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HIDDEN WOUNDS

A RESEARCH REPORT ON VIOLENCE AGAINST LGBTI IN IRAN



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Experiences of Violence Among Iranian LGBTI:
Findings from 2020 Research Survey Conducted by
6Rang (Iranian Lesbian and Transgender Network)



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6Rang

6Rang (Iranian Lesbian and Transgender Network) is a UK-based NGO established after the first Iranian Lesbian and Transgender Gathering in 2010. This network spans across more than 100 LGBTI individuals the majority of whom are based in Iran. This network pioneers and leads the campaign for LGBTI rights in Iran. Our mission is to raise awareness on sexual rights and eradicate homophobia, transphobia, violence against lesbian and transgender people as well as the LGBTI community in general. To that end, 6Rang highlights the fact that Iran's discriminatory, gender-based laws favoring heterosexual males, as well as the patriarchal power structure rooted in the Iranian culture, marginalize lesbian and transgender citizens. We are actively taking action towards empowering LGBTI+ individuals, taking a leading role in the LGBTI rights movements in Iran, and utilizing media campaigns and international mechanisms towards increasing accountability for the violations of LGBTI rights. 6Rang is also a member of the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA) and has made submissions to UN bodies and published reports that, among other issues, have focused on documenting human rights abuses against lesbian, gay and transgender persons in Iran.

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Executive Summary

Recent reports of increase in targeted violence against LGBTI people warrants research into the depth and breadth of this problem. 6Rang (Iranian Lesbian & Transgender Network)'s research has previously addressed the violence against the LGBTI people within the larger context of challenges facing this community and specifically within the context of violence against the LGBTI community within the healthcare

system of Iran. As such, this limited scope leaves a gap for further investigation into the LGBTI experience of violence in different aspects of their lives, the perpetrators of this form of violence, and its severity. To that end, 6Rang conducted a qualitative-quantitative combined research survey. This survey studies the experience of structural and social violence among LGBTI as these concepts are understood within global literature.

The following are the key findings of this study.

- Structural and social violence is widespread in Iran and LGBTI people Iranians regularly experience these forms of violence.
- About 20 percent of the participants of the current study reported having experienced violence in the legal system;
- About 46 percent of the participants reported experiencing violence in the education system;
- And, about 19 percent of the participants reported experiencing violence in the healthcare system.
- In addition to violence perpetrated by state actors, participants also reported extremely concerning rates of social violence perpetrated by non-state actors such as family, intimate partners, and peers.
- More than 20 percent of the participants reported having experienced violence perpetrated by their intimate partner;
- Nearly 63 percent of the participants reported experiencing violence perpetrated by their nuclear family,
- 49 percent of the participants reported experiencing violence perpetrated by their friends or classmates;
- 38 percent of the participants reported experiencing violence perpetrated by their extended family;
- 52 percent of the participants reported experiencing violence perpetrated in public spaces; And, 24 percent of the participants reported experiencing violence perpetrated in work settings.

Recommendations

In order to break the cycle of violence and end the violation of the rights of LGBTI victims of structural and domestic violence, 6Rang makes the following recommendations to international organizations, NGOs, advocacy organizations in Iran, as well as the media based on the results of this study.

To international organizations:

1. Increase pressure on the Islamic Republic of Iran to change laws criminalizing consensual same-sex conduct and the expression of diverse sexual and gender identities in such a way that these laws are not instrumentalized for perpetrating violence against LGBTI people.
2. To compel the Islamic Republic to establish and enforce laws and protection mechanisms specifically for those who are subjected to violence because of their sexual orientation or gender identity, and to ensure that perpetrators of such violence are brought to justice.

To NGOs:

1. Work towards ending the criminalization of consensual same-sex sexual conduct and enacting laws to protect victims of violence based on sexual orientation and gender identity.
2. Dedicate specific resources and facilities to support victims of violence based on sexual orientation and gender identity.
3. Provide free medical and psychological services to victims of violence in accordance with the protection of human rights and human dignity.
4. Record, document and report cases of violence against sexual and gender minorities.

To the media:

1. Show sensitivity and pay due attention to the widespread violence against LGBTI people and familiarize your audience with this issue and the need to end it.
2. Give a voice to victims of violence based on sexual orientation and gender identity so that they can make their demand at all levels including governmental and educational institutions, the community, and their families.



Introduction

Most often, people who do not conform to the binary division of gender, or the feminine or masculine in coherence with the corresponding biological sex, and deviate from this norm, face difficulties in being accepted by the society. One way this rejection manifests itself is in the form of violence. LGBTI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex) community members often face different forms of violence.

Accordingly, LGBTI Iranians continuously suffer from violence in different aspects of their lives. 6Rang has previously researched and documented experiences of violence among Iranian LGBTI people in its report titled ‘Diagnosing Identities, Wounding Bodies’.¹ Published in 2014, this in-depth interview-based field research documented an alarming rate of violence against the LGBTI people. This research documented the experience of violence among LGBTI people within the broader context of pathologizing sexual orientation and challenges of LGBTI people within the healthcare system. However, despite tackling violence in various aspects of life, the main focus of this research was on violence against the LGBTI people in the healthcare system in Iran. This delimitation of scope left a gap for further expansion into studying and documenting experiences of violence in different aspects of an

LGBTI individual’s lives including areas such as the education system, access to legal recourse and representation, and even the family setting of the LGBTI person. Moreover, recent events in Iran and the ensuing reports of increased targeted violence against the LGBTI people from members of our network necessitated further research and documentation of this issue.

The current study builds on our prior research. By collecting specific data and personal testimonies from Iranian LGBTI people about their experiences of violence, such a direct focus on the experience of violence gives us valuable insight into the depth and breadth of this specific problem. This is done through a new methodology and in areas previously not considered. This way the study enables us to measure the societal and systemic existence of this problem. To that end, the present report provides the data and personal testimonials of the participants followed by their descriptive analysis, which also applies previous findings at time. The conclusion of this report presents recommendations to the Iranian authorities and other stakeholders based on the key findings of this research.

1 Justice for Iran, “Diagnosing Identities, Wounding Bodies: Medical Abuses and Other Human Rights Violations Against Lesbian, Gay and Transgender People in Iran” (2012), available at: <https://justice4iran.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Pathologizing-Identities-Paralyzing-Bodies.pdf>

Background and context

6Rang's research¹ into the general situation of LGBTI people has shown that this group suffers violence founded in the laws of the state, promoted by state leaders, and perpetuated in the educational, judiciary and health care system. Similarly, members of the public, families, and even intimate partners engage in violent treatment of LGBTI persons. In order to study the continuity and prevalence of these types of violence 6Rang conducted an online research survey. The methodology, results, and analysis of this research is presented in the following.

Terminology

Experiences can be broadly classified into social violence and structural violence. As the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women suggests, structural violence is defined as including “laws and policies that maintain one group’s advantage over another in places of employment, and in terms of educational opportunities, access to resources, forms and places of worship, protection by the police and other State forces, and Government services and benefits. Additionally, an absence of laws that criminalize all forms of violence against women also serves as a form of structural violence. “ The current study adopts this definition with the modification to include laws that criminalize consensual same-sex conduct and prosecute cross-dressing and other forms of non-binary gender expression.² Based on this definition, the current study considers structural violence to include any form of violence perpetrated within the setting of a governmental institution such as the education, health or judiciary system.

