

Lesbian, Bisexual, and Queer Women Online

An Overview of Emerging Security Threats from Asia

March 2025





Outright International works together for better LGBTIQ lives.

Outright is dedicated to working with partners around the globe to strengthen the capacity of the LGBTIQ human rights movement, document and amplify human rights violations against LGBTIQ people, and advocate for inclusion and equality.

Founded in 1990, with staff in over a dozen countries, Outright works with the United Nations, regional human rights monitoring bodies, governments, humanitarian and development institutions, and civil society partners. Outright holds consultative status at the United Nations, where it serves as the secretariat of the UN LGBTI Core Group.

www.outrightinternational.org
hello@outrightinternational.org
facebook.com/outrightintl
twitter.com/outrightintl
youtube.com/@OutrightIntl

Outright International
216 East 45th Street, 17th Floor New York, NY 10017 USA
+1 212 430 6054

This work may be reproduced and redistributed, in whole or in part, without alteration and without prior written permission, solely for nonprofit administrative or educational purposes provided all copies contain the following statement:

© 2025 Outright International. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercialNoDerivatives 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, PO Box 1866, Mountain View, CA 94042, USA.

Contents

Acknowledgments	4
Executive Summary	5
Recommendations	7
To Lawmakers	7
To Government Agencies Responsible for Justice, Human Rights, Gender, and Technology	7
To Multilateral Institutions Responsible for the Protection of Human Rights	8
To Social Media Hosting Companies and Other Internet Intermediaries	8
To National and International Civil Society Organizations	9
To Funders of Civil Society Work in LGBTIQ, Gender, Technology, and Human Rights Sectors, Including Philanthropic Organizations and Foundations	9
Introduction	10
Defining Online Gender-Based Violence	12
Context	14
Access to Digital Spaces	16
Legal Frameworks on LGBTQ Rights, Digital Security, and Gender-Based Violence	18
Emerging Trends	26
Forms of Online Gender-Based Violence	26
1. Policing Gender Norms Through Hateful Remarks and Abuse	26
2. Sexualized Online Harassment	27
3. Cyberstalking	27
4. Non-Consensual Distribution of Images, Videos, and Other Content	28
5. Extortion, Non-Consensual Sharing of Intimate Imagery, Doxing, and Violent Threats	29
6. Intra-Community Perpetrators	30
7. Red-Tagging	30
Impact of Online Gender-Based Violence on LBQ Women	32
Help-Seeking Among LBQ Victim-Survivors	35
Insufficient Protection Available Through Laws and Complaints Mechanisms	35
Lack of Psychosocial Support	36
Difficulty Recognizing and Naming Online Gender-Based Violence	37

Acknowledgments

This report is a result of a collaborative effort among researchers and advocates within and outside Outright International. Lead researchers and editors were Madhura Chakraborty, Senior Global Researcher; and Neela Ghoshal, Senior Director of Law, Policy, and Research. The detailed in-country research was made possible by dedicated researcher-activists from across Asia including Maruf Rahman and Farah Naz Rahman (Bangladesh); Nica Dumlao (the Philippines); Hoa Bui and Anh Nguyen Hoang (Vietnam) and other researchers from Bangladesh, the Philippines, Indonesia and Malaysia who cannot be named due to safety concerns. Nandini Moitro illustrated this report, Arundhati Ghosh provided copyediting for the report and Megan Buckner designed the report.

Outright is deeply grateful to the LGBTIQ activists and people interviewed and surveyed for the five country reports. As always, we work in solidarity with you to build a world in which all LGBTIQ people are free, safe, and able to be visible.



Executive Summary

This report explores online gender-based violence against an oft-ignored group of victims—lesbian, bisexual, and queer (LBQ) women. Attacks on LBQ women online are colored by both misogyny and homophobia and 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. 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 summarizes the key findings from the five country reports, draws forth patterns in online gender-based violence facing LBQ women across these diverse contexts, and offers recommendations to policymakers and other stakeholders.

KEY FINDINGS:

- 1. Acts of online gender-based violence against LBQ women follow similar patterns.** Attacks on LBQ women online are largely motivated by a desire to enforce rigid, binary gender norms and roles. They stem from heteropatriarchy, misogyny, and male entitlement to women’s bodies and sexuality. The research brings to light numerous incidents that reveal a desire to discipline LBQ women for exceeding imposed “traditional” norms for women through their “transgressive” sexuality and gender expression and identity. As a result, they often take the form of “corrective” abuse. The perpetrators are by and large men and strangers. However, across these contexts, online manifestations of intra-community violence and intimate partner violence were also prevalent.
- 2. These acts of online violence against LBQ women have serious repercussions.** The mental as well as physical health of victim-survivors is, often, severely affected by continuing online violence, harassment, and intimidation. Multiple respondents completely withdrew from online spaces to protect themselves. Lack of psychosocial support for survivors further exacerbates harm. Further, online gender-based violence is often an extension of violence taking place outside the online realm—in families, romantic, or intra-community interactions. While literature on technology-facilitated gender-based violence recognizes this online-offline dynamic, current legal regimes are lagging behind in incorporating this understanding into laws and policies to address online gender-based violence.
- 3. States lack comprehensive mechanisms to redress the harm caused by online gender-based violence.** In three of the research contexts—Bangladesh, Indonesia, and Malaysia—some forms of same-sex intimacy are criminalized, leaving LBQ victim-survivors without recourse to the law. Even in the Philippines and Vietnam, where same-sex intimacy is not criminalized, stigma associated with being queer impedes access to redress from official channels. Victim-survivors almost always turn to friends, community, and family for support.

- 4. Law and policy fall far short in all five countries in addressing all instances of online gender-based violence, but especially when it comes to addressing the particularities of LBQ women's experiences.** This is compounded by the fact that same-sex intimacies and/or trans identities are criminalized in three of the five countries in which the research took place. Further, a victim-centric approach is missing in all existing legal frameworks and social media policies, which adopt punitive approaches that do not contribute to prevention or redress.

Recommendations

TO LAWMAKERS

Enact specific legislation to tackle online gender-based violence, separating it from cybercrime. Online gender-based violence, which targets individuals on the basis of their identities, is qualitatively different from fraud, hacking, and other issues addressed by cybercrime laws.

Decriminalize same-sex intimacy and gender nonconformity in jurisdictions in which these are criminalized. As long as LGBTQ people are criminalized, they will not have adequate access to criminal legal systems or victim-survivor support services.

Ensure that laws on gender-based violence are inclusive of LGBTQ people and do not rely on binary understandings of gender. Legislation should reflect the particular and distinct experiences of violence and harassment that LBQ women, trans people, nonbinary people, intersex people, and other minoritized groups face navigating online and offline spaces. Legislation should also take into account targeting based not only on sexual orientation and gender identity but also on other protected grounds such as disability, caste, class, religion, race, and ethnicity.

Ensure that laws related to gender-based violence, online and offline, go beyond a punitive model to address the root causes of violence. Criminal sanctions rely on a model of individual criminal responsibility, but online gender-based violence against LBQ people takes place in a societal context marked by sexism, homophobia, and transphobia. Laws to address gender-based violence should include affirmative measures to combat bias.

TO GOVERNMENT AGENCIES RESPONSIBLE FOR JUSTICE, HUMAN RIGHTS, GENDER, AND TECHNOLOGY

Train law enforcement agents to sensitively handle online gender-based violence complaints from LGBTQ people and women. Law enforcement agents should be held accountable for discriminatory treatment, which prevents victims from coming forward.

Establish redress mechanisms that include principles of restitution and reparation for the victim-survivor. The law must go beyond criminalizing harms committed and enact policies that bear in mind the well-being of the victim-survivors by centering care for them.

Enact comprehensive sexuality education and anti-bullying programs in schools that educate young people about the harms of online gender-based violence. Online gender-based violence often begins as early as secondary school. Programs should

have the twin goals of preventing young people from perpetrating online gender-based violence and ensuring that potential victim-survivors are aware of what constitutes online gender-based violence and how to seek recourse.

Collect disaggregated data on gender-based violence both online and offline.

Data should account for victim-survivors' sexual orientation and gender identity and should be used to track patterns, develop preventive strategies, and ensure redress.

TO MULTILATERAL INSTITUTIONS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Explicitly recognize the experience of violence that LBQ women face online. Use international platforms to call attention to and address online gender-based violence against LBQ women specifically, comprehensively, and holistically, and adopt inclusive language in reports, research, and resolutions on gender-based violence.

Ensure corporations acting as internet intermediaries are held accountable for violence on their platforms. A human rights-centered United Nations Global Digital Compact, with an inclusive multistakeholder approach to internet governance, would be a step in the right direction. Additionally, the treaties being drafted, like the proposed binding treaty on transnational corporations, must include a gender-justice framework to ensure accountability.

TO SOCIAL MEDIA HOSTING COMPANIES AND OTHER INTERNET INTERMEDIARIES

Enact and consistently implement policies on the prevention of and redress for online gender-based violence. Policies should be developed in consultation with a diverse range of civil society actors, with local linguistic expertise and sensitivity to gender justice issues, including women and LGBTQ users.

Establish gender-responsive complaints systems. Provide complaints monitoring staff with comprehensive gender sensitivity training, including on LGBTQ inclusion, and sufficient support to carry out their responsibilities.

Ensure that online gender-based violence policies and information on redress mechanisms are publicly and easily accessible to social media users. Create accessible content in multiple languages that demonstrates sensitivity to LBQ women's needs regarding online safety and access to redress mechanisms.

Create mechanisms to detect and take affirmative action against gender-based violence on platforms. Content that constitutes gender-based violence should be detected and addressed even in the absence of a complaint.

Ensure transparency on policies regarding the sharing of data with governments.

Social media users who may face criminalization or other government targeting based on their sexual orientation or gender identity need to know whether their data is protected on platforms.

