
Somewhere Only We Know

GENDER, SEXUALITIES, AND SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR ON THE INTERNET IN SRI LANKA



by SACHINI PERERA and ZAINAB IBRAHIM

First published in 2021

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Suggested citation: Perera, S., & Ibrahim, Z. (2021). Somewhere Only We Know: Gender, sexualities, and sexual behaviour on the internet in Sri Lanka. Association for Progressive Communications. <https://erotics.apc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Somewhere-only-We-Know-Online.pdf>

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Gender, sexualities, and
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internet in Sri Lanka

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Abbreviations

APC:	Association for Progressive Communications
CERT:	Computer Emergency Readiness Team
CSO:	Civil Society Organisation/s
FGD:	Focus Group Discussion
ICT:	Information and Communication Technology/ies
IT:	Information Technology
INGO:	International Non-Governmental Organisation
ISP:	Internet Service Provider
LBQ:	Lesbian Bisexual Queer
LGBTQ+:	Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Queer
NCPA:	National Child Protection Authority
NGO:	Non-Governmental Organisation
SMS:	Short Message Service
SOGIE:	Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity and Expression
WSG:	Women's Support Group

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Acknowledgements

This research is the culmination of the time and labour of many people and we are grateful for all the support we received. We want to thank all those who took the time to respond to the survey, to be a part of the community discussions and interviews, and to share their thoughts on how we could improve the research.

Uda Deshapriya and Tharindi Devasurendra coordinated various aspects of this research at different points in time. Thank you for all your help. A number of community organisations hosted rich conversations that went into this research. Thank you to Heart 2 Heart, Venasa, National Transgender Network, Abhimani and Chathra who welcomed us to their spaces and events. And thank you to Manju Hemal, Josh Nadesarajah, Thenu Ranketh, Bhoomi Harendran, Paba Deshapriya, the late Kusum Jayalath, Kaushalya Perera, Yamuna Guruge, Hasanah Cegu Isadeen and Cayathri Divakalala who coordinated and/or facilitated these conversations with us. A number of translators and interpreters supported us throughout this research, some of whom also reflected on the politics of language that are discussed in this report. Thank you to Michael Mendis, Hasanah Cegu Isadeen, Raveendran Sivatharsini, Phusathi Liyanaarachchi, Ephraim Shadrach and Ambikai Forman.

We want to thank the women's rights programme of the Association for Progressive Communications that invited us to be a part of EROTICS, with special appreciation for hvale whose cheerful "dear super humans" gave us encouragement when we needed it. We also thank our fellow super humans of the EROTICS South Asia partnership; Body and Data from Nepal, Point of View from India, Parsa Sajid from Bangladesh and the Women and Media Collective from Sri Lanka. We are grateful to hvale and Srinidhi Raghavan for providing constant feedback while the report was being drafted. And a big thank you to Pasan Jayasinghe for reviewing the report and penning the foreword, Sunila Galappatti for her thoughtful editing, and Hanim Abdul Cader and Isuri for doing the layout and design for various versions of this report.

Finally, we'd like to thank Amplify Change for the financial resources to carry out this research, APC for inviting us to be a part of this partnership, and the Women and Media Collective for agreeing to be our fiscal partner for this project and disbursing the funds on our behalf.

Sachini Perera and Zainab Ibrahim

Foreword

How we find each other is a question that has always occupied queer people. The internet has exploded this question – there is now a previously unimaginable myriad of ways to find ourselves. New, more, easier ways to build identity and community, to find old pleasures and create new ones. There is, also, an equal number of complications when we do use the internet to find each other. Some are replications of the anxieties, degradations and violences we face in the world at large, while others are entirely new dilemmas. In a country like Sri Lanka, where queer identities are criminalised, both these equations are heightened: the shadows the internet casts are darker, the elations found therein more intense.

Somewhere Only We Know is an attempt to capture some of the answers as to how queer people find each other in Sri Lanka. It uncovers a range of dynamics in how they express themselves online and what they encounter as a result of how others perceive them. The study ponders these responses against the backdrop of the rigid regulation of queer people by Sri Lanka's government and society. The picture it paints in sum is one that shades in the complex, and at times contradictory, ways queer Sri Lankans navigate their lives, and the different ways they find

meaning through as boundless a portal to the world, and themselves, as the internet.

With *Somewhere Only We Know*, Sachini and Zainab contribute to a growing body of work on LGBTQ+ persons' experiences online in Sri Lanka and South Asia more broadly. In channelling the voices of a wide range of queer Sri Lankans, in terms of the diversity of their queer identities as well as their locations, ethnicities, ages and livelihoods, the snapshot they capture is expansive. This expansiveness is doubly important as it renders the study a deliberate meditation in self-reflection. Finally, its importance lies as a study located in the Global South yet looking at a domain whose structures and norms are still largely produced and enforced by the North. It is with contributions such as these that we can begin to imagine possibilities not just of queer people liberating ourselves, but doing so in ways that deconstruct and dismantle ongoing colonisations of spaces, bodies and minds. That we can be more aware, considerate, and ultimately, more confident in how we find each other.

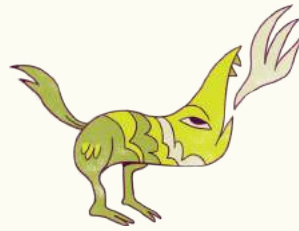
Pasan Jayasinghe
Colombo, Sri Lanka
July 2020

Key to the themes explored in this report

Internet Use and Expression Online

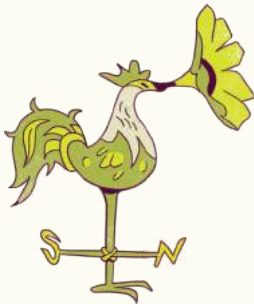


Identity, Expression,
Performance



Violence,
Harassment, Abuse

Finding Community and Livelihood



Finding Community and
Locating Activism



Livelihood



Content: Consumers and
Producers

Access and Regulation



Access



Preferred Platforms and
User Culture



Language and
Terminology

Key to the people featured in this report



Shirani



Hiran



Selvy



Hasini



Thivya



Aarya



Lakshmi



Vijay



Melony



Krishani



Shamal



Viran



Zara

Overview of Findings

Between August 2019 and April 2020, we set out to understand how the internet is being used by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (LGBTQ+) as well as people of other gender identities and expression, sexualities and sexual behaviour in Sri Lanka.