However, aside from the macro-level drivers of violence, violence also occurs at macro-level.³ These lower levels or settings where violence occurs are for example the household or the peer group of the individual. As such, this study considers this type of violence as social violence

and defines social violence as any type of violence committed that occurs outside of the domain of the state i.e. within the individual’s household, peer groups, or in public spaces. In these scenarios the perpetrators are non-state actors.

The analysis of this research and the subsequent categorization of the main findings are done in accordance with these definitions.

Scope

The current study considers the various kinds of experiences of violence among LGBTI people —categorized under structural and social violence—in Iran in specific settings. The settings studied here are access to legal recourse within the judiciary branch of the government, healthcare settings such as hospitals and clinics, the education system, public spaces, and households of the individuals. These settings are chosen because of suggestions in online polls leading to the formulation of the survey questionnaire, prior research showing that these are the main settings where violence against LGBTI people occurs, and these settings were found to be appropriate for studying the types of violence that this research focuses on.

Methodology

6Rang conducted this research through an extensive qualitative and quantitative online survey questionnaire and descriptive analysis of the responses of this survey. The results are based on insights gathered from our audience in response to our surveys on social media platforms such as Instagram. 6Rang’s academic experts in the field of violence used these insights to construct a questionnaire that asks participants about their experience of these two categories of violence. These included different types of violence within these categories ranging from severe physical harm to indirect or implicit forms of violence such as unfair control, financial deprivation, and

1 Ibid

2 Human Rights Council “Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, Rashida Manjoo” Available at: <https://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/docs/17session/A-HRC-17-26.pdf>

3 Unicef, “Structural violence against children in South Asia”, Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/rosa/media/1966/file/Structural%20violence%20against%20children%20in%20South%20Asia%20.pdf>

verbal threats. We also studied the settings where violence is perpetrated such as the workplace, educational institutions, public spaces, family, and legal system. This questionnaire was made up of 65 questions. As a first question, we provided nine types of violence that covered different aspects of violence (including physical, verbal, psychological, emotional and sexual violence, control of social relations, deprivation of fundamental needs, financial pressure, and abuse of power to force others to obedience). Then we asked participants which of those types defined violence in their viewpoint. This was done in order to explore participant's understanding towards different kinds of violence. Nine questions asked the participants' demographic including their biological sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, location, ethnicity, education level and four of them asked participants about their methods, how they accessed the survey, etc. The rest of the questions were about their experiences of violence, its severity, and its settings.

Furthermore, in order to obtain personal accounts of experience of violence, the survey also included open-ended questions that allowed the participants to answer questions in open text format based on their knowledge, feeling, and understanding. These included personal accounts of violence in the legal system, education system, violence in the family, and violence perpetrated by peer groups. All identifiable information of the accounts quoted by this report were changed or removed in order to protect the privacy and security of the participants. For the complete version of the survey please see Annex 1.

This methodology suited our research best because it allowed us to collect quantitative statistics and personal testimonies written by the participants while also affording the participants anonymity. Furthermore, the form of this research, being an online survey, enabled us to reach a large number of our target audience with time and cost efficiency while also protecting the participants and the surveyors from the risk of being arrested by the Iranian regime. The participants were asked to confirm the authenticity of their responses.

6Rang published this questionnaire on its social media accounts including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Telegram where the audience is primarily made up of LGBTI individuals who reside inside of Iran. These platforms were chosen because they are not only popular among our audience and easily accessible, but also because these platforms grant 6Rang direct access to our target audience. 6Rang published this questionnaire in November 2019. We received a total of 230 responses by the end of the response period, which was three months. These responses were collected, categorized, and summed based on individual questions as well as types and settings of violence stated above.

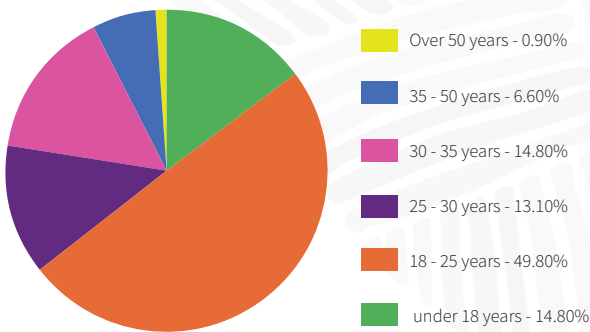
Following the collection of responses, we conducted our analysis in two parts. The first part concerned the quantitative analysis and the second part concerned the personal testimonials of the participants. For obtaining the quantitative figures, we summed up the total of responses per category such as demographics; percentage of participants who experienced some type of violence; the settings of violence; the perpetrator; the frequency of each type of violence i.e. physical, verbal, and sexual violence; all considered within the larger categories of structural and social violence. For the second part, we collected self-reported, written accounts of experiences of violence by individual participants under each type and category of violence. These responses are presented in their original Persian version as well as English-translated version. We drew our conclusions based on the results of the questionnaire in addition to the occasional comparison with the existing conclusions from our previous research which operates as an analysis lens.

Participant Demographics

Prior to presenting the main findings of the current study, it is important to consider the demographic of the participants as these provide valuable insight into the makeup of these individuals.

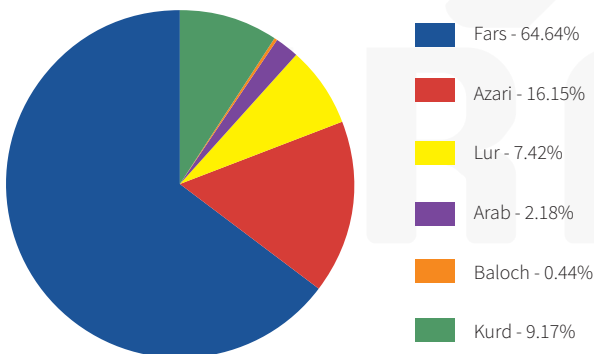
Age

As the following chart demonstrates, almost half of participants were between 18 to 25 years old. The largest group was followed by 25-to-35-year-olds who accounted for approximately 30 percent of the participants. The remaining participants (made up of approximately 15 percent) were above 35 years old.



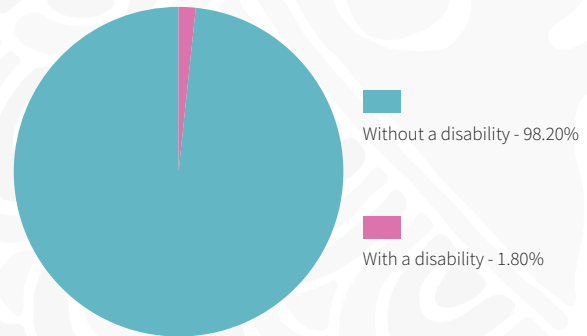
Ethnicity

Approximately 35 percent (76 of 230) of the participants belonged to ethnic minority groups while around 65 percent of the participants identified themselves as Fars.