Commit to greater transparency and accountability with regard to complaints.

Publish periodic data on received complaints and satisfactory resolution of such complaints, and allow oversight in cases where victim-survivors were dissatisfied with the outcome of complaints.

TO NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

Work intersectionally to address the needs of groups that face multiple, intersecting forms of violence, such as LBQ women. Resist siloed work that fails to address root causes, overlapping violence in offline and online spaces, and affected LGBTIQ people, women, and children.

Combine disparate strands of work on digital security, gendered violence, LGBTIQ rights, and freedom of expression to create a comprehensive position on online gender-based violence. Create robust, evolving, responsive strategies to influence multilateral treaty bodies and hold ICT intermediaries accountable.

Conduct training among LBQ women on identifying and accessing redress for online gender-based violence. Ensure the sustainability of training by producing and sharing context-based digital security guidelines and information on access to complaints mechanisms, helplines, and counseling for victim-survivors of online gender-based violence.

Conduct further research at the national and local levels on online gender-based violence. Produce qualitative evidence that can be used to pressure governments and ICT intermediaries to enact legislation and policies that address violence, including against LBQ women.

TO FUNDERS OF CIVIL SOCIETY WORK IN LGBTIQ, GENDER, TECHNOLOGY, AND HUMAN RIGHTS SECTORS, INCLUDING PHILANTHROPIC ORGANIZATIONS AND FOUNDATIONS

Fund further research on online gender-based violence on LBQ women.

In particular, direct resources to sub-regions where there is a data deficit, such as the Pacific and Central Asia.

Fund the creation and dissemination of multilingual digital security resources addressing the specificity of experience among LBQ women, trans and nonbinary people, and other marginalized groups. In a region as linguistically diverse as Asia and with such disparate digital access, resources in multiple languages and formats that reach across the digital divide are essential.

Establish funding mechanisms that bridge the gaps between currently siloed programming such as digital rights, feminist tech, and LGBTIQ rights. To comprehensively address online gender-based violence against LBQ women and LGBTIQ people, many strands of expertise, activism, and advocacy need to come together to create robust joint platforms to combat ongoing and evolving forms of gender-based violence in digital spaces.

Introduction

“I used to be curious about social media, and I posted a lot about my three disabled cats. I was very active on many cat groups, and my profile used to be public. There was one stranger from the group who started targeting me as a trans woman. He would dox me by screenshotting my profile and posts, then sharing it in his profile with captions that were transphobic, e.g., God will not accept trans women because it is against religion. While it did not lead to further violence, I felt very unsafe after that incident and started making all my accounts private.”¹

As internet saturation across the globe increases, the digital arena sees increasing violence, abuse, and harm directed towards marginalized people, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) people and women of all sexual and gender identities.² In 2022, Asian LGBTQ activists at a regional forum coordinated by Outright International highlighted the specific need to document and address online gender-based violence against lesbian, bisexual, and queer (LBQ) women in Asia, who are targeted on the basis of both gender and sexual orientation. Outright conducted research in five Asian countries—Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Vietnam—to understand how LBQ women in Asia experience violence and harassment online and how it impacts them. This report summarizes our findings and offers recommendations to policymakers and other stakeholders on how to address these harms.³

With the use of online platforms increasing dramatically during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, acts of online gender-based violence also skyrocketed.⁴ The breadth and gravity of

¹ Interview with Respondent, Malaysia. Full citation in forthcoming Malaysia country report.

² Rachel Keighley, “Hate Hurts: Exploring the Impact of Online Hate on LGBTQ+ Young People,” *Women & Criminal Justice* 32, no. 1–2 (October 17, 2021): 29–48, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08974454.2021.1988034>; Amnesty International UK, “Women abused on Twitter every 30 seconds - new study,” December 18, 2018, <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/women-abused-twitter-every-30-seconds-new-study>. Although Outright’s work encompasses lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer (LGBTIQ) people’s human rights and inclusion, for the purposes of this report, we refer in most cases to LGBTQ people, not intersex people, because we have not compiled firsthand evidence of online gender-based violence against intersex people in Asia. Outright has, however, received anecdotal information about harassment that intersex people have faced online in various parts of the world, and we assume that many of the conclusions and recommendations are also applicable to intersex people.

³ Outright refers to LBQ women as a term inclusive of lesbian, bisexual, and queer women, including cisgender, trans, and intersex women and all nonbinary or genderqueer people on the gender spectrum who relate to an LBQ identity. In this report, in the specific country contexts covered, many transmasculine persons have self-identified with the term LBQ women, broadening our customary container for research on LBQ-identified women. This self-initiated participation by transmasculine respondents is notable for future research efforts and frames on LBQ women.

⁴ In the first weeks of COVID-19 lockdowns in March 2020, internet usage increased exponentially. Mark Beech, “COVID-19 Pushes Up Internet Use 70% And Streaming More Than 12%, First Figures Reveal,” *Forbes*, March 26, 2020, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/markbeech/2020/03/25/covid-19-pushes-up-internet-use-70-streaming-more-than-12-first-figures-reveal/>.

online gender-based violence are evidenced by a slew of research from many parts of the world, including multi-country studies of online gender-based violence.⁵

While earlier research tended to narrowly focus on cisgender women and girls, recent research has taken into account the distinct experiences of LGBTQ people of all genders, albeit often briefly.⁶ A 2022 landscape analysis of online gender-based violence in Asia published by NORC at the University of Chicago and the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) highlights some research that is inclusive of LGBTQ people.⁷ Several academy-based studies have examined the impact of bullying and hate speech on LGBTQ people, especially young people.⁸ A 2023 study of trans and nonbinary people's experience of violence online in four African countries revealed how framing around online gender-based violence tends to exclude trans and nonbinary experiences.⁹

Studies on LBQ women's specific experiences of online gender-based violence, however, remain rare, and literature on online gender-based violence in Asia includes almost no discussion of online violence at the intersection of sexuality and gender. This is despite the likely prevalence and impact of such violence, as noted in the NORC and ICRW landscape analysis:

[O]verwhelming evidence indicates that there is a gender and sexual identity-based component of who experiences technology-facilitated violence, as a result of which, women, girls, and LGBTQI+ groups are much more likely to be targeted. Those with intersecting marginalized identities – religion, caste/ethnicity, low-income, younger

⁵ See, for instance, Sophie Flemming and Fabiana Castro, "Online Gender Based Violence: implication, developments and the legal framework," Global Human Rights Defence (GHRD), April 2023, 7, <https://www.ghrd.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Online-Gender-Based-Violence-implications-developments-and-the-legal-framework.pdf>; Jacqueline Hicks, "Global Evidence on the Prevalence and Impact of Online Gender-based Violence (OGBV)," Institute of Development Studies, October 8, 2021, DOI:10.19088/k4D.2021.140; Nyx Mclean and Thurlo Cicero, "The Left Out Project Report: The case for an online gender-based violence framework inclusive of transgender, non-binary and gender-diverse experiences," Association for Progressive Communications, 2023, <https://firn.genderit.org/sites/default/files/2023-08/The-Left-Out-Project-Report.pdf>; Zarizana Abdul Aziz, "Online Violence Against Women in Asia: A Multicountry Study," Asia Pacific UN Women, November 2020, <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Field%20Office%20ESEA/Docs/Publications/2020/12/ap-ICT-VAWG-report-7Dec20.pdf>.

⁶ See, for instance, Aziz, "Online Violence Against Women in Asia: A Multicountry Study," 29–30, 34–35.

⁷ The majority of studies cited in the report appear to focus almost exclusively on online gender-based violence directed at women, sometimes adding smaller sections on LGBTQ populations. See, for instance, NORC at the University of Chicago and ICRW, "Landscape Analysis of Technology-Facilitated Gender Based Violence: Findings from the Asia Region," February 2022, <https://www.icrw.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/USAID-TFGBV-Landscape-Analysis-Asia.pdf>. See the reference section of this landscape analysis report, on pp. 40–49, for information on existing country-specific studies. The NORC/ICRW report also notes that there are particular gaps in literature on online gender-based violence even as it affects cisgender women, most notably in Central Asia and the Pacific.

⁸ See, for instance, Roberto L. Abreu and Maureen C. Kenny, "Cyberbullying and LGBTQ Youth: A Systematic Literature Review and Recommendations for Prevention and Intervention," *Journal of Child & Adolescent Trauma* 11, (2018): 81–97, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40653-017-0175-7>; Chien-Chuan Wang, et al., "Effects of traditional and cyber homophobic bullying in childhood on depression, anxiety, and physical pain in emerging adulthood and the moderating effects of social support among gay and bisexual men in Taiwan," *Neuropsychiatric Disease and Treatment* 14, (May 2018): 1309–1317, <https://doi.org/10.2147/ndt.s164579>; Tyler Hatchel, et al., "LGBTQ youth and digital media: online risks," in *Child and Adolescent Online Risk Exposure: An Ecological Perspective*, ed. Michelle F. Wright and Lawrence B. Schiamburg (Academic Press, 2021), 303–325, <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-817499-9.00015-6>; Amelia Johns, et al., "Mapping and Review of Resources for, and Needs of Vulnerable and Marginalized Young People in the Asia-Pacific Region on Digital Literacy, Safety and Participation," UNDP and UNESCO, 2022, <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2022-05/UNDP-RBAP-Needs-of-Vulnerable-Marginalized-Young-People-on-Digital-Literacy-Safety-Participation-2022.pdf>; Timo T Ojanen and Ruthaychonnee Sittichai, "SOGIE, Bullying, and Cyberbullying in Thai Schools," in *SOGI Minority and School Life in Asian Contexts: Beyond Bullying and Conflict Toward Inter-minority Empathy*, ed., Makiko Kasai, Yuichi Toda, and Stephen Russell (Routledge, 2023), 119–134, 10.4324/9781003430414-7.