While internet access and usage is low in Sri Lanka, at 34% internet penetration (International Telecommunication Union, 2017) and 40% digital literacy, [research shows that almost all internet users in Sri Lanka are social media users](#) (Galpaya et al., 2019). The decade that followed the end of the three decade war in Sri Lanka has seen several government changes, a proliferation of neoliberal economic policies, increased ethno-religious conservatism, particularly within the increase and legitimisation of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism, increasing sexual conservatism, and heightened surveillance – all of which have shaped internet access and/or use in Sri Lanka, particularly social media. If the internet is a part of the continuum on which people live their social and political lives, this is also true for LGBTQ+ people and those with non-normative gender identities and sexual behaviour. In this study we attempted to examine what everyday use of the internet beyond activism looks like for these communities in Sri Lanka and what kind of agency they perceive in their occupation of the internet.

Non-heteronormative sexuality and sexual behaviour remains criminalised in Sri Lanka.

This has a bearing on access, on safety and security online, on experiences of hate speech and violence, self-censorship and regulation – all of these intersecting with issues of socio-economic class, language, ethnicity and age and other factors. But as we also found in this study, for those that can access it, the internet simultaneously offers a freeing space, a platform for more open expression than offline lives sometimes allow, an opportunity to grow livelihoods, a chance to find like-minded friends and community including others from the LGBTQ+ community, and a space to learn about topics considered taboo in many sections of Sri Lankan society.

We follow with the main themes that emerged; the themes are inter-connected and are best understood in that way. For instance, access and control over devices and internet use could impact on free expression online and the extent of self-censorship. However, it is possible to approach the report through the following thematic threads:

- 1) Internet Use and Expression Online;
- 2) Finding Community and Livelihood;
- 3) Access and Regulation.

1. Internet Use and Expression Online

This study explored internet use and expression online in multiple ways:

A) HOW A PERSON'S GENDER AND SEXUAL IDENTITY, AS WELL AS OTHER IDENTITIES SUCH AS ETHNICITY WAS LINKED TO THEIR USE OF THE INTERNET.

The reasons for self-expression and/or self-censorship on the internet are complex and vary from person to person according to the various identities they hold as well as the intersecting axes of privilege, oppression and inequality. For example, while being cisgender might afford you more space for expression than if you were transgender, the levels of expression afforded to cisgender men and cisgender women could vary and would also be influenced by other factors such as class and ethnicity, among others.

In this study, most people said their own use of the internet was definitely or sometimes affected by their own gender and sexuality. More than half of respondents said the internet changed how they understood their own gender and sexuality and perceived that of others, often positively. The role of the internet in a person's self-expression was highest for transgender people, followed by cis-women and then cis-men. Further, of those

who said the internet was most important for their self-expression, 71% were 30 years or less. However, interestingly, the pleasure gained from using the internet was much more mixed across age groups. While some viewed expression online as 'performance', for some with diverse gender expressions, the online space allowed more honesty in their gender expression than they could in their offline life, where they 'performed' to fit in.

B) PATTERNS OF CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION OF CONTENT

In this study, 82% of respondents saw themselves as consumers of content, but only 30% saw themselves as producing content. In terms of what constitutes content creation, most saw it as original work that has some social currency or value. Not everyone considered personal photos shared online, for example, that did not have this social currency, to be content. The ability to access information was valued across the board, particularly so for topics that are taboo or for which there is no other formal or easily available source of education – such as on gender, sexuality, and sexual and reproductive health and rights. Broadly, the survey showed that most people: always

used the internet for blogs, calls, chatting, emails, instant messaging, research, search engines, social networking, video streaming and work; sometimes used the internet for banking, blogs, forums, gaming, health information, livelihood, porn, and sexual pleasure; rarely used the internet for dating and sexting. The platforms seen as providing the most space for expression were Facebook, Whatsapp, Instagram, IMO, and Twitter.

C) EXPERIENCES OF ABUSE, VIOLENCE AND HATE SPEECH ONLINE

Of all those surveyed, 62% received abusive comments online and 56% received unwanted sexually explicit messaging and violent images demeaning to women. More than half of those asked said that it was not just women who got harassed online but rather that it was linked to scales of privilege, on which people with non-normative genders and sexualities are often further down, and that could sometimes include women more broadly. Certainly there was more backlash against women sharing certain types of content – anything to do with women's bodies, sexuality, sex education being some of the common areas that came up. It is also telling

that most of those affected by abuse, violence or hate speech would either report it to the platform or ignore it, but 90% would not report it to any legal mechanism or system.

D) SELF-CENSORSHIP AND REGULATION

Experiences varied significantly in terms of how free people felt to express themselves online, with several making compromises for the sake of safety, security or peace of mind. Their willingness to express themselves was also tied closely to prior experiences of violence, harassment and abuse as mentioned above. Sometimes the internet was at once, for the same person, a site of freedom and self-expression and also a difficult, sometimes harsh place that drives people to self-censorship in order to navigate it. People were also grappling with what they perceived as public and private lives online and offline, and how to straddle these in an online environment that allows freedom but also feels unsafe, for some more than others. Some chose to opt out of the internet as a primary space for expression in favour of more in-person interactions, or limit use because of how unsafe they feel. Family, including in-laws and lovers, played a big role in the need for self-censorship online.



2. Finding Community and Livelihood:

Internet platforms offered tools and opportunities to conduct livelihoods and support its growth, particularly for those with non-normative gender identities such as transgender people, who found more opportunity, acceptance and a wider audience online. For sex workers, the technology offered easier management of clients and improved safety since they didn't have to solicit in public as much. Therefore, there were positive gains in terms of earnings, reach and safety. However, there is a precarity in livelihoods dependent on the internet, linked to people's own identity and

lack of public acceptance, but also due to platform terms and control by third parties, some of whom have policies discriminatory to LGBTQ+ people, intentionally or not.

For many, the internet connected them to others more easily and helped them find 'community' – others with whom they could be themselves, find acceptance and support. For some, the internet provided a means to help others find their own confidence to reach out and connect, as well as to provide information that could be useful to others in their community.



3. Access and Regulation:

Access was considered in the following ways:

- a) control over devices and internet access;
- b) the cost of devices and internet connections;
- c) regulation by state and platforms;
- d) the language(s) primarily used and allowed on platforms.