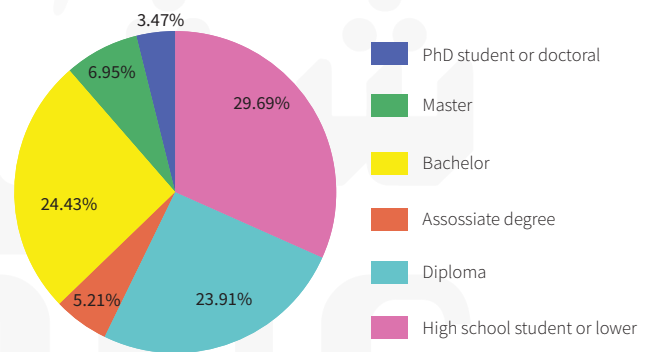
Disability

Among our participants, 4 out of 230 participants reported having at least one kind of disability.⁴ We speculate that this figure will be greater if disability due to mental illness was included. However, as there is little knowledge of this specific type of disability among our audience, we chose to leave it out.⁵



Education level

As demonstrated in the chart, the majority of the participants have completed a bachelor's degree, hold a high school diploma, or completed their secondary education.

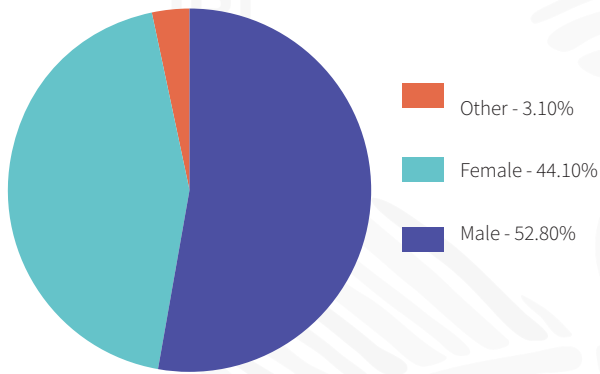


4 LGBTI people who are living with disability are mostly invisible. They are more susceptible to experience discrimination and more vulnerable to psychological distress due to experience of double discrimination. Their queer identities, needs, and challenges are often overshadowed by their disability.

5 6Rang, "Submission to the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)", Available at: <http://6rang.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/6Rang-Submission-CRPD.pdf>

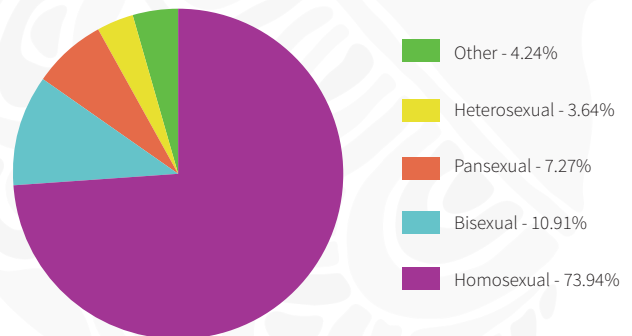
Biological sex

Out of 230 participants, 121 of them were biologically male and 102 individuals were biologically female. Seven individuals identified themselves as 'other'.



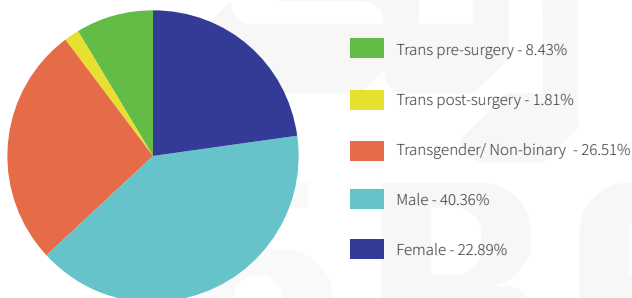
Sexual orientation

Homosexuality, with approximately 74 percent of the total responses, was the most common sexual orientation of the participants. Bisexuality and pansexuality came in the following stands. Those who described themselves as heterosexuals are binary trans- gender/sexual participants who are attracted to the opposite sex/ gender than themselves.



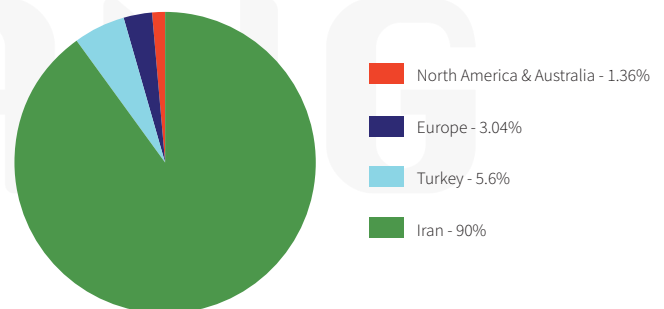
Gender identity

Almost 64 percent of participants identified themselves as man or woman, while 36 percent of them did not describe themselves in this gender binary.



Geographical location

90% of participants were based in 39 cities and towns in Iran. Also, 10% of 6Rang's social media audience from across the world completed the survey. Although the focus of this research was violence against this community inside of Iran, we included the experiences of those based outside the country as well.



Key Findings and Analysis

More than one third of participants (34%) believed their experience of violence is due to their sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression.

Participants' understanding of approaches attitudes toward violence

The participants provided by different examples and asked which one or ones they would consider as violence see Annex 1.

In response to agreement with different definitions of violence,⁶ 90 percent of the participants believed that all definitions of violence matched their personal understanding of violence. However, 15 percent of them believed parents are allowed to apply some of those forms of violence to their offspring, while 9.56 percent of participants expressed they do not avoid violence in their intimate relationship. Participants' interpretation of the concept of violence might be distorted as a result of living in a violent society where violence and humiliation are normalized and reinforced. Therefore, the reality of violence may be even worse than reported. This fragile understanding has been reflected in several individual explanations. For example, one person wrote: "every society has special laws that must be abided and in our law being gay is forbidden!"

Despite the distinction made between structural and social violence in this study and the following analysis, it is important to note that these types of violence are not mutually exclusive and could reinforce each other or even sometimes coincide. For example, when a school administration discovers a relationship between two pupils of the same-sex and informs their families, it could lead to violence from the families rather than support. Or, when a family threatens their LGBTI family member with being handed over to the police, such a person would be subjected to both of these types of violence.

In the following, the key findings of the study are explained under separate sections and data of the current research are analyzed accordingly with the intermittent application of insights from 6Rang's prior research as introduced.

6 As described in the methodology sub-section: "we provided nine definitions of violence that covered different aspects of violence (including physical, verbal, psychological, emotional and sexual violence, control of social relations, deprivation of fundamental needs, financial pressure, and abuse of power to force others to obedience). Then we asked participants which of those definitions defined violence in their viewpoint.

Structural violence

This section gives an overview of experiences of violence reported by the participants that is perpetrated by institutional officials in governmental or government-related settings. As such, the focus is mainly on the legal and judicial, education, and health care systems. Prior research has shown that these sectors account for almost all accounts of structural violence experienced by LGBTI persons.⁷ Similarly, a significant majority of the current responses highlight these sectors as the settings where structural violence is experienced. The following table shows the percentages based on the responses collected from the surveys.