⁹ Mclean and Cicero, "The Left Out Project report: The case for an online gender-based violence framework inclusive of transgender, non-binary and gender-diverse experiences."

age, and people with disabilities are more vulnerable to experiencing both online and offline violence, have longer-lasting impacts, and are less likely to share or report the experience.¹⁰

The targeting of women and LGBTQ people online reflects the precarity and violence they face offline as well as impunity for the perpetrators. LBQ women are doubly marginalized by the misogyny in enforced and unequal gender norms as well as homophobia. Outright's primary research in the five countries reveals that LBQ women not only face hostile comments online about subjective ideas around "immoral" or "irreligious" behavior or lifestyle but simultaneously are sought to be disciplined and silenced with threats of sexual violence and assault. At the same time, the existence of laws that criminalize LBQ women and the absence of protective laws lend impunity to their violators, making LBQ women easy targets. As Human Rights Watch notes:

The targeting of LGBT people online is enabled by their legal precarity offline. The criminalization of same-sex conduct or, where same-sex conduct is not criminalized, the application of vague "morality" and "debauchery" provisions against LGBT people emboldens digital targeting, quells LGBT expression online and offline, and serves as the basis for prosecutions of LGBT people. In the absence of legislation or sufficient digital platform regulations protecting LGBT people from discrimination online and offline, both security forces and private individuals have been able to target them online with impunity.¹¹

Addressing online gender-based violence against LBQ people, then, will require multipronged strategies that include visibilizing the problem; addressing misogyny, homophobia, and transphobia in society; repealing discriminatory laws that make it nearly impossible for LBQ people to seek access to justice; enacting protective laws and policies; putting in place effective oversight systems; and ensuring that LBQ women are aware of their rights.

DEFINING ONLINE GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

The term "online gender-based violence" and the broader concept of "technology-facilitated gender-based violence" have multiple, overlapping definitions. The Association of Progressive Communications (APC) proposed a working definition of online gender-based violence in 2015:

Acts of gender-based violence that are committed, abetted or aggravated, in part or fully, by the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs), such as mobile phones, the internet, social media platforms, and email.¹²

As Outright has argued, "gender-based violence" is sometimes conflated with "violence against women and girls," but this conflation misses the fact that gender-based violence seeks to enforce gender binaries and norms against everyone who is perceived to violate these norms,

¹⁰ NORC at the University of Chicago and the ICRW, "Landscape Analysis of Technology-Facilitated Gender Based Violence: Findings from the Asia Region," 1.

¹¹ Rasha Younes, "All This Terror Because of a Photo: Digital Targeting and Its Offline Consequences for LGBT People in the Middle East and North Africa," *Human Rights Watch*, February 21, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2023/02/21/all-terror-because-photo/digital-targeting-and-its-offline-consequences-lgbt>.

¹² Association for Progressive Communications (APC), "Providing a gender lens in the digital age: APC submission to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights' Working Group on Business and Human Rights," November 2018, https://www.apc.org/sites/default/files/APC_submission_Providing_a_gender_lens_in_the_digital_age.pdf.

not only women and girls.¹³ A binary understanding of gender-based violence is inadequate and will fail to address root causes. Succeeding definitions have expanded on the concept as the harms perpetrated on people through the use of the internet or mobile technologies “based on their sexual or gender identity or through enforcing harmful gender norms.”¹⁴

Forms of online gender-based violence include “stalking, bullying, sexual harassment, defamation, hate speech, and exploitation.”¹⁵ They may also include, as reported by Outright interviewees in the analysis that follows, doxing, sextortion, hacking, online identity theft, shallow fakes, and non-consensual sharing of intimate imagery.

Table 1. Some Forms of Online Gender-Based Violence

Term	Working Definition and Source
Doxing (also, doxing)	Posting personal and sensitive information including home and work addresses, telephone numbers, email addresses and family names without permission. Source: UNFPA, “Digital Violence Terms,” https://www.unfpa.org/thevirtualisreal-background#glossary
Sextortion	A type of electronic blackmail, the demand for money, sex/sex acts, or additional explicit images in exchange for not exposing intimate images or private information. Source: UNFPA, “Digital Violence Terms,” https://www.unfpa.org/thevirtualisreal-background#glossary
Hacking	The gaining of unauthorized access to data in a system or computer. Source: Google’s English Language dictionary provided by Oxford Languages
Online Identity Theft	A crime in which an attacker uses fraud or deception to illegally obtain personal or sensitive information from a victim and misuses it to act in the victim’s name. Source: Google’s English Language dictionary provided by Oxford Languages
Shallow Fake	A manipulated image, often done with editing software, such as attaching someone’s face to someone else’s body. A more believable, sophisticated “deepfake” is done with machine learning. Source: UNFPA, “Digital Violence Terms,” https://www.unfpa.org/thevirtualisreal-background#glossary
Non-consensual sharing of intimate imagery	A form of image-based abuse. This is commonly referred to as “revenge porn,” but this term is objectionable as it suggests wrongdoing by the survivor to provoke retribution. Source: adapted from UNFPA, “Digital Violence Terms,” https://www.unfpa.org/thevirtualisreal-background#glossary

¹³ Neela Ghoshal, “What Gender-Based Violence Looks Like When You Are Queer, Trans, or Intersex,” Outright International, November 25, 2024, <https://outrightinternational.org/insights/what-gender-based-violence-looks-when-you-are-queer-trans-or-intersex>.

¹⁴ Laura Hinson et al., “Technology-facilitated gender-based violence: What is it and how do we measure it?” ICROW, 2018, 1, https://www.icrow.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/ICROW_TFGBVMarketing_Brief_v8-Web.pdf.

¹⁵ Ibid.

CONTEXT

The Asia LGBTIQ Network on Gender-Based Violence identified the need for data and research on the topic of online aggression and abuse in a members' meeting in 2022.¹⁶ Outright, which supports the forum through its Asia program, set out to commission a multi-country research project across South and Southeast Asia in 2022 and 2023. This summary report seeks to provide an overview of the research and to lay out emerging themes, including points of convergence and departure. The study was conducted in five countries—Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Vietnam—by consultant researchers from the countries. This summary report serves as an index of the country reports and briefs. It consolidates findings and identifies overarching themes, creating an overview of emerging concerns, areas for further research, and broad recommendations.

Each of the country reports covers the legal framework governing online gender-based violence and a review of secondary research on existing data. Additionally, the consultants in each country surveyed 60 to 100 respondents through questionnaires tailored to the contexts and selected 10 or more individuals for in-depth, qualitative key informant interviews.

The availability of data on online gender-based violence varies from country to country. 2017 research by the Bangladesh Legal Aid Services Trust (BLAST) showed that 73 percent of women using the internet in **Bangladesh** had faced online gender-based violence.¹⁷ In this context, attacks on LGBTQ activists in Bangladesh have made media headlines, and a growing spate of anti-rights bloggers and content creators post homophobic and transphobic content to inflame public opinion.¹⁸ Comprehensive datasets and research on online gender-based violence faced by LGBTQ people do not exist. Accordingly, the country report on Bangladesh endeavors to begin to address this gap.

The NORC and ICRW landscape analysis, referenced above, notes the limited availability of data on online gender-based violence in **Indonesia**. However, the Indonesian National Commission on Violence Against Women (Komnas Perempuan) noted an alarming 400 percent increase in complaints of online gender-based violence in 2020 compared to the previous year.¹⁹ The country report builds evidence beyond non-disaggregated statistics to portray the subjective experiences of LBQ women in Indonesia facing online harassment and violence and expose the lack of survivor-centered recourse mechanisms.

In **Malaysia**, the government collects data on cybercrimes. The Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) reports that in the past three years, cyberbullying has topped the list of cybercrimes, with over 9,000 complaints recorded.²⁰ However, this data has significant limitations. It is organized by binary gender, and since Malaysian laws criminalize

¹⁶ In 2020, Outright established a network of LGBTIQ civil society organizations that work to address gender-based violence. We regularly convene members in online and offline gatherings to discuss issues related to gender-based violence against LGBTIQ people, priorities, and focus areas for further research and advocacy.

¹⁷ Saraban Tahura Zaman et al., "Legal Action on Cyber Violence Against Women," Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST), December 2017, 2, <https://www.blast.org.bd/content/publications/Cyber-violence.pdf>.

¹⁸ Reuters, "Social media 'a precarious place' for LGBTQ people in Bangladesh, activists say," *South China Morning Post*, March 29, 2024, <https://www.scmp.com/news/asia/south-asia/article/3257146/social-media-precarious-place-lgbtq-people-bangladesh-activists-say>.

¹⁹ NORC at the University of Chicago and ICRW, "Technology-Facilitated Gender Based Violence in Asia: Indonesia," USAID, February 2022, 2, https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00Z77G.pdf.

²⁰ "Cyberbullying tops cybercrime reports in Malaysia with over 9k complaints," *The Sun*, July 25, 2024, <https://thesun.my/malaysia-news/cyberbullying-tops-cybercrime-reports-in-malaysia-with-over-9k-complaints-BD12772773>.

LGBTQ people, government data is unlikely to reflect the reality of online gender-based violence that LBQ women in the country face. Moreover, activists have repeatedly raised concerns about censorship and violation of the right to privacy in the content regulatory and investigatory powers invested in the MCMC, particularly with a proposed amendment in December 2024 that further increases MCMC's overreach.²¹ Independent research from Malaysia reveals a high incidence of violence against women animated by misogyny and homophobia.²² Some existing research on hate speech in online spaces notes that sexual minorities, along with women and ethnoreligious minorities, are often targeted.²³ The report sets out to further document and critically analyze the experience of LBQ women, with specific attention to ethnolinguistic diversity.