In line with other research, smartphones are driving internet use, with 88% of respondents in this study using their mobile phone as the primary device to access the internet, and at least 60% having full control over it. Those who face controlled or limited access, also practice self-censorship online. However, as other sections of this report show, access and control are not barometers for free expression, as other social, political and legal factors come into play. The cost of devices and internet access are factors in how extensively and often it can be used. Regulation and internet shut-downs by the state affect livelihoods online as they do free expression. For vulnerable groups such as sex workers, the lack of regulation of their livelihoods online does not however afford legal protection. Preferred platforms for self-expression such as Facebook and Whatsapp are not

necessarily platforms over which users have much control and often they don't actually have full control over their data shared there. Fears for safety and security online – either their own personal safety or that of their data, resulted in people resorting to self-censorship.

Language use is historically a complex and political issue in Sri Lanka. The survey showed that most respondents were bilingual in their daily lives and on the internet as well. Over 30% used English only on the internet, although this includes the use of the English script to communicate phonetically in Sinhala and Tamil. Although there have been recent improvements in multilingual access on platforms, most people we surveyed and spoke to said they still need some English capability to navigate the internet. Most resources are also in English and so there is a big information gap for those not literate in English. In terms of navigating terminology around gender and sexuality in particular, terms in the lexicon of global LGBTQ+ activism were found not always to be relevant or appropriate in translation into Sinhala and Tamil or to lose meaning in a local context.



This report makes the following recommendations:

RECOMMENDATIONS TO STATE ACTORS

- 🍌 Repeal and amend laws that criminalise people on the basis of their sexuality, gender or sexual behaviour.
- 🍌 Include LGBTQ+ people in national Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and digital policy-making processes.
- 🍌 Develop community-led telecommunication infrastructure networks.
- 🍌 Strengthen capacity of law-enforcement and other frontline ICT officials addressing technology-related violence, to recognise technology-related violence and treat it as violence; ensure training to handle cases within a framework of consent and privacy, rather than harm; ensure sensitisation on a rights-based understanding of gender and sexuality.
- 🍌 State responses to hate speech and technology related violence should offer victims / survivors a choice of remedies including: the full implementation of existing laws; access to non-judgmental and free mental health and psychosocial support; access to information on how to report incidences of technology related violence, how

to reach civil society organisations, and how to access legal support.

- 🍌 Design and implement school-level programmes on digital security, media literacy and comprehensive sexuality education / relationship education.
- 🍌 Stop intentional disruption of internet or electronic communications, also known as internet shutdowns, as they infringe on rights to information and can have economic and social consequences on people's lives.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS

- 🍌 Advocate for the repeal of laws and policies that criminalise people on the basis of their sexuality, gender or sexual behaviour.
- 🍌 Develop online resources and information on sexual and reproductive health and rights, sexuality and gender, in Sinhala and Tamil, and create conducive spaces online to share and discuss these.
- 🍌 Allocate resources for LGBTQ+ people to tell their own stories in their own languages and support dissemination of the same.

- 👉 Support programmes and training, including with ICT agencies, that promote digital economy, digital literacy, internet access for LGBTQ+ people.
- 👉 Strengthen the knowledge and awareness of LGBTQ+ communities as to their rights online and remedies for action in situations of hate speech and violence.
- 👉 Expand the scope of what civil society organisations (CSOs) consider gender-based violence, to include technology related violence, in their advocacy, campaigning and support to survivors.
- 👉 In responding to hate speech and technology related violence, provide survivors / victims a range of options: advocating for full implementation of existing laws; access to non-judgmental and free mental health and psychosocial support for victims / survivors; provide information on how to report the violence, how to reach CSOs working on the issue and how to access legal support.
- 👉 Advocate for and support the development of school-level programmes on digital security, media literacy and comprehensive sexuality education / relationship education.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO INTERNET PLATFORMS

- 👉 Adopt clear community guidelines and terms and conditions that are in line with human rights standards and are responsive to technology-related violence.
- 👉 Platforms need to have content moderation capacities in Sinhala and Tamil and strengthened capacities to address incidents of violence that are reported to them, including those against LGBTQ+ people.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO MEDIA

- 👉 All media institutions online (both digitally native and otherwise) should take steps to ensure non-discrimination against LGBTQ+ people in how they are represented in and reported on media platforms.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO ACADEMIA

- 👉 Localising surveys and research should go beyond translation to local languages. Ensure that locally used and understood terminology is used, in consultation with communities whose experiences are being documented.
- 👉 Further explore linkages between the internet and mental health for LGBTQ+ people, which was outside the scope of this study.

Introduction

From 2019 to 2020, we set out to understand how LGBTQ+ people in Sri Lanka as well as people with diverse gender identities and expressions and sexual behaviour are using the internet. Non-heteronormative sexual identities and behaviour remain criminalised in Sri Lanka, largely due to sections 365 and 365A of the penal code which prohibit “carnal knowledge against the order of nature” and “gross indecency” as well as section 399, which refers to “cheating by personation.” In a 2016 judgment, the Supreme Court of Sri Lanka acknowledged that “contemporary thinking that consensual sex between adults should not be policed by the state nor should it be a grounds for criminalisation”, and held that if sexual acts are between consenting adults then there is no need for custodial sentences and awarded only a suspended sentence. This supports the position of the LGBTQ+ community and allies that the penal code as well as other laws such as the Vagrants Ordinance and the Obscene Publications Act must be amended or repealed as necessary.

Discrimination, stigma and violence faced by LGBTQ+ people in Sri Lanka and the impunity enjoyed by perpetrators including the State [continue to be documented](#) (Human Rights Watch, 2016). There are ongoing [efforts](#) (Sri Lanka Brief) and [calls](#) (Women and Media Collective, 2016) to decriminalise homosexuality and small signs of progress such

as the very first time a Presidential candidate has [openly acknowledged the need to protect the rights of LGBTQ+ people](#) (Ceylon Today, 2019). However, for most part the lives as well as the existence of LGBTQ+ communities [remain invisibilised](#) (Jayasinghe, 2019).