In consistency with these numbers, previously LGBTI interviewees have told 6Rang that as far as structural settings are concerned, they are discriminated against in education and access to health care, arbitrarily arrested and detained, their private parties are raided, and consensual same-sex conduct and non-binary gender expression is criminalized with severe punishments including flogging and the death penalty.

Table 1: percentage of structural violence reported among participants

Agent of violence	Percentage	Frequency (number of participants)
Legal system (court, police, etc.)	19.6	45
Education system	46.5	107
Health care system	18.7	43

7 Justice for Iran, "Diagnosing Identities, Wounding Bodies: Medical Abuses and Other Human Rights Violations Against Lesbian, Gay and Transgender People in Iran" (2012), available at: <https://justice4iran.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Pathologizing-Identities-Paralyzing-Bodies.pdf>

Violence in legal system

The laws of Islamic Republic of Iran are a major source of violence against LGBTI people. 19.6 percent of participants reported violence committed by officials in the police and security forces as well as the judiciary i.e. judges and prosecutors. They consistently reported humiliating conduct or physical violence by the ordinary police, security forces, and patrol police (moral police) for reasons such as different gender expression, breaching binary dress-code norms, insufficient hijab (Islamic veil) or participating in house parties. 12.6 percent (N:29) reported they were arrested by the police because of their gender identity and expression, and sexual orientation. 30 participants (17.3%) also gave accounts of the police or judges asking for sexual favors as a bribe or hush money. A considerable number of participants experience physical and/or sexual violence in the legal system.

68 percent of the participants reported they never or rarely took legal action when they faced violence, which possibly reflects their distrust in, and the unreliability of, the judiciary system.

Table 2: type and frequency of violence experienced in the legal system

Type of violence in the legal system (police & other state authorities)	Frequency			
	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely
Physical violence	0	4.34	8.69	15.65
Sexual violence	0	1.73	3.47	7.82

Narratives and personal testimonies of participants show that the real number of those who have experienced violence in a legal setting is probably more than what has been reported. Several participants stated they are afraid of answering this question. Many participants, even those who have not experienced police persecution, reported being in constant fear of being arrested by the police. Multiple examples of personal accounts of this type of violence experienced in the legal system are provided in the following.

Table 3: personal accounts of violence in the legal system

I have been arrested several times because of my appearance (choice of outfit) and humiliated.
I was arrested in a car with my boyfriend when they [the police] arrested us at around 9:30 in the evening. They told us, “what are two boys with such an age difference doing at this time of the night?” Then, they took us to the police station and called our parents. After that, I could not see my boyfriend.
My family gave me over to the police because I am intersex.
I was arrested in the house that my partner and I had rented. It was a lot more like an attack than an arrest even though we had completely surrendered.
I was arrested four times by the moral police because of being trans and because of my appearance. They also flogged me.
I complained to the police many times because of being assaulted on the streets and on the metro, but because I had an earring, they asked me, “why are you like this?” meaning feminine. I told them I am transgender. Then, they [the police] wanted to have sex with me and abuse me. When I didn’t accept that, they detained me for many days. After that they sent me to the court and the legal doctor. They kept threatening me that if they find out I have had sex with a man, they will hang me. After two weeks they finally released me, but all this time they had not even informed my family about me.
In the workplace, I was forced to resign after the theft and disclosure of my personal information about me and my partner. My employer also had to report us to law enforcement agencies, but due to mediation from some people around me they accepted not to do so.

It is worth mentioning that 19.6 percent only reflects direct violence that has been perpetrated within police, security forces and the judiciary, while the law and the legal system act as indirect source for all aspects of violence against the LGBTI community. Sexual minorities in Iran face constant threats, insults, harassments, blackmail and abuse in their daily life by non-state actors who feel emboldened to enact violence with impunity, due to discriminatory laws that

criminalize same-sex conduct and transgender expression. For instance, one participant reported being surrendered to the police by her own family due to her non-binary gender expression. Also, a homosexual couple had to resign and leave their job because their relationship was “outed” or disclosed to their colleagues, which led to threats of them being handed over to the police by their employer.

These results confirm the findings of our prior research.⁸ The legal regime of Islamic Republic of Iran remains an extremely hostile and dangerous environment for LGBTI individuals and activists. The Islamic Republic of Iran's Penal Code (IPC) continues to impose criminal sanctions and maintain the death penalty and corporal punishment for consensual same-sex sexual conducts. The officials regularly and arbitrarily arrest, harass and persecute members of the LGBTI community and gender equality rights activists and continue to suppress any form of civil activism and defense of human rights that is concerned with gender identity and sexual orientation.

More specifically, consensual same-sex conduct involving intercourse between men is punishable by the death penalty despite treating the active and the passive partners differently (Article 234). Other punishments include up to 100 lashes for sexual conduct that does not amount to intercourse (Articles 236-7), up to 100 lashes for same-sex sexual conduct between women (Article 239), and transgender expressions, including cross-dressing, up to 74 lashes. Furthermore, expressing homosexual desires either in the society or via social media platforms are also punishable under general laws criminalizing immorality and indecency according to Articles 639 and 640 IPC by imprisonment, flogging and a fine. Alternatively, in some cases, such acts may be punished under a more serious charge of efsad-e-fel-arz (corruption on earth) punishable by the death penalty (Article 286 IPC).⁹

In order to enforce these laws, the national police and paramilitary militia, known as Basij, regularly arrest, detain, and violently abuse LGBTI individuals. These actions are not based on sexual behavior, but on a mere perception of sexual orientation based on appearance and demeanor. It is noteworthy that this includes lesbian and transgender women who disregard the mandatory veiling and other restrictive dress codes imposed on women.¹⁰

Legal prohibition on the free expression of sexual orientation and gender identity goes beyond the public spaces and controls behavior also in private spaces. These laws provide the police and state actors with the excuse to raid private gatherings and parties where LGBTI people are reported to be gathering. They arrest the people present in the absence of any proof of illegal activity and merely on the basis of appearance and behavior.¹¹

8 Justice for Iran, "Diagnosing Identities, Wounding Bodies: Medical Abuses and Other Human Rights Violations Against Lesbian, Gay and Transgender People in Iran" (2012), available at: <https://justice4iran.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Pathologizing-Identities-Paralyzing-Bodies.pdf>

9 6Rang "Submission UN Universal Periodic Review 34th Session Working Group", Available at: <https://uprdoc.ohchr.org/uprweb/downloadfile.aspx?filename=6762&file=EnglishTranslation>

10 Ibid

11 Ibid, supra note 1

Violence in education system

According to the survey results, 107 of 230 participants reported having experienced violence in their educational environments. This means that almost half of them faced violence at school, or university. 18 percent of the participants reported having been constantly insulted and humiliated by the school administration.