While the **Philippines** has consistently topped the world internet usage index in the last decade, comprehensive data on online gender-based violence is lacking, particularly when it comes to LBQ women.²⁴ A five-country study across East, South, and Southeast Asia by UN Women Asia Pacific found that the Philippines had a very high incidence of "sexist or misogynist comments or gender-based hate speech" as well as considerably high threats of online harassment, discrimination, and threats of both sexual and non-sexual violence.²⁵ The country report fills an important gap in information on LBQ women's experience of online gender-based violence and how that violence can spill into offline spaces.

Vietnam ranked among the bottom five of the 25 countries surveyed for Microsoft's 2020 Digital Civility Index.²⁶ Among the countries surveyed that year, it was also ranked the country with the highest level of "reputational risk" and the second-highest level of "sexual risk" online.²⁷ In 2016, UNESCO conducted a large-scale survey of over 2,600 schoolchildren in Vietnam.²⁸ The study revealed that among respondents who described themselves as sexually attracted to the same gender or less conforming to traditional masculine and feminine gender norms, which is likely to include LGBTQ students, 70 percent faced physical and verbal violence and harassment.²⁹ Additionally, a 2023 study by Lighthouse Social

²¹ Article 19, "Malaysia: Halt the repressive amendments to the Communications and Multimedia Act," December 3, 2024, <https://www.article19.org/resources/repressive-amendments-communications-multimedia-act>; Article 19, "Malaysia: The Communications and Multimedia Act 1998 Legal Analysis," February 2017, <https://www.article19.org/data/files/medialibrary/38689/Malaysia-analysis-Final-December.pdf>.

²² Aziz, "Online Violence Against Women in Asia: A Multicountry Study," 9, 29, and 34; Juana Jaafar, "Voice, Visibility and a Variety of Viciousness: A Malaysian Study of Women's Lived Realities on Social Media," *Persatuan Kesedaran Komuniti Selangor (EMPOWER)*, 2017, 15 and 38, https://www.apc.org/sites/default/files/EMPOWER_VVV_FINAL_Web.pdf; Serene Lim, "Queering Malay Identity Politics in the Malaysian Digital Space," *Heinrich Böll Stiftung*, May 14, 2021, <https://th.boell.org/en/2021/05/14/queering-malaysian-digital-space>.

²³ See, for instance, Norena Abdul Karim Zamri et al., "Digital hate speech and othering: The construction of hate speech from Malaysian perspectives," *Cogent Arts & Humanities* 10, no. 1 (June 2023), <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2023.2229089>.

²⁴ Kate Lamb, "Philippines tops world internet usage index with an average of 10 hours a day," *The Guardian*, February 1, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2019/feb/01/world-internet-usage-index-philippines-10-hours-a-day>; Janvic Mateo, "Pinoys still top consumers of online videos," *The Philippine Star*, February 7, 2024, <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2024/02/07/2331549/pinoys-still-top-consumers-online-video-content>.

²⁵ Aziz, "Online Violence Against Women in Asia: A Multicountry Study," 26.

²⁶ Microsoft, "Civility, Safety and Interaction Online: Digital Civility Global Report," February 2020, 2, 7, <https://news.microsoft.com/wp-content/uploads/prod/sites/421/2020/02/Digital-Civility-2020-Global-Report.pdf>.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 39–40. According to the Digital Civility Index, reputational risk includes doxing, risk to personal reputation, and risk to work reputation.

²⁸ UNESCO Office in Hanoi and UNESCO Office Bangkok and Regional Bureau for Education in Asia and the Pacific, "Reaching out: preventing and addressing school-related gender-based violence in Vietnam," 2016, 25–26, <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000246927>.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 32.

Enterprise Vietnam, a national LGBTQ rights group, revealed LGBTQ people faced extremely high levels of online gender-based violence, with at least 79 percent of the over 500 respondents in the survey having faced some form of gender-based violence.³⁰ The present study is an in-depth look at the experiences of Vietnamese LBQ people, mainly from major cities, followed by smaller urban spaces, and a few respondents based in rural and suburban areas.

ACCESS TO DIGITAL SPACES

Asian countries have seen some of the fastest growth in internet usage and the largest potential for growth in social media.³¹ Facebook’s largest user base by country in 2020 was India, followed by the United States and then Indonesia.³² At the same time, the absolute number of people without access to the internet and social media is highest in South Asia.³³ In fact, there are large variations in uptake of the internet by percentage of population in the five countries that are part of the research, as **Table 2** shows.

Table 2. Access to the Internet and Social Media Usage

	Internet users (% of population) ³⁴	Number of active cellular mobile connections in early 2024 ³⁵	Number of active social media user identities in early 2024 ³⁶	Gender ³⁷ of social media users (%) in early 2024 ³⁸
Bangladesh	44.5% (2023)	188.6 million	52.90 million	Female: 34.2% Male: 65.8%
Indonesia	66.485% (2022)	353.3 million	139 million	Female: 46.5% Male: 53.5%
Malaysia	97.4% (2022)	44.55 million	28.68 million	Female: 44.3% Male: 55.7%

³⁰ Lighthouse Social Enterprise, “The Prevalence of Sexual Orientation and Gender-based Violence Among LGBTI+ People in Vietnam and Related Factors,” March 2022, 11, https://lighthousevietnam.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/ENG_Final-Report_SGBV-Study_Lighthouse_230616-1.pdf.

³¹ Asia has some of the fastest average mobile internet speeds. Internet penetration hovers around 56 percent with almost 2.42 billion users and 2.14 billion active social media users. Aziz, “Online Violence Against Women in Asia: A Multicountry Study,” 24.

³² Ibid.

³³ Simon Kemp, “Internet Use in 2024,” *Data Reportal*, January 31, 2024, <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2024-deep-dive-the-state-of-internet-adoption>.

³⁴ “Key Indicators Database,” Asian Development Bank, accessed December 29, 2024, https://kidb.adb.org/explore?filter%5Byear%5D=2000%2C2001%2C2002%2C2003%2C2004%2C2005%2C2006%2C2007%2C2008%2C2009%2C2010%2C2011%2C2012%2C2013%2C2014%2C2015%2C2016%2C2017%2C2018%2C2019%2C2020%2C2021%2C2022%2C2023&filter%5Bindicator_id%5D=2500039%2C2500035&filter%5Beconomy_code%5D=VIE&grouping=economies.

³⁵ Kemp, “Internet Use in 2024.”

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid. The report consulted only used male and female genders.

³⁸ Ibid.

	Internet users (% of population) ³⁴	Number of active cellular mobile connections in early 2024 ³⁵	Number of active social media user identities in early 2024 ³⁶	Gender ³⁷ of social media users (%) in early 2024 ³⁸
The Philippines	72.3% (2022)	117.4 million	86.75 million	Female: 52.3% Male: 47.7%
Vietnam	78.59% (2022)	168.5 million	78.44 million	Female: 51% Male: 49%
South Asia	51.5% (2024) ³⁹			
Southeast Asia	71.5% (2024) ⁴⁰			

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

Legal Frameworks on LGBTQ Rights, Digital Security, and Gender-Based Violence

Studies on online gender-based violence globally and from Asia reveal that offline violence is replicated online, and vice versa.⁴¹ In two of the countries surveyed here—Bangladesh and Malaysia—same-sex relations are criminalized at the national level. In all countries, legal recognition of trans people—which can translate to lower levels of violence—is limited, sometimes hinging on traditional, pre-colonial gender categories and medicalized models rather than self-determination.⁴²

In countries with Muslim majorities, Sharia legal systems governing Muslims exist alongside secular penal codes. This manifests in codified criminalization, including in Indonesia’s Aceh province and in Malaysia, where state Sharia enactments and fatwas issued against LGBTQ people in Malaysia play a role in policing sexuality and gender. These Sharia enactments and exclusionary interpretations of Sharia contribute to the continued stigmatization of LGBTQ people. In Bangladesh, the traditional third-gender identity of hijras has become a veritable battleground between religious conservatives and LGBTQ activists.⁴³ While the Philippines has seen an increasing space being carved out by LGBTQ people of faith within the Catholic church, attacks on queer and trans people are often justified in the name of religion.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Hicks, “Global Evidence on the Prevalence and Impact of Online Gender-based Violence (OGBV).”

⁴² Outright International, *Empowering Identity: The Case for Self-Determined Legal Gender Recognition*, November 20, 2024, <https://outrightinternational.org/our-work/human-rights-research/empowering-identity-case-self-determined-legal-gender-recognition>.

⁴³ Amreeta Lethe, “The Story of Sharifa: One step forward, many steps backward?” *The Daily Star*, July 12, 2024, <https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/views/news/the-story-sharifa-one-step-forward-many-steps-backward-3654506>.

⁴⁴ Chad De Guzman, “In the Philippines, You Can Be Both Openly LGBT and Proudly Catholic. But It’s Not Easy,” *TIME*, June 6, 2022, <https://time.com/6184345/lgbt-philippines-catholic-church-pride/>.

The country reports touch upon religion, especially while documenting instances of online abuse faced by respondents, but further dedicated research is needed to understand how rising authoritarianism in many of these countries is accompanied by increasing anti-gender sentiments that cite religiosity and indigenous cultural markers as the basis of rejecting LGBTQ peoples.

Where there are laws regulating online activities and protecting individuals, they are often loosely worded in ways that can infringe on freedom of expression. Indeed, in some of the countries, cybersecurity laws are used to crack down on dissent and opposition, sometimes specifically targeting LGBTQ organizations and activists. Similarly, laws on pornography, while they may be of use in the prevention of the dissemination of images and videos of sexual nature without the consent of the parties, may be used to target LGBTQ people on grounds of “obscenity.”