In the decade that followed the end of the 30 year ethnic conflict, postwar Sri Lanka has seen two government and regime changes, [a proliferation of neoliberal economic policies](#) (Kadirgamar, 2013), [heightened surveillance](#) (Human Rights Watch, 2020), [increasing sexual conservatism](#) (Wickramasinghe, 2020), and [increasing ethno-religious nationalism](#) (Perera, 2016). What has been significant in this period is that the internet, and more specifically social media, has played a role in all of the aforementioned things, especially in the increase and legitimisation of [Sinhala Buddhist nationalism](#) (Ivarsson, 2019). In fact, while internet access and usage remain low in Sri Lanka, [research shows that almost all internet users in Sri Lanka are social media users](#) (Galpaya et al., 2019). If the internet is a part of the continuum in which people live their social and political lives, then this is true for LGBTQ+ people as well. While their use of the internet for activism [has been previously documented](#) (Deshapriya et al., 2017), in this study we sought to understand what everyday use of the internet beyond activism looks like for the LGBTQ+ community



We hope our findings and the various experiences and reflections of LGBTQ+ people and others from Sri Lanka that are documented in this study contribute towards destigmatising diverse sexual orientations and gender identities and expressions (SOGIE).



in Sri Lanka and what kind of agency they perceive in their occupation of the internet.


This report finds company in a number of studies and reports from Sri Lanka that explore the intersections of the internet, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, etc. (Annex 2). We hope our findings and the various experiences and reflections of LGBTQ+ people and others from Sri Lanka that are documented in this study contribute towards destigmatising diverse sexual orientations and gender identities and expressions (SOGIE). This study was conducted as part of the [EROTICS: Exploratory Research on Sexuality and the Internet project](#) by the Women's Rights Programme of the Association for Progressive Communications (APC), and was supported by AmplifyChange. Finally, this study was completed before the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic and related public health measures. Therefore perspectives that may be specific to internet usage during this pandemic remain outside the scope of this study and have not been included in this report.

Methodologies, Limitations and Challenges


This study was done in two parts: the first was a quantitative survey (Annex 1) and the second was a series of qualitative in-depth interviews with selected survey respondents.

QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

The survey was initially intended to be an online survey only, but that posed certain constraints: with only an online survey tool, we were not convinced we could access difficult-to-reach people such as LGBTQ+ people who are not within activist spaces, sex workers whose experiences and behaviour fall outside heteronormativity, for example. Further, there were technological limitations for some respondents to access and complete a survey online as well as challenges around the terminology used in the survey in local languages Tamil and Sinhala (explained further in the Limitations section below). Therefore, we decided to organise and/or join in-person meetings in community-led spaces during which we disseminated the survey in hard copies. Five such meetings were held in total. Respondents were able to fill out the survey, provide feedback as to the structure and content of the survey and take part in focus group discussions on the politics of LGBTQ+ language. The responses from the in-person meetings were then fed into the online survey format for final analysis. The discussions that took place on the politics of LGBTQ+ language have culminated in an ongoing crowdsourced [Glossary of Terms for Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation in Sinhala, Tamil and English](#).



We were able to build trust and rapport with respondents given that it wasn't yet another random online survey, which in turn allowed for richer conversations.




QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

The survey tool was developed in English and then translated into Tamil and Sinhala. This also raised challenges of local language terminology, which is discussed in the section below. The links to the online survey tool was disseminated in all three languages via Whatsapp groups, personal and public social media pages on Facebook and Twitter, over email as well as through the networks of local community-led organisations. This dissemination strategy proved to have many advantages. We were able to build trust and rapport with respondents given that it wasn't yet another random online survey, which in turn allowed for richer conversations. We were also able to use project funds to support community-led spaces and organisations and ensure that the survey was not a one-way endeavour that took from the community without giving back.


In total, the survey had 103 respondents who completed the survey in full, while 9 surveys had compulsory questions left incomplete and therefore could not be included in the final analysis.

As mentioned earlier, we organised/joined five meetings in which the quantitative survey was filled by respondents. Some meetings were formed of particular groups based on the community organisation or group with whom we arranged the meeting. One meeting was only with transgender women and men and another with just cisgender women sex workers, while others were more mixed across the LGBTQ+ spectrum. Each meeting had a Focus Group Discussion during which participants were able to fill out the survey while clarifying questions, terms and translations with us, provide feedback on the survey including what we could explore in depth, open up discussions on the politics of language, and share with us some of their needs in capacity-strengthening with regards to using the internet in safe and pleasurable ways.

While conducting these focus group meetings, we realised that discussions in organisational settings were not always the best way to reach out to informal groups of queer people who spend time together. Learning from this, we also organised a community social gathering at a queer-friendly venue where attendants filled out surveys and added and discussed terms for the [glossary](#) while socialising with each other. We limited this gathering to those who



Out of the 103 respondents of the survey, 50 had indicated that they were interested in speaking to us further about their experiences in using the internet.



identify as women and femme given that “in Sri Lanka, as in other places, the histories of queer movements are often told through the lens of gay men’s histories” ([Wijesiriwardena, 2017](#)) and patriarchal restrictions on mobility and other freedoms limit the opportunities women and femmes have to convene and socialise. The focus groups, including this social gathering, were also important for intergenerational connections to be made between Lesbian Bisexual Queer (LBQ) women. There has been a gap in LBQ women’s organising ever since the dissolution of the Women’s Support Group (WSG) in 2010 and while in the last few years there have been younger LBQ women organising informally, there haven’t been many opportunities for them to interact with those from earlier generations. Therefore, we were glad to see that the convenings also became an opportunity to meet, connect and share stories and experiences.

Out of the 103 respondents of the survey, 50 had indicated that they were interested in speaking to us further about their experiences in using the internet. We selected 13 respondents to be interviewed on the basis of language (Tamil – 5, Sinhala – 4, English – 4), ensuring that there was a diversity of identities represented in this sample as well as on the basis of their responses in areas we could explore further through deeper dives. All names of interviewees have been changed

in this report to protect their privacy. The interviews were conducted in Tamil, Sinhala and English depending on the preference of the interviewee, and the Tamil and Sinhala interviews were translated into English.

The findings are presented below on the basis of themes that emerged from the analysis of survey data – and supported or explained further through the qualitative interviews. The term ‘LGBTQ+’ has been used in this study to reflect the identities of the people who participated. This includes those that did not want to identify in any particular way or said they were non-binary. As this survey and associated discussions were open to anyone of non-normative sexualities or sexual behaviour as well – for example sex workers – that has been denoted as relevant in this report.