Violence in a school or university is one of the most visible types of violence against the

LGBTI community. This type of violence can take many forms ranging from physical violence to verbal, psychological, or even, sexual violence. It is often expressed through acts of bullying, intimidation, and repression by classmates, trainers, or other school staff. Sexual violence in the educational settings is more common in countries where being a member of the LGBTI community is legally forbidden or against socio-religious norms. This is because on the one hand, victims are afraid or ashamed of breaking their

Table 4: percentage of reported violence within the education system

Type of violence in education system	Frequency			
	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely
Physical violence	2.17	5.21	15	25
Verbal violence	5.62	11.73	27	32
Sexual violence	0	1.30	3.47	10.43

Table 5: personal accounts of experiencing violence in the education system

At school I was sent to the principal's office multiple times and subsequently sent to receive counseling. I was also being threatened with expulsion because of my short hair and my style.
One of my teachers told me I had to have sex with him if I wanted to pass.
I was reprimanded because one of the girls [same sex as me] in school was romantically interested in me. Although I was not interested in her, I was temporarily suspended from school. I was told my short hairstyle was "boyish" and it attracted girls.
Because of my attraction to the same sex as myself, I was summoned by the university's disciplinary committee and then expelled from the dormitory. This expulsion later affected the outcome of a selection procedure for a job at one of the governmental institutions.
The schoolmaster had told my close friend's parents that I was a "she-male". After that, they did not allow my friend to associate with me anymore.
They called me a "sexually ill" person

silence or seeking help and on the other, the law neither protects the victims nor has a deterrent effect on sexual offenders.

These statistics and personal testimonies add nuance to our previous general findings. Our prior interviews gave evidence that in educational institutions, such as schools, the criminalization of sexual orientation and gender identity together with the segregation of schools by gender has a deeply negative impact on access to education.¹² LGBTI people frequently suffer harassment and beaten up by school administrators as well as raped and experienced violence perpetrated by other pupils. For some LGBTI people, harassment and abuse happen so often and so severely that they are left with no choice but abandon their education and drop out of school.

The harassment and abuse in education is not limited to trans persons where their identity is apparent. Students who are perceived to be LGBTI or have non-conforming gender expression also suffer extensive violence and harassment including bullying and rape by classmates. School authorities rarely take any action to address these issues.¹³ Therefore, one's perception adds an extra layer of complexity to the causes of harassment and violence in education.

Violence in healthcare system

The LGBTI community in Iran experience discrimination in healthcare system because of staff unawareness and insensitivity, homophobia and transphobia, heteronormative discourse, stigmatization, negative comments, harassment, refusal of treatment, and verbal or sexual assault. Reparative or conversion therapy is a common practice among mental health professionals in Iran, which has also been supported systematically by the Islamic Republic's education system. In such conditions, widespread mistreatment threatens the health and wellbeing of LGBTI people. Transsexual people are more vulnerable as they need routine medical care such as hormone therapy.¹⁴ In the current survey, 18.7 percent of participants reported having experienced violence committed by the healthcare professionals. 66 percent of the participants reported they never or rarely seek help from mental health professionals in case of being subjected to violence.

Table 6: frequency and percentage of violence experienced within the healthcare system

How often do you seek help from mental health practitioners (psychologist, counselor etc.) if you are subjected to violence?	Frequency				
	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Number of participants	23	26	32	66	85
Percentages of participants	10	11.30	13.91	28.69	36.95

¹²Justice for Iran, "Diagnosing Identities, Wounding Bodies: Medical Abuses and Other Human Rights Violations Against Lesbian, Gay and Transgender People in Iran" (2012), available at: <https://justice4iran.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Pathologizing-Identities-Paralyzing-Bodies.pdf>

¹³Ibid

¹⁴Ibid

Once again, the accounts of the current participants match the findings of our prior research showing that in the health sector, the patterns of serious human rights abuses against LGBTI people continues.¹⁵ As 6Rang's prior research focused more extensively on this specific matter providing an in-depth analysis of this problem, the current study only confirms the continuous existence of this problem in a general sense.

Generally considered, many LGBTI people opt for "curing" their Gender Identity Disorder (GID), as defined by the state of Iran, in order to escape the risk of criminal prosecution, (state) harassment, arbitrary arrest and detention. This situation is further complicated by the complete disregard for ethical, medical, clinical and educational standards in the administration of these irreversible procedures.¹⁶ 6Rang's research has revealed countless instances of the administration of sex reassignment surgeries that drastically fall short of international clinical standards.¹⁷ These shortcomings have resulted in bleeding or serious infections and leading to permanent and irreparable physical damage and long-lasting health complications.¹⁸

156Rang, "Reparative Therapies on Gays and Lesbians through Cruel, Inhumane and Humiliating Treatments Has Increased in Iran" Available at: <https://www.ilgaasia.org/news/2018/7/13/repot-from-6rang-reparative-therapies-on-gays-and-lesbians-through-cruel-inhumane-and-humiliating-treatments-has-increased-in-iran>

16Ibid

17A/HRC/28/12/Add.1, at 7.

18The interview is available online at the following link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Wh0snjDCX0> (accessed 17 January 2020).

Social violence

As previously defined, social violence is any kind of implicit or explicit violence perpetrated by individuals (non-state actors) in different social interactions such as peer groups or the individual's household. Prior in-person interviews illustrate that the members of the public as well as family members inflict violence on LGBTI people.¹⁹ The current legal landscape of Iran that criminalizes same-sex conduct and gender-variant expression paired with the incitement to hate speech and hatred by top-ranking Iranian officials, not only provides the opportunity for, but also actively promotes abuse and violence against LGBTI people. This kind of abuse also takes the form of blackmail and extortion. Participants have previously given accounts of verbal abuse on public transport because of their appearance, harassment for public displays of affection such as kissing in a parking lot, etc. Other testimonies show that taunts, insults and threats are a constant reality for LGBTI people. In fact, these incidents are so common that many of them try to isolate themselves and avoid public interaction in order to reduce their risk of being harassed and abused.²⁰

A great number of participants have also reported experiencing violence in their families because of their sexual orientation and gender identity. Experiences of violence in the family involve beating, flogging, psychological abuse, forced isolation from friends and society, verbal abuse, and death threats. In case of lesbians and female-to-male transgender people, family abuse also elevated to threats to or actual coercion to arranged marriage. There have been reports of lesbians and trans individuals who were victims of honor-based violence. Families may kill, physically harm, or force their members into arranged marriages with the intent to protect or defend the honor or reputation of the family and/or the community. Iranian LGBTI people often have no recourse to justice for the violence and abuse they suffer in their families. Participants have given accounts of being beaten by their families until they abandoned their homes or were told to become "normal".

The new findings not only verify the mentioned perpetrators in addition to intimate partners, colleagues and peers, and extended family, but also give us a picture of who is responsible for the most violence against LGBTI people in which setting.

Table 7: percentage and frequency of social violence

Perpetrator of violence	Percent	Frequency (number of participants)
Intimate partner	20.9	48
Nuclear family	62.2	143
Friends or classmates	49.1	113
Extended family	37.8	87
Sports settings	8.3	19
Public area (e.g. on the street)	52.2	120
Work setting	23.5	54

¹⁹Justice for Iran, "Diagnosing Identities, Wounding Bodies: Medical Abuses and Other Human Rights Violations Against Lesbian, Gay and Transgender People in Iran" (2012), available at: <https://justice4iran.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Pathologizing-Identities-Paralyzing-Bodies.pdf>

²⁰Ibid supra note 3

Domestic Violence

This type of violence and abuse can be defined as any incident of controlling, coercive, threatening behavior, violence or abuse by those aged 16 or over who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. Such violence can encompass, but is not limited to psychological, physical, sexual, financial and emotional.²¹ As can be seen in the previous table, over half of participants (62.2%) reported violence from a member of their nuclear family. The following table summarizes the frequency of various types of violence in the nuclear family.

