful nor unhelpful: 3<br/>Not very helpful: 4<br/>Not at all helpful: 5<br/>Prefer not to say: 6</p>              |
| <p><b>Q311. How satisfied or unsatisfied were you with how the other organization/NGO handled your incident/report?</b></p> <p><b>[Answer only if you reported to other organization/NGO]</b></p>                                                           | <p>Very satisfied: 1<br/>Somewhat satisfied: 2<br/>Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied: 3<br/>Not very satisfied: 4<br/>Not at all satisfied: 5<br/>Prefer not to say: 6</p> |
| <p><b>Q312. How helpful were Police/law enforcement authority in handling your report?</b></p> <p><b>[Answer only if you reported to Police/law enforcement authority]</b></p>                                                                              | <p>Very helpful: 1<br/>Somewhat helpful: 2<br/>Neither helpful nor unhelpful: 3<br/>Not very helpful: 4<br/>Not at all helpful: 5<br/>Prefer not to say: 6</p>              |
| <p><b>Q313. How satisfied or unsatisfied were you with how the Police/law enforcement authority handled your incident/report?</b></p> <p><b>[Answer only if you reported to Police/law enforcement authority]</b></p>                                       | <p>Very satisfied: 1<br/>Somewhat satisfied: 2<br/>Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied: 3<br/>Not very satisfied: 4<br/>Not at all satisfied: 5<br/>Prefer not to say: 6</p> |
| <p><b>Q313a. What action were taken due to your report?</b></p> <p><b>[check all that apply]</b></p>                                                                                                                                                        | <p>Removed the content: A<br/>Removed the account of the perpetrator: B<br/>Took legal action against the perpetrator: C<br/>Others(specify)... [space for text]</p>        |

|                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                    |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Q314. Did you face any discrimination for your gender or sexual identity while seeking help for these incidents?</b>                                                     | Yes: 1<br>No: 2 <b>Q316</b>                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>Q314a. What kind of discrimination did you face?</b><br><br>[check all that apply]                                                                                       | Refused to take complaints: A<br>Complaint was not taken seriously: B<br>Get mocked/harassed for gender/sexual identity: C<br>Other (specify) ... [space for text] |
| <b>Q316. In the past 12 months, did you need to attend any mental health services? For example, talking treatments such as counselling and therapy for these incidents?</b> | Yes.....1<br>No.....2                                                                                                                                              |
| <b>Q317. In the past 12 months, did you need to withdraw your participation from the digital platforms due to this incident?</b>                                            | Yes.....1<br>No.....2                                                                                                                                              |
| <b>Q318. Do you know where you can report online/cyber violence?</b>                                                                                                        | Yes: 1<br>No: 2                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>Q319. Do you have anyone to talk to or consult to if you face online violence, particularly because of your gender or sexual identity?</b>                               | Yes: 1<br>No: 2                                                                                                                                                    |

## Annex 2: Online GBV Against LBQ People in Bangladesh: In-Depth Interview Guidelines

### Demographics of Victim

|                                   |  |                            |  |
|-----------------------------------|--|----------------------------|--|
| <b>Name (if willing to share)</b> |  | <b>Education level</b>     |  |
| <b>Age</b>                        |  | <b>Profession</b>          |  |
| <b>Gender expression</b>          |  | <b>Gender attracted to</b> |  |

### Particulars of Online Gender-Based Violence Incidents

- Did you face any violence on social media? If yes, then...
- What do you think, who were the people or who was the person who committed this incident?
  - Are they related to you by any means?
  - Were they known earlier?
  - What are their gender identities?
  - Are they famous on social media?
  - Are they the followers of any specific trend? What is that?
  - Do they belong to any organized group? If yes, then please elaborate that.
- How many incidents did you experience? Did you experience it once or multiple times? And was it always the same person or persons causing the incidents?
- I'd like to share with you a list of types of online actions that were used against you. Please answer Yes or No. If you're not sure or don't know, you can say Not Sure.
  - Life threats
  - Doxing
  - Bullying
  - Calling bad names
  - Leaving humiliating comments on social media posts
  - Messaging in a sexually explicit manner
  - Sharing nudes without consent
  - Constant pushing for sexual intimacy in the chat
  - Cyberstalking and harassment
  - Gender-based discriminatory memes and posts
  - Posting edited nudes of the victims
  - Opening fake accounts using victim's name and identity
  - Hacking social media accounts
  - Blackmailing based on previous chats
  - Posting screenshots of earlier chats

5. Does the person causing the online GBV incident share their personal information on social media?
  - To what extent do they share?
  - Do they use anonymous IDs?
  - What kind of social media was it?