LIMITATIONS AND CHALLENGES

The findings of this research have to be viewed in the context of several limitations and challenges. A fundamental limitation was that while we had allocated time to share the first draft of the survey (developed by APC as it was for three countries) with local LGBTQ+ community members for their feedback before being finalised, we were unable to do this due to delays that were beyond our control. As a result of this, there were limitations in the

options the survey provided for the category of identity, with some respondents unable to identify with any. For example, some transgender people used cisgender options, as they couldn’t see themselves reflected in the survey; some Tamil respondents did not identify with the ethnic identity framing.

The most effective way of reaching out to communities to disseminate the survey was through community organisations and their networks. However, there are also LGBTQ+ people who are not within activist spaces but are organised informally and socially. Or groups such as sex workers whose experiences and behaviour fall outside of heteronormativity, but are not always captured under the umbrella of LGBTQ+ and therefore are not always included in the networks of community organizations (although there are overlaps). We took cognisance of this in our outreach plan and attempted to address this by reaching out in several ways to as many groups of people as we could access, within the scope of this study. However, this remains a limitation.

We faced some challenges when translating the survey to Tamil and Sinhala, the key issue being that some of the terminology in English such as queer or non-binary do not translate into the local terminology or understanding, something that could have been mitigated had we been able to have

the draft survey reviewed by the community before finalising it. There was also a technical error in the Tamil translation of the survey, with the survey administrator repeating the same question twice and omitting another. So the question on how much control respondents have over their device was unanswered by about 30 respondents.

The survey was initially intended to be mainly an online survey but with the above reasons in mind, as well as in consideration of some of our respondents' technological capacities to access and fill out an online survey, we decided to organise and/or join in-person meetings in community-led spaces during which we disseminated the survey in hard copies. Respondents were able to fill out the survey, provide feedback on the structure and content of the survey, and take part in focus group discussions on the politics of LGBTQ+ language. The community gatherings had a restricted audience, for reasons of safety and security and based on who was willing to be a part of the discussion, and is therefore limited to that degree. However, the online survey was shared widely on social media groups and networks in order to reach a wider audience of people.

During these discussions, more limitations of the survey were revealed. Some respondents noted that while the survey

recognised gender as cis or trans, some of them identified as simply man or woman even if they were not cisgender. They felt the survey did not have a place for their identity. During a focus group in the Eastern province, respondents raised the phrasing of 'ethnic minority' to be problematic in a question that gave a list of identities to choose from, and said they would have preferred a phrasing of 'discriminated or marginalised on the basis of ethnicity'. Therefore many chose not to identify as an ethnic minority in the survey, a decision we respect while acknowledging that the representation of different ethnicities will consequently not be fully reflected in the findings.

A key challenge we faced in surveys being filled out by hand was in ensuring that all compulsory questions were answered. Although we reminded respondents about this frequently, the challenges in how some LGBTQ+ terminology translated to local languages, as well as the ambiguity of some of the multiple choice answers such as 'sometimes' and 'once in a while', resulted in some incomplete surveys that could not be included. In some instances, respondents had added their own answers even when choices were offered from which to select, which meant that the responses to these questions could not be included in the final quantitative analysis.

Findings

As mentioned in the overview of findings at the start of this report, the main themes that emerged are inter-connected and are best understood in that way. However, it is possible to approach the findings through the following thematic threads:

- 1) Internet Use and Expression Online;
- 2) Finding Community and Livelihood;
- and 3) Access and Regulation.

Who were the respondents?

AGE

Our respondents were mostly between the ages of 18–44 with the median age being 28. Thirty per cent of the respondents were under the age of 25 while 34% were between 25–30 years of age. On a scale of 1 to 10 (10 being

the highest), 35 of 100 respondents rated the internet at a 10 for being an important site of self-expression, and 23 of these respondents were 30 years old or younger (71%).

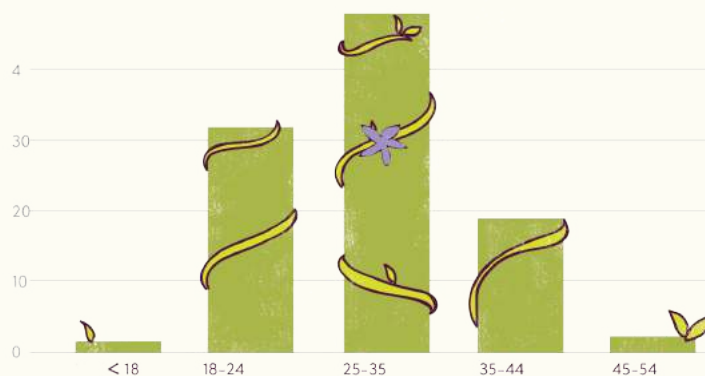


Figure 01: Age



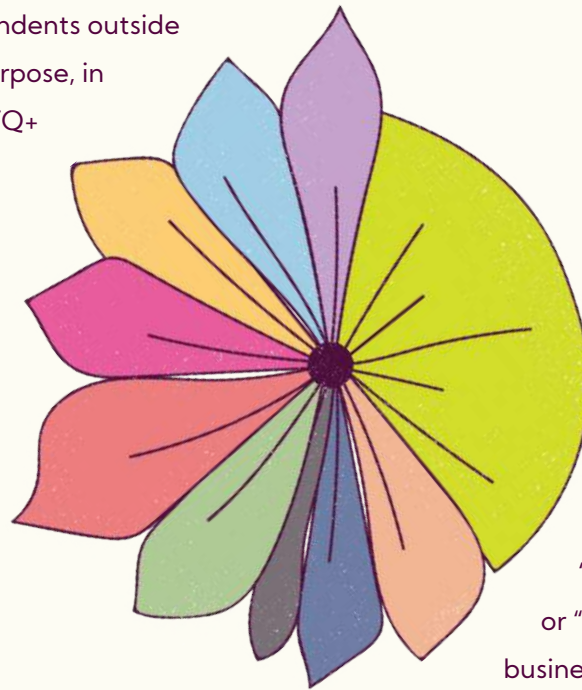
Melony, a 46 year-old cisgender gay man, rated the internet at 5 on the same scale, as a site for self-expression. He started using the internet 10 years ago and has been performing in drag for over 20 years and is known by his performance name, so for him the internet is only one of the sites or spaces in which he expresses himself, and not the most important one.