Comprehensive digital protection policies and laws that safeguard the rights of individuals and incorporate a gender justice lens to address specific vulnerabilities faced by women and marginalized communities, including LGBTQ people, are absent in all five countries. A gender justice lens recognizes that gender-based violence is a systemic issue, a form of injustice that is built into patriarchal societal structures, into existing norms, and even codified into law.⁴⁵ None of the legal provisions from the five countries, outlined in Table 2 below, center human rights or operate with an inclusive, gender justice-oriented approach. Instead, several of the cybercrime-related laws are found to be breaching the right to freedom of expression and opinions, quashing dissent, and being misused to suppress opposition. As for the gender violence laws, they are exclusionary, based on a limited, patriarchal understanding of binary gender and who is a victim.

For instance, when the colonial penal code in Bangladesh defines the act of sexual harassment as “outraging the modesty” of a woman, it is inherently making a subjective, patriarchal assumption about the ideal woman-victim: one who has “modesty.” Similarly, when various offenses against women and children are penalized in multiple laws across these five countries, leaving out violations against male, trans, and nonbinary people, the law is establishing a hierarchy of innocence that presumes that women and children are victims who need protection and grants the state the role of a patriarchal protector. Where LGBTQ lives continue to be criminalized, this criminalization itself is justified through claims related to protecting children, traditional families, morality, health, or religion.

Most of the laws also center punitive provisions as a response to gender-based violence. While some violations may warrant criminal punishment, a carceral approach can run contrary to a gender justice lens in that it emphasizes a perpetrator’s individual criminal

⁴⁵ A gender justice lens would acknowledge that fundamental inequalities exist in social, economic, and digital spheres as a result of systemic cisheteropatriarchy and commit to addressing such inequality with intentionality and intersectional inclusivity. The Association for Progressive Communications discusses the importance of gender justice lenses in multilateral treaties such as the UN Global Digital Compact, as well as how gender justice is an essential component of the right to freedom of expression and opinion. Maja Romano, “Bringing a gender justice lens to the UN’s Global Digital Compact,” November 18, 2024, APC, <https://www.apc.org/en/news/bringing-gender-justice-lens-uns-global-digital-compact>; APC “Gender Justice and the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression: Submission in response to the call by the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression for contributions to the thematic report to be presented to the 76th session of the United Nations General Assembly,” June 2021, https://www.apc.org/sites/default/files/APC_submission_on_gender_justice_and_the_right_to_freedom_of_opinion_and_expression.pdf.

liability and absolves the systems that perpetuate harm, violence, and stigma.⁴⁶ A number of studies have shown alternatives exist when reducing gender-based violence and also how gender-based violence increases when other injustices and stressors—from conflicts to climate change—further intensify existing inequalities.⁴⁷ Criminalization itself can be seen as an extension of existing unequal and unjust structures:

Criminalization is the social and political process by which society determines which actions or behaviors – and by who – will be punished by the state. At the most basic level, it involves passage and enforcement of criminal laws. While framed as neutral, decisions about what kinds of conduct to punish, how, and how much are very much a choice, guided by existing structures of economic and social inequality based on race, gender, sexuality, disability, and poverty, among others.⁴⁸

Feminists globally, but especially from the global South, have pioneered concepts around radical care, healing justice, and restorative justice. These are important cornerstones of understanding how accountability for gender-based violence, online and offline, can go beyond a carceral model and prioritize well-being, care, and healing.⁴⁹ The moral certitude evinced in the laws, even when they are perpetuating gender injustice and violence against LGBTQ actors, often masks efforts to normalize heteropatriarchal systems, which ultimately normalize violence against women.

Ultimately, the lack of substantive protection of LGBTQ people's rights, including the criminalization of consensual same-sex intimacy, renders LGBTQ people vulnerable to violence. In sociocultural contexts where women face structural inequalities and high levels of gendered violence, LBQ women are further affected in both online and offline spaces with little to no recourse. **Table 3** gives an idea of how the rights of LGBTQ people interact with existing protections against gender-based violence and protections against crimes committed in the digital realm.

⁴⁶ Soha Abdelaty et al., "Beyond Criminalization: A Feminist Questioning of Criminal Justice Interventions to Address Sexual and Reproductive Rights Violations," RESURJ, 2020, <https://resurj.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/ENGLISH-Beyond-Criminalization-A-Feminist-Questioning-of-Criminal-Justice-Interventions-to-Address-Sexual-and-Reproductive-Rights-Violations.pdf>.

⁴⁷ Ibid. See the reference section, particularly 46–47.

⁴⁸ Barnard Center for Research on Women, "The Crisis of Criminalization," March 2017, <https://bcrw.barnard.edu/wp-content/nfs/reports/NFS9-Challenging-Criminalization-Funding-Perspectives.pdf>; See also Amnesty International, CREA, IWRAP Asia Pacific, RESURJ, and The Global Health Justice Partnership of the Yale Law School and Yale School of Public Health, *Imagining possibilities: Moving beyond criminalization as our dominant response to gender-based violence*, October 2024, <https://resurj.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Imagining-possibilities-report.pdf>.

⁴⁹ See, for instance, Faranak Miraftab, "Radical Care as Transformative Solidarity," presentation for panel on Feminist Practices of Solidarity, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, accessed October 13, 2022, <https://iopen.library.illinois.edu/scalar/constructing-solidarities-for-a-humane-urbanism/radical-care-as-transformative-solidarity>; Sarah Bott, Andrew Morrison, and Mary Ellsberg, "Preventing and responding to gender-based violence in middle and low-income countries: a global review and analysis," *World Bank Policy Research Working Paper Series* 3618, June 2005, <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/91e799d3-4fab-52b1-b0f5-7bf23d23e4bb/content>; Karen Engle, "Calling in the Troops: The Uneasy Relationship among Women's Rights, Human Rights, and Humanitarian Intervention," *Harvard Human Rights Journal* 20, 189–224, 2007, https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2157478.

Table 3. Legal Protections on Cybercrimes, Gender-Based Violence, and Rights of LGBTQ People

Country	LGBTQ Legal Rights	Digital Security	Protection Against Gender-Based Violence
Bangladesh	<p>Penal Code 377 criminalizes consensual same-sex relations.</p> <p>Limited possibility of legal gender recognition through the recognition of the hijras as a third gender category in addition to male and female. This has come under challenge as recently as 2024, with a more medicalized model of certification of intersex variation being required to qualify for the benefits.</p> <p>No laws protect against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.</p>	<p>The Bangladesh Telecommunications Act 2001 provided for an independent commission to regulate telecommunications. The government has drafted a new bill to replace it, currently under consultation, that brings social media under its ambit.⁵⁰</p> <p>The Pornography Control Act 2012 has a very broad and subjective definition of pornography as “sexually arousing” and “obscene” materials. It provides penalties for a person who captures and threatens to or distributes images of another person that are designated as pornographic under this law.</p> <p>ICT Act 2013/ Digital Security Act 2018/ Cyber Security Act 2023 Repackaged multiple times under different names since 2013, this law has been widely seen as a tool to suppress dissent and crack down on activists critical of the Awami League government, and activists have called for its repeal by the interim government.⁵¹ Self-censorship undertaken by content creators has particularly affected LGBTIQ individuals and organizations in an already repressive socio-legal environment.⁵²</p>	<p>Sections 354 and 509 of the Penal Code are of colonial provenance and criminalize assault or attempt to assault with the intention of “outraging the modesty of a woman” or the use of words, gestures, and acts that are “insulting to the modesty of a woman.”</p> <p>The Women and Children Repression Prevention Act (WCRPA) 2000 criminalizes offenses against women and children, including trafficking, kidnapping, rape, sexual assault, and violence for dowry. It does not address online offenses.</p>

⁵⁰ Hasan Mahamudul, “Govt Drafts Fresh Telecom Act,” *The Daily Star*, March 25, 2024, <https://www.thedailystar.net/business/economy/news/govt-drafts-fresh-telecom-act-3574146>.

⁵¹ Amnesty International, “Bangladesh: Interim Government must restore freedom of expression in Bangladesh and repeal Cyber Security Act,” August 8, 2024, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/08/bangladesh-interim-government-must-restore-freedom-of-expression-in-bangladesh-and-repeal-cyber-security-act/>; Clooney Foundation for Justice, “Bangladesh: Drop Cases Still Pending Under Flawed Cyber Security Law Repealed in 2018,” November 1, 2024, <https://cfj.org/news/bangladesh-drop-pending-cybersecurity-law-cases/>.

⁵² Shongshoptak, “In the Shadows of Self-Censorship: The Impact of Cyber Security Act on Bangladesh’s LGBTIQ+ Movement,” *Engage Media*, December 19, 2023, <https://engagemedia.org/2023/youth-bangladesh-sc-en/>.