### Context

1. What might be the possible motives behind perpetrators' actions according to you? Please provide details to help explain the situation.
  - Was it based on your personal relationship or online conversation with them?
  - Did you perceive their actions were motivated by hostility against LBQ people or other minority groups (LGBTQI, Women, human rights defenders etc)?
  - Was the act motivated by state sponsorship, religion or any organized group?
  - Did any offline event motivate the act? When did that happen? Was it planned for LBQ people?
2. Do you think the act was only targeted due to your sexuality, gender identity or expression?
  - Do you think your orientation and gender expression played an intensifying role?
  - What else do you think was being targeted -- ethnicity, economic status, caste, religion, physical disability, medical condition or something else?

### Intent

1. Can you tell me what was the intention of the perpetrator?
  - Was it due to any personal issue? Please explain.
  - Was their intention to prevent you from going online and restrict your influence?
  - Was there any intention to isolate you from your fellow profiles?
2. What online methods were used to commit the incident?
  - What platform was used?
  - Was it one platform or several - what were they?

### Impacts

1. How did the online incidents impact you? Please provide details.
  - Did it hamper your presence on digital platforms?
  - Did it hamper your freedom of expression?
  - Did it cause you to hide your SOGI (Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity) and go into the closet?
  - Did it hamper any of your rights?
  - Did it affect your performance at work
  - Did it affect your school work or education?
  - Did it affect your physical health?



- Did it affect your emotional state?
- Did it affect your mental state?

## Remedies

1. Did you report this act to anyone? If yes, then...
  - To whom? Was it the digital platform itself? If yes, then -?
  - Was the digital platform able to provide you with any solution? Tell me the mechanism.
  - Did they have any provision for people with LBQ identities?
  - Was the solution helpful for addressing the violence that has been committed upon you?
  - Was the solution easily accessible or prompt enough? Did you face any harassment while seeking help?
  - Was there any specific issue of your complaint that was overlooked? What is/are that?
2. Did you seek help from the government institution? If yes, then...
  - Were there any available remedies in the government Institution?
  - What kind of redress was available? What were the mechanisms?
  - Was there any separate remedy for LBQ people except the digital security act?
  - Did you face any harassment due to your sexual orientation while seeking help?
  - Was the remedy satisfactory? Was it prompt enough?
  - Was there any complaint that was overlooked?
3. Did you seek help from organizations? If yes, then...
  - Were there any available remedies in the organization?
  - What kind of redress was available? What were the mechanisms?
  - Was there any separate remedy for LBQ people? Was it responsive enough?
  - Did you face any harassment due to your sexual orientation while seeking help?
  - Was the remedy satisfactory?
  - Was there any complaint that was overlooked?

## Policy Modification

1. Do you know what social media policies are? Please explain.
2. Do you know what the laws say about social media usage?
3. Are you satisfied with the policies and laws on social media usage? Please explain.
4. Do you think it's important to review social media policies? Why?
5. Do you know the community standards/security guidelines of digital platforms? Are they helpful? Why and why not?
6. Do you think the above mentioned GBV can be addressed through existing laws? Why and why not?
7. Did you face any GBV that started online and ultimately advanced towards offline?
  - Do you think it's enough for solving online GBV on LBQ identities?

- Do you think any amendment or additional protections are needed for the policies to address the problem?
- What are they? Can you give me some examples?
- Is it necessary to include LBQ people in policy-making or law-making?
- Should LBQ people be consulted about what law and policy changes they recommend?
- How could that change be brought?
  - Are you referring to policy modification?
  - Or are you referring to psychosocial support?
  - Or are you referring to...etc.?
- Perpetrator's view: Do you think you have ever engaged in any behavior that could be considered as online violence?

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