Table 8: types and frequency of violence reported in nuclear family

Type of Violence	Frequency			
	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely
Verbal	6.95	13.19	20	23.91
Physical	7.82	8.69	22.17	39.13
Psychological (humiliation, insult)	6.95	6.52	23.42	30.34
Financial deprivation	3.91	10.86	10.43	16.95
Sexual	1.30	5.21	5.65	16.95
Neglect (e.g. forced labor, lack of support)	13.04	20	24.78	36.52
Control of social relations / Contact with friends	10	10.86	14.74	20.86
Threat to forced marriage	8.69	4.78	11.73	13.47
Deprivation of work	4.7	2.17	6.95	10
Deprivation of education	3.91	3.47	3.91	5.65

²¹ <https://www.galop.org.uk/domesticabuse/>

Only a quarter of participants perceived their nuclear family as supportive when they were struggling with violent experiences, while 53 percent of them described their family as unsupportive. 26 percent of participants reported constant experience of violence during their childhood. Also, 24.34% of participants felt insecure about their family. Almost 26% of 6Rang survey participants reported forced marriage as a concern to different extents. Forced marriage is recognized as a serious abuse of human rights. It could lead to various other forms of violence such as corrective rape, sexual violence and being trapped in abusive, harmful relationships. The following table presents examples of participants' testimonials about their experience of violence within their nuclear family.

Table 9: personal accounts of violence in nuclear family

My father beat me so severely because of my homosexuality that I started stammering and to this day I have this condition.
My brother humiliates me and tells me I am a dishonor. He always tells me not to behave like girls.
My family treats me like a sick person and they hope that one day I will be cured.
My mother forced me to do a virginity test.
My family not only beat me and humiliate me, but also don't let me go outside of the house. I am imprisoned at home for the crime of being gay.
My family does not let me dress the way I like to or cut my hair short.
I cannot believe in anybody, even myself, because of the violence from my family.
My family has humiliated and beaten several times calling me despicable and vile. I am m-to-f transgender. When my family found out about my gender identity, they told me to find a way to leave.
When my father found out, he injured my head and it had to be stitched. I have many wounds and blackened marks on my body.
My uncle threatened me that if I don't change my sexual orientation, I will be responsible for saving my own life.

Violence by intimate partner

LGBTI people persons also face violence from their intimate partners. 11.20 % of participants reported they are in a violent relationship.

The nature of violence perpetrated by family members is different from other forms of violence. One might decide to leave the school, college or workplace to avoid unfriendly or

Table 10: frequency of violence committed by intimate partner

How often do you experience violence by your intimate partner?	Frequency			
	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely
	4.78	6.52	14.34	20.43

Examples of this type of abuse would be that an abusive partner may manipulate and convince the victim that no one will believe the abuse is real by using society's heterosexist myths about aggression and violence. For example, in a violent gay couple's relationship, the abuser might say to his abused partner "You are an adult and strong man, do not play the role of a victim! Nobody believes it". Or similarly, an abusive partner may threaten to call the police, family, or friends and disclose the abused one's sexuality.

hostile environment. It could be challenging, but possible. Leaving parents, family members and home environment is hardly possible because everyone, more or less, is dependent on the family, emotionally and financially. For LGBTI youth, independence can be a great challenge due to their problems in being able to complete an education and/or secure consistent employment. Many of these individuals prefer to stay in their violent home and deal with abusive family members because they know the world outside their home is even more harsh and cruel. Some of them may think to leave home. For those who do not earn enough money, leaving home means becoming homeless. There is no official statistics about homelessness among LGBTI community in Iran. In the US, 40% of homeless youth identify as LGBTI.²² In Iran, a higher rate could be estimated due to the lack of protective laws to support this population. In case of trans persons, this form of violence may amount to withholding medication or misgendering.

22 Griffith, D. (2019). LGBTQ youth are at greater risk of homelessness and incarceration. Available at: https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2019/01/22/lgbtq_youth/

Violence in public spaces

Public spaces have historically been a fighting ring for the disadvantaged groups. Harassment against LGBTI people in public spaces, even in states with strict local protections against discrimination in public spaces, still take place. Not surprisingly, 52.2% of participants reported experiencing violence in public spaces. Strangers in public accommodations, places of business, public transport, taxis, public toilets, and restaurants are another main source of violence against the LGBTI community in Iran. Additionally, 24.5% of participants reported having experienced cyber violence, which could be considered as a form of public space violence.

6Rang's prior interview-based research has shown that sexual assault and other physical attacks against LGBTI people who do not conform to culturally approved models of femininity and masculinity are also all too common.²³ Many of participants reported that their lives in Iran constantly involved the fear of being assaulted and raped by men.²⁴ 6Rang has recorded multiple accounts of sexual assault and rape perpetrated by non-state actors. This problem is further compounded by the fear of the participants that if they were to file complaints to the police, the law would not only not protect them but also get them arrested and charged with sexual offences.²⁵

Table 11: frequency of violence perpetrated by strangers (general public)

How often do you experience violence by strangers?	Frequency				
	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Number of participants	6	14	23	54	135
Percentages of participants	2.60	6.08	10	23.47	58.69

Table 12: type and frequency of violence perpetrated by strangers (general public)

Type of violence	Frequency			
	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely
Physical /verbal violence	5.65	6.08	21.73	37.82
Sexual violence	2.60	6.08	10	23.47

23 Justice for Iran, "Diagnosing Identities, Wounding Bodies: Medical Abuses and Other Human Rights Violations Against Lesbian, Gay and Transgender People in Iran" (2012), available at: <https://justice4iran.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Pathologizing-Identities-Paralyzing-Bodies.pdf>

24 Ibid

25 Ibid

Adding to these insights, the current findings specifically show just how frequent and how widespread this form of violence is.

These non-state actors also feel encouraged to engage in homophobic and transphobic acts because the absence of an adequate police response to incidents of sexual assault and rape allows them to do so with impunity. This lack of police response is also a source of human rights violation in that Iran is failing in its duty to protect one group of its population from violence.

Violence and bullying in peer groups

Peer groups, whether in educational settings such as school or in public space, are another serious perpetrator of violence against LGBTI people. For example, bullying at school against LGBTI children and adolescents is one of the most serious mental health risk factors. Bullying experienced among LGBTI students is correlated with suicidal ideation, suicide attempts, and unexcused absences from school.²⁶ In the current study, 49.1 percent of participants experienced violence from their peer group including friends and classmates. Only 26% of them described their friend or peer group supportive. The following table provides a collection of personal accounts of this form of violence.