Whereas, for 30 year old Viran, who identifies as non-binary and has been using the internet since they were a child, the internet was where they understood and embraced their identity and also the space in which they are fully able to be themselves, therefore rated 10. While age was not the only factor that informed Melony's and Viran's use and experience of the internet to express themselves, the age at which they began using the internet affected how they perceived it as a space for expression.

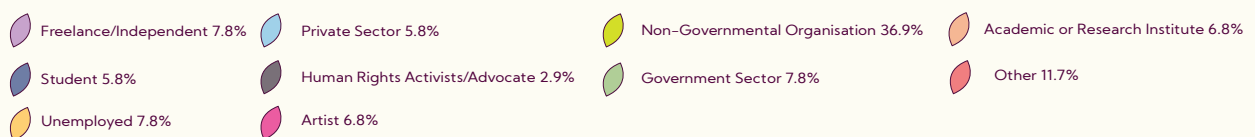
OCCUPATION

While 39.8% of our respondents were from Non Governmental Organisations (NGO) or were activists, 60% of the respondents were from other sectors. This is significant because we reached out to respondents outside of the NGO sector on purpose, in order to document LGBTQ+ people's experiences on the internet beyond activism and advocacy.



While 7.8% of respondents were unemployed, many who marked 'other' explained that they were "currently not working" or "currently not doing business", indicating that either 'unemployed' was not accurate enough to describe their work status or that they disassociated from the term.

Figure 02: Occupation



SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER IDENTITY AND EXPRESSION (SOGIE)

While at first glance it looks like the respondents were mostly cisgender women and heterosexual, this has to be understood in the context of some of the limitations and challenges they faced while filling the survey. Some people, including but not limited to those who were post-operative, felt that the option to choose between cis and trans was too limiting and they identified simply as man or woman. Therefore some respondents opted for cis regardless of the gender assigned

at birth. A majority of those identifying as heterosexual then have to be understood within this context, with the possibility of their not being cisgender within the commonly accepted definition of the term. It should also be noted that the sexual behaviour of some of the respondents cannot be understood with their responses to sexual orientation. Some of the responses to 'Other' in sexual orientation included demiromantic/ demisexual, possibly bisexual, and trans/straight.

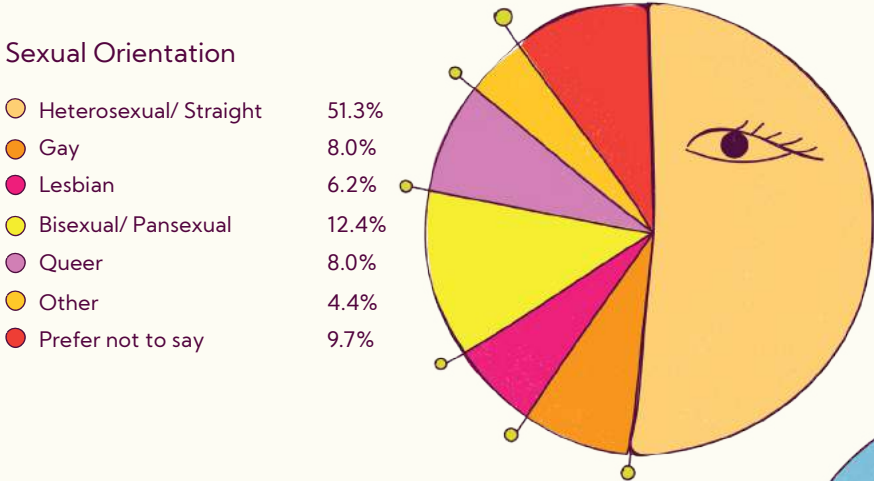


Figure 03: Sexual orientation

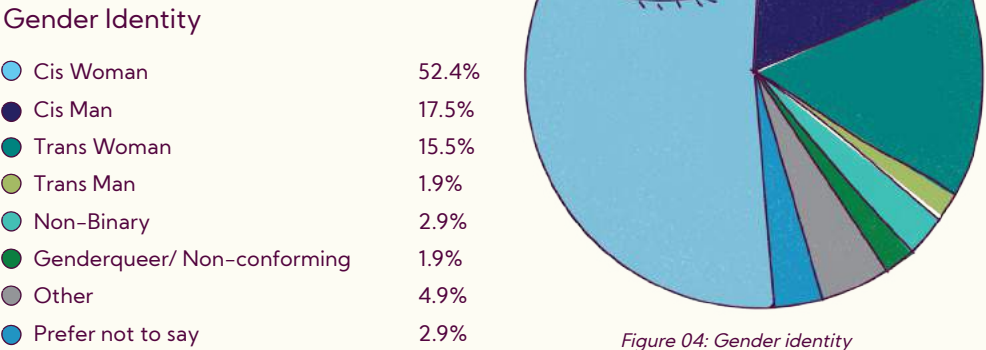


Figure 04: Gender identity

LOCATION

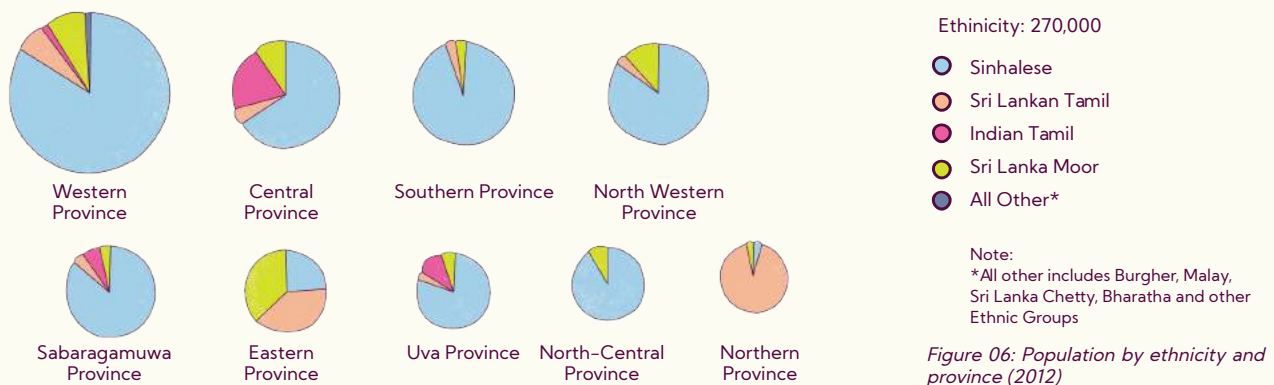
While the survey did not ask respondents to specify their location according to district or province, we organised and attended community gatherings that were held in the Western and Eastern Provinces and were attended by participants from the Western, Northern and Eastern Provinces. Given internal migration within the country, especially to the Western Province, it is possible that some of the respondents were originally from other provinces. Given the limitations of time and resources, we were not able physically to cover all provinces of the country except through online dissemination. However the selection of Western, Northern and Eastern Provinces was deliberate. The capital city being in the Western Province and urban access to the internet, urban lifestyles closely connected to everyday internet use, as well as the research