Country	LGBTQ Legal Rights	Digital Security	Protection Against Gender-Based Violence
Indonesia	<p>The new Criminal Code passed in 2022 makes sexual relationships outside marriage a criminal offense punishable by up to a year of imprisonment, with the effect of criminalizing same-sex intimacy nationwide for the first time. The law comes into effect in 2026.</p> <p>While there are no national-level laws currently in effect that criminalize same-sex intimacy, several provinces punish homosexuality in their provincial laws, with sentences ranging from public flogging to mandated conversion practices. These jurisdictions include the provinces of Aceh and South Sumatra and the cities of Bukit Tinggi, Bogor, Garut, Pariaman, Padang Panjang, and Cianjur.</p> <p>No laws protect against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. No laws provide legal recognition for transgender people.</p>	<p>Electronic Information and Transactions Law No. 11 (<i>Undang-undang ITE</i>) seeks to regulate information and electronic transactions. It also prohibits online defamation, threats, and extortion.</p> <p>Pornography Law No. 44 (<i>Undang-undang pornografi</i>) has a very broad definition of pornography, explicitly criminalizing the production or consumption of content with “deviant sexual intercourse.” Apart from the state, religious institutions, families, and communities are also defined as actors responsible for the prevention of the proliferation of pornography and upholding a “moral” society.</p>	<p>Law Number 12 2022 on Sexual Violence against Women includes “electronic-based sexual violence (<i>Undang-undang TPKS</i>). This long-anticipated legal measure only proves to be partially effective against online gender-based violence as it leaves out many instances of such violence from its ambit, including non-consensual sharing of sexual images and videos, doxing, and online threats of physical violence and incitement to violence.⁵³ The act currently criminalizes acts of non-consensual capturing of sexual images and videos; sending unsolicited sexual content; digitally facilitated stalking; online sexual harassment; and sextortion.⁵⁴</p>

⁵³ International Commission of Jurists (ICJ), “Indonesia: Protect women against online gender-based violence more effectively,” September 26, 2023, <https://www.icj.org/resource/indonesia-protect-women-against-online-gender-based-violence-more-effectively/>.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

Country	LGBTQ Legal Rights	Digital Security	Protection Against Gender-Based Violence
<p>Malaysia</p>	<p>Consensual same-sex intimacy is criminalized through the Penal Code Sections 377A, 377B, and 377D, as well as through state Shariah enactments.</p> <p>Trans people are criminalized throughout Malaysia under state Sharia enactments and face criminal charges for offenses such as “a man posing as a woman” or “a woman posing as a man.”</p> <p>No laws protect against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. No laws provide legal recognition for transgender people, and in fact, fatwas exist.</p>	<p>The Personal Data Protection Act 2010 (PDPA) regulates the use, processing, and disclosure of personal data with regard to commercial transactions and applies to anyone who processes or has control over the processing of any personal data in respect of commercial transactions. Unfortunately, personal data used for registration of social media, for instance, is non-commercial and hence does not come under the remit of this act.⁵⁵ In fact, the law cannot be used to prosecute the misuse of personal data in cases of doxing.</p> <p>Under the Cyber Security Act 2024, the authorities can search and seize electronic equipment without warrants, and internet intermediaries can be fined heavily for noncompliance regarding providing data to the state.⁵⁶</p> <p>The Communications and Multimedia Act (1998) has a broad-ranging purview from consumer protection to content regulation and investigatory powers.⁵⁷ Rights groups have already flagged that the act is contrary to freedom of expression and the right to privacy. The proposed amendments to the act in December 2024 have deepened these concerns, as the amendments propose an overreach of the MCMC, increased surveillance, and subjective morality in legal provisions, among others.⁵⁸</p>	<p>Section 507A of the Penal Code (commonly referred to as the “Stalk Act”) and the Anti-Sexual Harassment Act, both introduced in 2022, provide protection in case of offences committed both online and offline.</p>

⁵⁵ Jillian Chia, “New Laws to Protect Personal Data,” Skrine, June 30, 2010, <https://www.skrine.com/insights/newsletter/june-2010/new-laws-to-protect-personal-data>.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Article 19, “Malaysia The Communications and Multimedia Act 1998: Legal Analysis.”

⁵⁸ Article 19, “Malaysia: Halt the repressive amendments to the Communications and Multimedia Act.”

Country	LGBTQ Legal Rights	Digital Security	Protection Against Gender-Based Violence
<p>The Philippines</p>	<p>Same-sex relations are legal.</p> <p>While there are no laws that protect against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression, at least eight provinces and roughly 30 cities and barangays have ordinances and provisions to prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or sexual identity and gender identity.</p> <p>Additionally, the Magna Carta of Women and the Magna Carta for Public Social Workers also include provisions that protect against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.</p> <p>Several draft bills to protect against discrimination have been tabled in Congress, and while some bills were passed in the lower House, they have always been blocked in the Senate.</p> <p>There is no legal gender recognition allowing for the change of gender markers of trans persons.</p>	<p>The Cybercrime Prevention Act of 2012 defines and penalizes content-related offenses, including consensual acts such as cybersex as well as online manifestations of criminal acts such as libel and child pornography.</p> <p>The Anti-Photo and Video Voyeurism Act of 2009 criminalizes “photo or video voyeurism,” defined as the copying, distribution, sharing, etc., of intimate sexual images or videos without prior written consent from the person featured in such material, irrespective of consent to record such images.</p>	<p>The Safe Spaces Act of 2018 expands on a previous anti-sexual harassment act and protects victim-survivors from acts of sexual harassment in, among other settings, online spaces. The law prohibits “gender-based online sexual harassment,” defined as online acts targeted at particular persons that terrorize and intimidate victims.</p> <p>The Anti-Violence Against Women and their Children Act of 2004 addresses various forms of violence against women and children committed within the context of intimate partner relationships, including physical, sexual, and psychological violence and economic violence. In a December 2022 decision, the Supreme Court ruled on the applicability of the Anti-Violence Against Women and their Children Act to same-sex relationships between women.⁵⁹</p>

⁵⁹ Supreme Court Public Information Office, “SC: Anti-VAWC Act Applies to Lesbian Relationships,” May 17, 2023, <https://sc.judiciary.gov.ph/sc-anti-vawc-act-applies-to-lesbian-relationships/>.

Country	LGBTQ Legal Rights	Digital Security	Protection Against Gender-Based Violence
Vietnam	<p>Same-sex relations have been decriminalized since 2000.</p> <p>No laws protect against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.</p> <p>Trans people can access limited legal gender recognition on the basis of surgery.</p>	<p>Law No. 24/2018/QH14 on Cybersecurity (2018) provides for the protection of national security and public order in cyberspace, outlining the responsibilities of relevant agencies, organizations, and individuals in ensuring network security. The law also explicitly mentions the prohibition of acting against the state as well as discrimination on the basis of gender or race, prostitution, trafficking, and the production of material deemed pornography. Finally, this law provides for protection from online content that is humiliating and slandering and violates the “dignity and honor” of any individual.</p> <p>Decision No. 874/2021/QĐ-BTTTT on Code of Conduct on Social Networks (2021) This policy sets out a code of conduct for social media intermediaries for the smooth running of social media networks as well as for individuals and non-state organizations using social media, state agencies, and civil servants. Under the code of conduct, individuals are asked to comport themselves in line with “moral values” and not post content that violates the “honor and dignity” of other individuals and organizations.</p>	<p>Law No. 73/2006/QH11 on Gender Equality (2006) stipulates the implementation of gender equality in the fields of politics, economy, labor, education and training, science and technology, culture, information, sports, health, and family.</p> <p>While the law distinguishes gender and sex, they are defined in binary terms as roles and behaviors pertaining to men and women and biological characteristics pertaining to men and women, respectively. Gender equality, therefore, is defined as equality between men and women in the law.</p> <p>Law No. 13/2022/QH15 on Domestic Violence Prevention and Control (2022) provides for the prevention of domestic violence, protection of persons at risk of domestic violence, survivor support, and remedies for domestic violence. The law defines domestic violence as “the intentional act of a family member that harms or has the potential to cause physical, mental, sexual, and economic harm to other family members,” thereby not defining the victims in terms of gender.</p>

Emerging Trends

FORMS OF ONLINE GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

1. Policing Gender Norms Through Hateful Remarks and Abuse

LBQ persons interviewed and responding to surveys across Bangladesh, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Vietnam faced online gender-based violence in the form of hateful remarks fueled both by misogyny and queer and transphobia whereby “traditional” gender norms are supposedly subverted. In many of these cases, the perpetrators were unknown to the respondents, often complete strangers.

In **Vietnam**, B. Tram, a lesbian woman, described an incident where she received a long message on Facebook from an unknown person:

One day, I posted a photo, and a complete stranger, I didn't know why they knew my Facebook, texted me: 'What a girl! You don't look like a proper girl, and you love girls that destroy Vietnam's fine tradition'...and I just remember that they used one or two slurs: 'Fuck you,' and something like 'You're living a wrong life, you are at the bottom of society'...generally, I received [such comments] a lot.⁶⁰

For a transmasculine person from an ethnic minority group in **Bangladesh**, his ethnic identity was as much a subject of hateful comments on social media as his transness:

I get threatened very often on social media. They are super curious about my gender, whether I am a man or a woman...People harass me not only for my gender identity but also for my ethnicity, as they don't consider me as one of them.⁶¹

In **Malaysia**, a nonbinary respondent shared:

I used to post a lot of LGBTQ+ related content, and there would be comments like, 'Why are you posting this? Are you an *ombothu* [Tamil pejorative term used against trans women]? Do you like girls? Do you like me?' and such.



⁶⁰ Interview with Bich Tram (not their real name), August 25, 2023, virtual.

⁶¹ Interview with Nupur T., August 15, 2023, Dhaka.

In the **Philippines**, several respondents noted that online hate speech often alludes to binary gender roles and gender-related stereotypes. Gina S., a survey respondent, said:

[Someone] told my friend and even posted about it [online] that [Gina] can't be a good mother because she is a tomboy.⁶²

2. Sexualized Online Harassment

A significant number of respondents across countries received sexually explicit messages and images, including messages soliciting sexual intercourse.

In **Malaysia**, of the 116 respondents surveyed, 56 reported experiencing sexual harassment online. A respondent belonging to the Indian ethnic minority reported:

I used to make videos on YouTube and Vine [as a teenager], and men would come and DM me sexual stuff mostly, send me pornographic videos saying that 'Oh, I would like to do these things with you,' send me dick pics, and Indian men would tell me that I'm acting that I don't know how to talk Tamil, and maybe their dick in my mouth would help me speak Tamil and not talk shit about Indian people. When I used to share LGBT stuff on YouTube, and on there they say, 'Maybe if I fucked you hard enough, you will stop liking girls,' and such.⁶³

12 of the 100 surveyed respondents in **Bangladesh** reported receiving unwanted lewd and sexually explicit messages, whereas 6 received unsolicited sexually explicit images and propositions.

Xuan P.,⁶⁴ a bisexual transwoman from **Vietnam**, recalls she received a message from an unknown social media user who offered to send her a picture of their male genitalia. Sixteen out of the surveyed 43 persons in Vietnam were victims of online sexual harassment, with the most common forms being text-based descriptions of sexual acts and unsolicited sexually explicit images and videos.