Table 13: type and frequency of violence perpetrated by peer groups

Type of violence	Frequency			
	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely
Physical /verbal violence	7.39	16.95	26.52	32.17
Sexual violence	1.73	4.78	9.13	15.21

²⁶Robinson, J. P., & Espelage, D. L. (2012). Bullying Explains Only Part of LGBTQ-Heterosexual Risk Disparities: Implications for Policy and Practice. *Educational Researcher*, 41(8), 309–319. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X12457023>

Table 14: personal accounts of violence perpetrated by peer groups

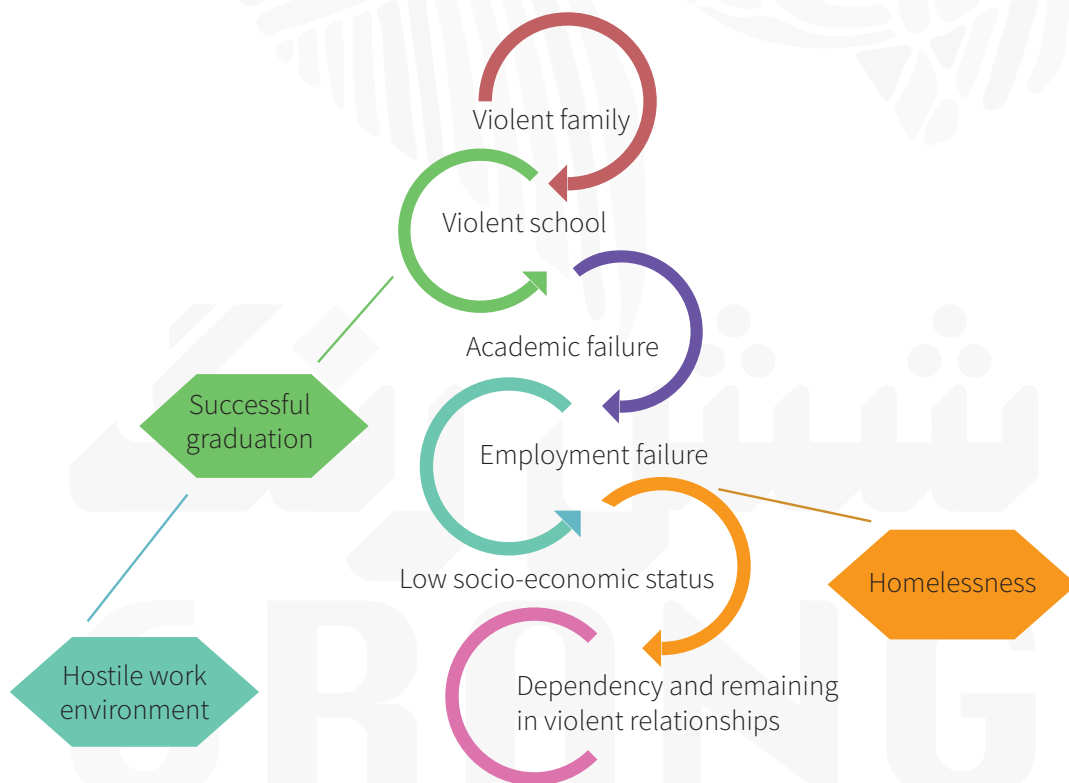
<p>When I told my best friend about my attraction to him, not only he took distance from me, but also, he told the entire school (teachers and classmates) about my secret. After that, I was humiliated for a long time and everyone was talking behind my back.</p>
<p>My friends make fun of sexual orientation and ridicule me.</p>
<p>Anyone who gets close to me at school gets labeled as a “faggot”. I am always alone.</p>
<p>My classmate often used derogatory words likes “faggot” and “bumboy” to refer to me.</p>
<p>I am sexually assaulted at school because I have a delicate body and am not muscular like other boys.</p>
<p>Two or three of the thuggish boys from my school touched my body whenever they caught me alone. A few times they undressed me by force and took photos of me. Now they threaten and blackmail me with those photos.</p>
<p>One time, one of them forced himself into the toilet and raped me. I can’t tell anybody about it because of the pictures that they have of me. Nobody will believe me and everyone will blame me because they think I don’t behave manly enough.</p>

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Vicious cycle of violence

LGBTI individuals in Iran experience violence across all parts of their lives with instances combining and intersecting to create an existence in which LGBTI people are trapped in a life cycle of violence. Starting at home, their identity, gender expression, and sexuality is severely suppressed or rejected by family members. At school, LGBTI children and adolescents experience homophobic and transphobic motivated bullying, which directly impacts their ability and right to access education. Such discrimination is perpetrated by other students, teachers, and administrators and often continues at home because it makes them unable achieve higher marks or other things in education. While many of them may not even be able to finish high school, those who find a chance at higher education, still experience harassment, discrimination, and constant fear of disclosure and its legal consequences at the university and workplace.

For many LGBTI youth, particularly those who are gender non-conforming, the lack of successful education combined with societal discrimination leads to difficulties in finding and keeping employment. Lack of a reliable job makes them financially dependent on their violent families. Financial needs also make them more susceptible to stay in abusive intimate relationships. For those who are lucky to find a stable job, hostile work environment and unwanted outing put them at the risk of unemployment. It appears that the absence of protective laws creates a vicious cycle of violence in which LGBTI people are victimized systematically. 35 % of participants were hopeful to break this cycle of violence.



Resisting violence

While seeking help could be considered as a healthy resistance strategy, silence, retaliation and self-directed aggressive behaviors such as self-harm or suicidal thoughts are maladaptive coping strategies. The following table shows the participants' strategies for resisting or countering violence.

These findings show the limitations of access to reliable sources of support. For example, only 15 % of participants rely on legal support regularly. When the law, family, and friends are the perpetrators of violence, silence seems like a low-cost solution for avoiding conflict. However, silence also leads to a feeling of being victimized and increases the sense of entrapment and helplessness. 36.08% of participants said they lost their self-confidence after experiences of violence. 55.62 percent of participants reported LGBTI organizations have had a definite significant role in their awareness and 24 percent estimated the role of these organizations to some extent important in their awareness. 57% of participants reported they use social media as the main source of information about gender and sexuality related topics. 35 % of participants were hopeful about breaking the cycle of violence.

Table 15: participants strategies for dealing with violence

Coping mechanisms	Frequency			
	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely
Silence	5.65	7.82	24.34	25.21
Retaliation	12.17	14.78	30.86	27.39
Seeking legal help	4.34	9.13	18.69	41.73
Seeking help mental healthcare	10	10.86	13.47	28.69
Seeking help from peer group	10.43	15.21	23.04	31.30
Seeking help from family	9.56	15.65	22.17	21.37
Thinking to commit suicide	12.17	18.26	21.30	22.17

Annex 1: Examples of violence

Which one(s) of the following examples is violence in your opinion?