team and many queer groups being based in the capital were reasons for picking the Western Province. However, there are ethnic, cultural, linguistic and geographical specificities to how people in other provinces use the internet, especially in the primarily Tamil-speaking Northern and Eastern Provinces, where state surveillance and military presence continue to be high, including intensifications after the 2019 Easter Sunday attacks. At the same time, there is queer organising in these provinces which is affected by the specificities mentioned above as well as the criminalisation of homosexuality in the country. This made it important to ensure that experiences of queer people from these provinces were also recorded through the survey and interviews.



Figure 05. Survey locations

According to the 2012 Census of Population and Housing, the ethnic composition of the provinces is as follows:



Online vs Offline: A False Dichotomy or Not?

THE SAME VIOLENCE WE SEE
IN THE OFFLINE WORLD IS
REPLICATED ON THE INTERNET

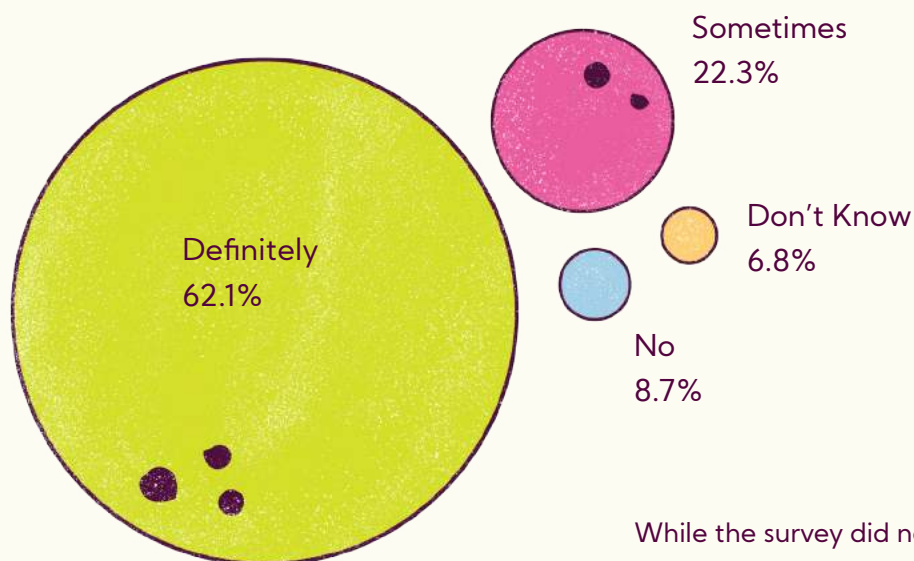


Figure 07: The same violence we see in the offline world is replicated on the internet

While the survey did not explicitly ask respondents if they view the online and offline as a binary or as two parts of the same continuum, some questions, such as the one above, did force them to consider it as a binary. During interviews, we learnt that while many respondents see the line between online and offline worlds blurring, they still made conscious decisions to use these as different spaces in which they would express themselves, especially their gender identity and sexuality, in differing and often strategic ways.



Hiran, a cisgender gay man, doesn't perceive online and offline as very clear cut binaries but it is evident that he was less cautious about expressing himself online than he was offline. He wanted to be an actor ever since childhood but chose to maintain a low profile while in school and didn't participate in theatre productions except in one minor role. The low profile was mainly due to concerns he had for his personal safety as someone who, while not out as gay, was not perceived as heterosexual either. But these same concerns were not factors when he set up a YouTube channel and posted his first video. While the internet exposed him to a much wider audience than a school play would have, there was an implicit sense of safety in a virtual audience's lack of physical proximity. He admits to not really having thought through what the consequences of posting a video would be and doing it with no set expectations.

For Vijay, a cisgender heterosexual man, the internet can get in the way of building real world connections, a block to engaging with "real community." He says, "I sometimes feel I can just be in a room and do everything without stepping out. So I think this (the internet) is a block to engaging with the real



community. So in my case, I wonder sometimes if it distracts from everything else." This he says, is one of the worst aspects of the internet in his opinion.

For Selvy, a cisgender woman who preferred not to share her sexual orientation, the difference between the online world and 'real life' is that in real life people are face-to-face and so they don't always say exactly what they want to, or if they want to be abusive or harass someone, there is always the possibility that they could be arrested by the police. But on Facebook, for example, she says, they can hide behind fake IDs or, when they don't know the person, feel free to say whatever they want and so they easily abuse women and trans people and others.



Zara, a cisgender bisexual queer woman, shared another view of the online vs offline dichotomy (or not). She talked about how



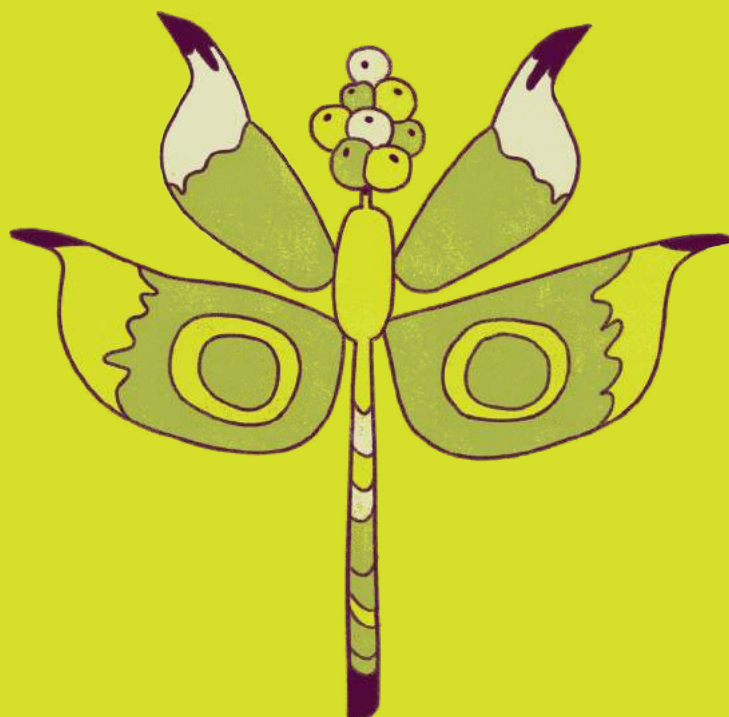
"online activist" or "online feminist" have negative connotations and are most often used disparagingly because learning your politics primarily online is viewed by some as insufficient. As someone whose political education in feminism and queer theory happened almost entirely online, for Zara such a clear cut divide does not exist between online and offline, she said they came together seamlessly to form her reality. Both Krishani (a cisgender woman who identified as straight but also possibly bisexual)