In the **Philippines**, Ava Q., a lesbian respondent, said that unknown persons send unwanted pornographic materials to her email and drive:

I feel violated when unsolicited porn finds its way in my inbox and Google Drive. Part of it is concern that such content would infect my files.⁶⁵

Other respondents from the country also commented that they get propositioned by both men and women online and sent sexually explicit images.

3. Cyberstalking

Respondents said that social media and apps have become spaces where perpetrators subject LBQ women to cyberstalking, including by repeatedly sending unwanted messages, sexually explicit or otherwise. In the **Philippines**, 12 queer women of the 60 surveyed informed the researchers that individuals kept reappearing on all their posts despite being blocked.

⁶² Online survey response from Gina S., July 2023, The Philippines.

⁶³ Interview with Respondent, Malaysia. Full citation in forthcoming Malaysia country report.

⁶⁴ Interview with Xuan P. (not her real name), August 29, 2023, virtual.

⁶⁵ Interview with Ava Q. (not her real name), September 18, 2023; responses to interview questions sent via email.

An LBQ respondent from the Philippines said:

There's an account that keeps on commenting on my posts and stories that were body-shaming. I think the account was created for dating purposes, but when I said I'm not straight, I'm queer, he keeps on stalking me and commenting on my posts.⁶⁶

Another respondent shared her experience of cyberstalking on a dating application:

In my Hinge account, there was a person who messaged me, a guy that I dated before. They repeatedly messaged my account, and when I blocked it, they just created another account and sent me messages again.⁶⁷

In **Vietnam**, survey responses suggested that stalking was the most common form of gender-based violence LBQ persons faced online, with 29 of 100 survey respondents saying they had experienced cyberstalking.

4. Non-Consensual Distribution of Images, Videos, and Other Content

Across all country contexts, a significant number of respondents reported the non-consensual distribution of images.

In **Malaysia**, a trans LBQ respondent revealed:

I used to be curious about social media, and I posted a lot about my three disabled cats. I was very active on many cat groups, they even made it to TV, and my profile used to be public. There was one stranger from the group (a man) who started targeting me as a trans woman. He would doxx [sic] me by screenshotting my profile and posts, then sharing it in his profile with captions that were transphobic, e.g., God will not accept trans women because it is against religion. While it did not lead to further violence, I felt very unsafe after [those incidents] and started making all my accounts private.⁶⁸

Another respondent revealed that their profile photo on social media with a pride flag background was captured through a screenshot and distributed on a group chat channel of which she was a part. Everyone made fun of the shared images captured without her consent, and she left the channel, feeling humiliated.

Another trans LBQ respondent shared that her photos on social media were used to create a fake account to mirror her actual account.

[A] fake Instagram account [was created] that took my images with my ex. A random guy was DMing me about how I was going to burn in hell, sexualizing my posts, found the school I went to, and threatened to report me to my college.⁶⁹

In Malaysia, many respondents said that perpetrators had amplified the respondents' voluntary sharing of their gender identity or sexuality on personal social media accounts with malicious intent. They reported that relatives, friends, acquaintances, and others

⁶⁶ Online survey response from Pau T., July 2, 2023, The Philippines.

⁶⁷ Online survey response from LC., September 12, 2023, The Philippines.

⁶⁸ Interview with Respondent, Penang, January 2024. Full citation in forthcoming Malaysia country report.

⁶⁹ Interview with Respondent, Selangor, December 2024. Full citation in forthcoming Malaysia country report.

shared this information as salacious gossip or with the intent to get the LBQ person censured and stigmatized.

In **Vietnam**, Xuan P., a bisexual trans woman, said she had seen many cases in which social media users, particularly on X (the platform formerly known as Twitter), outed trans women without their consent. She noted that “many trans women didn’t publicly identify themselves as trans on their profiles” and that there were “Twitter accounts created just to out others, exposing a person as not being a ‘real woman’ or [abusing] them.”⁷⁰

5. Extortion, Non-consensual Sharing of Intimate Imagery, Doxing, and Violent Threats

Based on accounts from most respondents across all countries, the most common form of technology-facilitated blackmail comes from past partners. In some cases, particularly in criminalized contexts, online spaces are often the only spaces to explore their identities and build connections with other LGBTI people and LBQ women. This then becomes a target for extortionists.

A 35-year-old respondent in **Bangladesh**, Ruma, shared her experiences of being extorted for money by her former partner:

I experienced an event of blackmailing by my ex-partner. She is actually demanding money from me or she [threatens to] publish our intimate chats and pictures. She harassed me for a long time. I had nothing but to 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.⁷¹

Another respondent from Bangladesh said that there are organized groups that seek to out LGBTQ individuals and harm them:

Some of them follow a trend, they are organized. The people who want sexual intimacy, they blackmail us by calling on a date. Their motive is to harass and rob us... It might be a high ransom or murder. Sometimes they want to use our identities to extract information about other members of the LGBT community. They say that they have proof of your sexual identity. If we do not share specific information about the community, they will publish them.⁷²

In the **Philippines**, Pat G. shared how a former partner threatened to post private photos and videos if they did not get back together:

The worst that I experienced was [the threat of] revenge porn. It manifested as desperate actions by my ex, who wants to get back together, and I didn’t entertain his advances because I don’t want to be in a relationship with him. After he threatened revenge porn, I blocked him.⁷³

Also in the Philippines, Irish, a lesbian activist, was doxed on YouTube. This politically motivated attack targeting her sexuality left her feeling extremely vulnerable:

⁷⁰ Interview with Xuan P.

⁷¹ Interview with Ruma S. (not her real name), September 18, 2023, Dhaka.

⁷² Interview with Sabiha M. (not her real name), August 7, 2023, Dhaka.

⁷³ Interview with Pat G. (not her real name), September 12, 2023, virtual.

[T]hey included my profile—where I worked, all my information. From that, people could find out what my schedule is and know where I would be.⁷⁴

Irish was assisting in creating a campaign for trans inclusion in schools with students in Negros Island, an area of the Philippines notorious for extrajudicial killings and arrests of activists and human rights defenders under former President Rodrigo Duterte.

6. Intra-Community Perpetrators

Most of the perpetrators identified by respondents were strangers and straight cis men, followed by straight cis women. In a smaller number of cases, the perpetrators were queer. For instance, in **Vietnam**, a respondent said that many of the perpetrators who outed and shamed trans women on social media were gay men. Further, 24 of 100 LBQ survey participants in Vietnam reported that they themselves had participated in at least one form of behavior that could constitute online gender-based violence. The example pertained to accessing other people's accounts and downloading and saving a person's messages and images from social networking sites without consent. Their motivation largely pertained to offline interpersonal conflicts.

7. Red-Tagging

In the **Philippines**, "red-tagging" refers to a specific form of politically motivated hate speech in which government officials or their emissaries label activists as communists or rebels. Red-tagging has serious consequences for the safety of LBQ activists who express their political views and affiliations on social media. They receive hateful comments and messages that are often gendered in nature. These statements from survey respondents revealed the ruling party's use of various forms of online gender-based violence to suppress dissent. A nonbinary bisexual respondent revealed:

I was subjected to DDS & BBM [Diehard Duterte Supporters and Bongbong Marcos] apologists sending hate messages, hoping people like me burn in hell, die from tokhang, etc.⁷⁵

I was red-tagged when they saw from my [Facebook profile] that I supported Leni [Robredo, an opposition presidential candidate]. They also alluded in their posts that I'm a tomboy and immoral.⁷⁶



⁷⁴ Interview with Irish Inoceto, July 22, 2023, virtual.

⁷⁵ Online survey response from Anonymous Respondent, July 18, 2023, The Philippines. "Tokhang" refers to the Duterte administration's Operation Tokhang (knock and plead), which targeted suspected drug users and sellers. Officially, the tactic is designed for the police to summon and warn these suspects, but in practice, Oplan Tokhang has been the systematic extrajudicial killing of these individuals. An estimated 12,000–30,000 individuals have been killed as part of this program. International Criminal Court's Office of the Prosecutor, "Situation in the Republic of the Philippines," ICC-01/21-12-15-09-2021-1/41 EC PT, September 15, 2021, https://www.icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/CourtRecords/CR2021_08044.PDF.

⁷⁶ Online survey response from Anonymous Respondent, July 19, 2023, The Philippines.

I was red-tagged in the Philippines, and SMNI [SMNI News, a news agency with links to the ruling party] called me a lesbian on their Youtube channel, exposing my name, that I'm a lesbian, and calling me a terrorist and communist. Not only because of my politics, for being an activist, but also because I was helping trans students to be included in their school, so their hair won't be cut off, and to be allowed admission [and] entry into their schools...[They suggested] my comments have no validity because I'm lesbian.⁷⁷

In at least one case the targeted activist sought asylum outside the Philippines.

⁷⁷ Irish Inoceto interview.

Impact of Online Gender-Based Violence on LBQ Women

Primary impacts of online gender-based violence on LBQ women include **withdrawal from online spaces**, disconnection from peers and sources of support, and self-censorship and modification of their online presence to evade violence and better fit heteronormative standards of acceptability. Online gender-based violence, therefore, directly affects LBQ women's freedom of association and expression. As a respondent from the Philippines added:

It makes us use social media less. Because once you have experienced online gender-based violence, your point of action is to avoid it. You will limit your social media engagements so that you won't experience those attacks again, like I did.⁷⁸

Fay T., from the Philippines, revealed censoring herself, including informative posts she used to make about LGBTIQ issues on social media:

After [what happened], I posted less frequently. I used to post monthly on things like SOGIE 101, [but] I felt that I attracted unwanted attention. Now I would just post using our [organization's] page because I feel safer doing that rather than about something personal. That way, I don't get triggered anymore. It's a little sad. I come from a family of educators, I wanted to normalize being queer, but because of this experience, I cut down on my posts. I want to counter the stigma, but that really limited my [activities]. I used to [set my posts] to public. I was braver before this happened.⁷⁹

A respondent from Vietnam added:

⁷⁸ Interview with Ash X., July 25, 2023, virtual.