1. Violence means beating or physically assaulting a person in order to coerce them into an act or omission
2. Violence means preventing an adult from pursuing their interests to force them to do something against their will
3. Violence means depriving someone of their social ties, imprisonment at home, or limiting their contact with the outside world
4. Violence means placing economic constraints on the basic needs of someone in order to force them to comply with constrictor's demands because of dependency
5. Violence means emotionally depriving someone in order to force them into compliance in their pursuit to finding love
6. Violence means insulting someone with words and humiliating them in order to force them to submit to one's control
7. Violence means using one's authority and position in an institution or office to violate the rights of others
8. Violence means spreading rumors or publishing one's private information in cyberspace
9. Violence means when one person forces another person into having sex with them, or having non-consensual physical contact
10. Violence means all of the above
11. I have no specific understanding of violence

1. خشونت یعنی کتک زدن و یا آزار فیزیکی به یک فرد برای اجبار به انجام یا عدم انجام کاری

2. خشونت یعنی ممنوع کردن فردی بالغ از اجرای علائقش برای وادار کردن او به انجام کاری که مطابق میلش نیست

3. خشونت یعنی محروم کردن کسی از روابط اجتماعی یا حبس او در خانه یا محدود کردن راه های تماس او با دنیای خارج

4. خشونت یعنی ایجاد محدودیت اقتصادی در تامین نیازهای اولیه برای کسی، تا بدلیل وابستگی، مجبور به تبعیت از خواسته های دیگری شود

5. خشونت یعنی فرد را از لحاظ احساسی در مضیقه گذاشتن تا برای دریافت محبت مجبور به اجرای خواسته های فرد شود

6. خشونت یعنی توهین به فرد با کلمات و تحقیر وی برای اینکه به قدرت دیگری گردن نهد

7. خشونت یعنی استفاده از قدرت و جایگاه خود در یک نهاد یا اداره برای نقض حقوق افراد

8. خشونت یعنی در فضای مجازی شایعه یا اطلاعات خصوصی کسی را پخش کردن

9. خشونت یعنی به زور کسی را وادار به عشق ورزی یا سکس کردن یا بدون رضایت ، با کسی تماس بدنی داشتن

10. خشونت یعنی مجموعه همه موارد بالا

11. هیچ درک مشخصی از خشونت ندارم

Annex 2: Research survey on the experience of violence among LGBTI in Iran

This form will help us research the extent, type, and ways of countering the violence perpetrated against the LGBTI in society, the family, and through the state without obtaining your personal information.*

Please fill out the form below truthfully and with your full consent in order for it to be effective in changing the status quo and providing solutions.

Please note that all fields marked with an asterisk (*) are required.

I find this survey essential and will contribute to its completion	Gender Identity
Yes	Woman
	Man
Age	Intersex
Under 18 years old	Transgender
18 to 25 years old	Trans F to M
25 to 30 years old	Trans M to F
30 to 35 years old	Other
35 to 50 years old	
Over 50 years old	What is your ethnicity?
	Kurd
Biological Sex	Baloch
Female	Turk (Azeri)
Male	Lur
Intersex	Arab
Sexual Orientation	Do you have any disabilities?
Homosexual (Lesbian)	Yes
Homosexual (gay)	No
Bisexual	
Asexual	City of residence:
Pansexual	
	Level of education

*The original form was published in Farsi. Presented here is an English translation of this form.

Which of the following definitions best describes your understanding of violence?
Violence means beating or physically assaulting a person in order to coerce them into an act or omission
Violence means preventing an adult from pursuing their interests to force them to do something against their will
Violence means depriving someone of their social ties, imprisonment at home, or limiting their contact with the outside world
Violence means placing economic constraints on the basic needs of someone in order to force them to comply with constrictor's demands because of dependency
Violence means emotionally depriving someone in order to force them into compliance in their pursuit to finding love
Violence means insulting someone with words and humiliating them in order to force them to submit to one's control
Violence means using one's authority and position in an institution or office to violate the rights of others
Violence means spreading rumors or publishing one's private information in cyberspace
Violence means when one person forces another person into having sex with them, or having non-consensual physical contact
Violence means all of the above
I have no specific understanding of violence
Do you believe parents have the right to perpetrate some of these types of violence against their child?
Yes
No

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Have you ever experienced violence? Who was the perpetrator?
Family (Parents, siblings)
Partner or sexual partner
School or educational institution's (e.g. university) administrators
Sports administrators
Health institutions professionals such as psychologists and doctors
Judicial system officials such as judges and ...
Law enforcement officers such as police, security forces, etc.
Strangers in the streets and public places
Friends or classmates
Employer or co-workers in the workplace
Family members
Do you ever been arrested because of your sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression?
Yes
No
Explain:
What do you expect of us as an LGBTI rights advocacy organization in tackling existing structural violence?
Specify your comments and suggestions below:
On which social media platform did you access this form?
Telegram
Instagram
Facebook
Twitter
Please include the name of the group or channel where you accessed this form:
If you would like us to contact you, leave your email address or WhatsApp number:

Question	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
I have experienced violence as a child					
My father/stepfather/legal guardian punished me with a cane, belt, or similar things					
My mother/stepmother/legal guardian punished me with a belt, slipper, or similar things					
People in my family addressed me with derogatory words like nasty, stupid, psychopath etc.					
I was deprived of pocket money punished by its deprivation					
As a child, I had to do heavy work that did not fit my age.					
At home, there was someone that I could rely on if needed					
Family members mistreated me					
School administrator(s) insulted me					
School administrator(s) physically punished me					
I was sexually abused by teaching staff					
I was sexually abused by a male member of the family					
I was sexually abused by a female member of the family					
I suffered physical violence by the police or law enforcement officers					
I was sexually abused by the police, law enforcement officers, or public officials					
I suffered violence (verbal humiliation, physical abuse, or ...) perpetrated by a friend					
One or more of my friends sexually abused me					
I suffered violence perpetrated by a stranger					
A stranger sexually abused me					
I have experienced verbal abuse (violence)					
The reason for these experiences of violence has been my sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression					
I have experienced cyber violence: I have received violent comments, messages etc. against myself					
My family makes me feel insecure					
I was deprived of education					
I am restricted from leaving the house or meeting my friends					
The amount of domestic work expected of me is more than I can handle					
I am threatened with forced marriage					
As a punishment, I am deprived of the clothes and things that I need					
I am not permitted to work outside home or have an income					
I am insulted or humiliated in gatherings					
I have lost my self-confidence because of the experience of violence					

I have experienced violence perpetrated by my partner
I am in a violent relationship now
I help those who are subjected to violence
I avoid violence in my love affair
I respond to violence in kind
I remain silent in the face of violence
I use the law to combat violence
Criminalizing laws and the promotion of state-sponsored hate speech against the LGBTI community escalate these types of violence
I seek help from peers and friends if I experience violence
I seek help from a counselor and psychologist if I experience violence
The family supports me
I think about suicide
I have attempted suicide
I hope for the end of the cycle of violence
I believe LGBTI rights advocacy organizations and the cyberspace have been effective in raising my awareness
I like to read
Social media networks are my source of information about sexual orientation, gender identity, and related issues

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HIDDEN WOUNDS

A RESEARCH REPORT ON VIOLENCE AGAINST LGBTI IN IRAN



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6RANG

Iranian Lesbian and Transgender Network

Contact us:

 6rang.iran

 6rangiran

 6rangiran

 iran6rang

 info@6rang.org

This report is also published in Farsi under the title of:

زخم‌های پنهان

Zakhm-hā-ye Penhān

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