



# FACT SHEET

## VIOLENCE:

Through the Lens of Lesbians, Bisexual Women  
and Trans People in Asia

### BASED ON RESEARCH IN JAPAN, MALAYSIA, PAKISTAN, SRI LANKA AND THE PHILIPPINES

- › State definitions of gender-based violence (GBV) excluded violence experienced by LBT persons.
- › Domestic violence legislation that extended protections to unmarried couples and cohabiting partners did not apply to same sex couples in Malaysia and Sri Lanka, and were not used in Japan because of stigma against lesbians and bisexual women.
- › Narrow definitions of rape and sexual harassment excluded protections for LBT victims of sexual violence.
- › LBT victims of family and partner violence were routinely denied services by women's emergency sheltering programs.
- › Counseling services were insensitive to LBT people, poorly informed, and generally untrustworthy regarding confidentiality.

## HEALTH COSTS OF VIOLENCE

LBT people's realities are a blind spot for many mental health practitioners and healthcare providers in Asia. They are poorly informed about the impact of criminalization and forced gender conformity on lesbians, bisexual women and transgender persons.

LBT respondents for this 5-country study reported they had no place to safely retreat from the barrage of violations on their dignity.

The most common method to force LBT persons in Asia to conform to sexual and gender norms was emotional violence, involving verbal and mental abuse, prolonged silent treatment, religious condemnation, isolation, surveillance, and financial withholding.

Physical violence was the second most commonly used method to force sexual and gender conformity on LBT individuals in Asia.

Family was the primary source of violence against LBT in Asia.

In Pakistan, where homosexuality is prohibited, some lesbians and bisexual women had escaped violent families by agreeing to enter heterosexual marriages, where they experienced physical, mental and sexual violence from their husbands for refusing sex.

In Japan, where homosexuality is not criminalized and transgender are legally recognized, lesbians reported feeling "non-existent" in Japanese society. Japanese trans persons felt they only existed as "defective" people with a disorder.

Family rejection and condemnation caused some Malaysian transwomen to believe that their gender identity was the result of sins committed by their fathers, a burden that they had to bear.



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## PERSONAL COPING METHODS

- › Butch lesbians and trans men in the Malaysia research avoided family gatherings and isolated themselves daily in their rooms to avoid different kinds of violence.
- › In the Philippines, LBT victims of violence relied on friends who themselves had no access to redress and external sources of support.
- › Japanese LBT reported that societal pressure to cope privately with personal trauma, forced them to keep silent, blame themselves for not coping well, and to not expect help from state or social programs.
- › In all five countries, trans respondents said they had to “normalize” the violence by downplaying and pretending not to be affected by it.
- › Most of the respondents in the study linked their suffering to lack of sensitive support systems. They relied on inner strength and, where possible, friends or a supportive member of extended family.

## INVISIBILITY OF LBT REALITIES

Long term and, sometimes, severe mental health issues related to violence and discrimination for being LBT included:

- Depression
- Constant anger
- Chronic anxiety
- Insomnia
- PTSD, flashbacks
- Chronic physical and painful illnesses
- Low self-esteem
- Low confidence
- Acute self-loathing
- Social isolation
- Substance addictions
- Self-harming
- Suicide

Over half of the 50 LBT people in the Japan study had considered suicide to end the violence and their suffering. Five individuals had attempted to kill themselves.

One Japanese transman, who had tried several times to kill himself, died from suicide during the research. A year before his death, he was told at four different interviews that he was being denied a job due to Gender Identity Disorder. He gave in and circled “female” on his curriculum vitae even as he was getting hormone injections to sound and look more male.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- › Mental health practitioners must be better able to recognize signs of family violence, same sex partner violence, and child sexual violence; and be better trained to support and assist LBT victims-survivors as well as parents with LBT children.
- › Government ministries focused on ending gender-based violence must acknowledge and promote awareness of the impact of violence and stigmatization on lesbians, bisexual women and individuals with non-conforming gender.
- › Ministry of Health and Ministry of Women and Children should hold consultations and hearings on the effects of family violence on LBT youth.
- › Governments must direct state-funded NGOs and victim assistance programs to expand services to LBT people, receive training to implement good practices for safe and LBT-sensitive services, including psychosocial support.