⁷⁹ Interview with Fay T. (not her real name), July 26, 2023, virtual. "SOGIE" refers to sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression.

I don't like to post many things on social networks anymore. I created another account with a smaller circle of friends who are close to me and post only on this account. For my main account (the previous one), I do not post many things.⁸⁰

A lesbian respondent from Vietnam has stopped using certain social media networks altogether:

Currently, I post less photos—both photos of [my partner] and myself...I have not used Facebook for a half a year.⁸¹

A nonbinary respondent from Malaysia added:

Stresses me out that I need to think about security so much before I post.⁸²

Given that in most of the countries surveyed, fewer women are present on social media, and given that LBQ women are a marginalized subset within the whole, online gender-based violence has a severe and debilitating impact on LBQ sociality, visibility, and community-building. Online spaces have often been the sole form of access for queer people, especially younger queers and those living away from metropolitan centers, to find community, date, and explore their identity with relative safety.

Online gender-based violence led to **negative mental health impacts** on many of the LBQ persons surveyed. An LBQ person from the Philippines revealed:

[It] affected my mental health. It affected my comfort in sleeping. It affected my mobility as well. I used to respond [to these comments] because they agitate me, until I realized that they never run out.⁸³

A nonbinary respondent in their early 40s from Malaysia revealed her struggles with suicidal ideation, anger, and sadness:

I don't understand why somebody else, who has no relation to you, or even someone who is related, why do they dehumanize you like this. It strips you off, you're not even allowed to exist as yourself. It makes me angry to know that there are people out there like that... This also makes me feel sad. These are cases that might've been reported, these are cases that you hear from people. What about people who don't share these things? They are suffering in silence. Some of them may not even be here because there is so much pain that they can't continue to live.



⁸⁰ Interview with Nghia N. (not their real name), August 23, 2023, virtual.

⁸¹ Interview with Bich Tram.

⁸² Interview with Respondent, Malaysia. Full citation in forthcoming Malaysia country report.

⁸³ Irish Inoceto, interview.

I know of cases like that. And I personally have also gone to a stage where I can't be here anymore because this has happened to me.⁸⁴

Another respondent from Bangladesh said:

I had [passion] and dreams of working with dedication and learning. And after the incident [of experiencing online gender-based violence], I lost all energy. I was not fit for working. I went into severe depression. There was a time I used to think of killing myself, [that] it would be better if I die.⁸⁵

In the Philippines, multiple respondents reported that violence online affected their offline mobility. Irish, a respondent who had been red-tagged, revealed:

Whenever I went to work, I would survey my surroundings, check if there was a motorcycle hanging around. It made me paranoid seeing a motorcycle, because you don't really know everyone in the community. Whenever I walked, I would look behind me to see if someone was following me....Especially when the red-tagging escalated, I needed to take a taxi [home]. I often took a taxi, and it was really expensive. I liked walking home, but I couldn't keep doing it.⁸⁶

In Malaysia, over 60 of the 123 respondents reported that they felt more resilient and/or empowered having persisted in online spaces in spite of online gender-based violence. One respondent attributed this resilience to having a supportive trans community with diverse lived experiences. Three respondents noted that while they may have gained resilience through these incidents, they may not be empowered, or vice versa. One of them responded that they have become more resourceful, but not necessarily more resilient.

⁸⁴ Interview with Respondent, Malaysia. Full citation in forthcoming Malaysia country report.

⁸⁵ Interview with Farzana T. (not her real name), 5 August 2023, Dhaka.

⁸⁶ Irish Inoceto, interview.

Help-Seeking Among LBQ Victim-Survivors

The main findings from across the countries in Asia reveal that:

- Victim-survivors often have little or no information about redress mechanisms.
- Victim-survivors who are aware of existing redress mechanisms, including reporting mechanisms on social media, have little faith in them.
- Victim-survivors fear stigma and feel vulnerable due to their sexuality and gender identity and, as a result, do not think about seeking redress.
- Victim-survivors in some cases do not recognize forms of online gender-based violence.
- Victim-survivors report that their queer and trans friends are their main and sometimes sole sources of solace and support, while institutions consistently fail them.

INSUFFICIENT PROTECTION AVAILABLE THROUGH LAWS AND COMPLAINTS MECHANISMS

Almost all respondents surveyed, whether they attempted to register a complaint or not, felt that both state laws and online complaint mechanisms were insufficient. In the **Philippines**, a survivor reported:

“My partner reported the account of the person who attacked me, but he was only suspended for 7 days. When I logged in later, the account [was] still there.”⁸⁷

Another respondent explained:

The [Violence Against Women and Children] law is not gender-responsive. Even in the barangay level, it's not clear among first responders what gender means. On the level

⁸⁷ Interview with Jem, July 2023, The Philippines.

of case management, [a complaint] won't move forward. A key hindrance is, apart from having a weak referral system, the victim-survivors do not know where to go. This is even more of a challenge for online gender-based violence cases, especially due to the lack of explicit language [in the law] on online gender-based violence.⁸⁸

In **Bangladesh**, Farzana, a lesbian woman, said:

The existing law can't protect us against online gender-based violence. We have digital security acts which completely go against our LBQ community. It will not give us protection, rather it will get us arrested at any moment. If we want protection, we need to decriminalize the LGBTQ people first. Penal Code 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.⁸⁹

In **Vietnam**, respondents said that the reporting process for online gender-based violence is unclear. One respondent noted:

Governmental departments such as the Ministry of Labour Invalids and Social Affairs [and] the Department of Children talked about the issue. The National Hotline 111 also recognized its duty in receiving reports on online gender-based violence. However, we are still in the training stages for relevant stakeholders...Sometimes we still encounter ambiguity in the procedures. Although we do have a specific decree, [decree number] 56 guiding the processes related to addressing violence and abuse, however, it primarily addresses offline violence rather than providing specific guidelines for issues on online platforms.⁹⁰

A psychosocial worker from Vietnam, who works closely with LBQ persons, added:

Some insiders witnessed other people being [victimized] online [by their social community] after speaking up about their experiences. As a result, many believe it is safer to remain silent. They feel that speaking out will not resolve any issues; instead, they fear being blamed for various reasons, such as how they dress, their choice to go out at night, their decision to stay silent in the first place, and their lack of resisting action initially.⁹¹

LACK OF PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT

Most victim-survivors across countries choose to seek help from friends, family, and other members of the queer community. LBQ women who seek psychosocial support may be subjected to further victimization.

⁸⁸ Interview with Pauline, July 2023, The Philippines. A *barangay* is the smallest unit of administrative division in the Philippines. Cities and municipalities often consist of several *barangays*.

⁸⁹ Farzana, interview.

⁹⁰ Interview with Kim Chung (not her real name), August 31 2023, virtual.

⁹¹ Interview with Ngoc Bang (not her real name), August 19 2023, Hanoi.



In **Bangladesh**, an LBQ woman who sought psychosocial support from medical professionals reported a shocking disregard for her well-being:

Just to say, you are going through continuous mood swings, anxiety, panic attacks, and breathing issues. The regular doctors of the places like Dhanmondi, Shere Bagla Nagar, or Mirpur health facilities are not aware of the panic attacks. They do not know the patients may need psychological reassurance too...The male doctor slapped me. I was in between consciousness and unconsciousness. I couldn't say anything. They pressed me here (pointing to the breast) so bad that I was feeling like dying. They said I was pretending. Because mental illness is not an illness according to them.⁹²

Even in other contexts where affirming services are available, survivors can often be slow to trust such processes. In **Vietnam**, a counselor noted that:

Actually, initially, they didn't trust us, they didn't know [what] this organization was...And secondly, she had also been bullied a lot by other strangers, so she was afraid of being treated like that again.⁹³

DIFFICULTY RECOGNIZING AND NAMING ONLINE GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Across the countries, researchers noted that often LBQ victims are reluctant to name what they have undergone as violence. Faith Sadicon, an activist from Camp Queer and Queering Gender-Based Violence Collective, emphasized the need to unpack and reframe violence based on the experiences of LBQ people. They noted:

LBQ people find it hard to identify non-consensual sexual contact as sexual violence, especially if you have had traumatic experiences. This is also true for psychological violence, which is very characteristic of online violence. Homophobic state rhetoric, for instance, is hardly recognized by queer people as a form of gender-based violence, even though it can lead to...trauma...What I found helpful in having conversations with survivors is unpacking the types of violence with them, discussing what constitutes gender-based violence, and leveling off with them.⁹⁴

Further, survivors often fear that online gender-based violence is or is considered less "serious" than other forms of violence. As a respondent from **Vietnam** noted:

I don't think anyone reports to local authorities. Because, first, [they] don't know whether reporting mechanisms exist, or to whom they should report to. And then, even if they do report, [the authorities might not] consider it a serious matter and just [dismiss it as] immature young people speaking nonsense online...⁹⁵

Ultimately, all of these factors influence low reporting of online gender-based violence through the criminal legal system as well as redress mechanisms within social media platforms.

⁹² Interview with Sabiha M. (not her real name), August 7 2023, Dhaka.

⁹³ Ngoc Bang, interview.

⁹⁴ Interview with Faith Sadicon, September 23, 2023, virtual.

⁹⁵ Interview with Lam (not her real name), September 20, 2023, virtual.



OUTRIGHT
INTERNATIONAL

Contact:

Outright International

216 East 45th Street, 17th Floor, New York, NY, 10017

+1 212 430 6054

comms@outrightinternational.org

outrightinternational.org