and Thivya (a cisgender, bisexual woman), spoke of the dangers of digital addiction, again raising concern about the blurring line between the online and the offline and how the online or the digital are taking over our lives more and more.

Therefore, it seems many respondents are occupying this contradiction the internet offers them. On one hand, there's a sense that space and time are being transcended through technology as per Castell's theory of network society (Castells, 2000), the effects of which are viewed both positively and negatively. On the other hand, the possibility of being other selves or occupying other worlds online creates a clear demarcation between online and offline. As illustrated in the next section, this can be especially useful in being selective and strategic about where and how various identities, including gender and sexuality, are expressed.



Internet Use and Expression Online

*Identity, Expression,
Performance*

GENDER IDENTITY AND SEXUALITY

When asked if their gender and sexual identities affected the way they use the internet, a minority of respondents said definitely. Most respondents answered 'sometimes'.

Has your gender identity affected the way you use the internet?

- Definitely 27.2%
- No 19.4%
- Sometimes 37.9%
- I don't know 15.6%

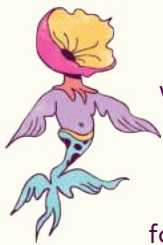
Figure 08: Has your gender identity affected the way you use the internet?

Has your sexual identity affected the way you use the internet?

- Definitely 17.5%
- No 24.3%
- Sometimes 35.9%
- I don't know 22.3%

Figure 09: Has your sexual identity affected the way you use the internet?

More than 50% of the respondents actively agreed that access to the internet had changed how they understand gender and sexuality and perceive those of different



genders and sexuality. Shamal, a trans man, said that the internet was helpful in better understanding his struggles with the gender he was assigned at birth. He had found useful information on the

internet about gender identity as well as the transition process but at the time that he was searching, the information was all from outside Sri Lanka. He understood enough English to access that information but it was challenging. It was through a friend who was a medical student that he came across the National Transgender Network and Venasa, and through these organisations he found out that surgery for trans men was being done in Sri Lanka.

Has access to the internet changed how you understand gender and sexual identities?

-  Definitely 53.4%
-  No 13.6%
-  Sometimes 19.4%
-  I don't know 13.6%

Figure 10: Has access to the internet changed how you perceive people of different gender and sexual identities?

Has access to the internet changed how you perceive people of different gender and sexual identities?

-  Definitely 53.4%
-  No 15.5%
-  Sometimes 23.3%
-  I don't know 7.8%

Figure 11: Has access to the internet changed how you understand gender and sexual identity?



Hasini, a cisgender heterosexual woman, said she did not think that the internet has played a significant role in her understanding of her own

gender and sexual identity, saying at most it was probably a 4 on 10, where 1 is not at all. It is worth noting that 'gender and sexual identity' was automatically understood as being not cisgender and not heteronormative, and therefore the question did not perhaps seem very relevant if one identified as cis-het unless questioning these identities, which she said she has not. However, Hasini said that the internet helped her understand issues of gender and sexuality that her sister – a person with an intellectual disability – may be facing or going through.

While respondents were quite clear about the relationship between the internet and gender and sexuality and the value of the internet in helping their understanding, the next section illustrates that this relationship did not automatically translate into free expression on the internet.

More than 50% of the respondents actively agreed that access to the internet had changed how they understand gender and sexuality and perceive those of different genders and sexuality.

SELF EXPRESSION AND SELF-CENSORSHIP

Our questions about self-expression were not limited to expression and performance of gender identity and sexuality, so this section considers various forms of expression that happen on the internet.

Thirty two per cent of cis women, and 50% of trans women rated the internet at 10 on the scale (of 1–10 with 10 being the highest), for the role it plays in their self-expression, whereas only 22% cis men rated the role of the internet at 10, in responding to the same question. On the same scale, 35 of 100 respondents rated the internet at a 10 for

On a scale of 1–10, what is the importance of the internet for self-expression?

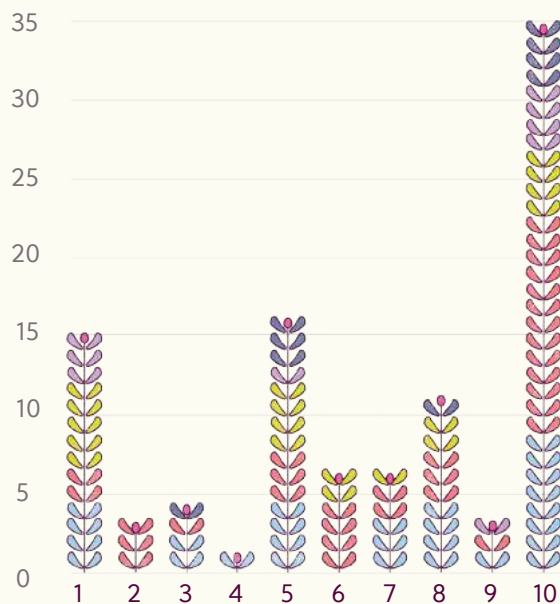


Figure 12: On a scale of 1–10, what is the importance of the internet for self-expression?

 < 25
  25–30
  31–35
  36 – 40
  > 40

being an important site of self-expression, and 23 of these respondents were 30 years old or younger (71%). However when it came to rating how pleasurable their experience of using the internet was, a majority of respondents across all age groups rated it at 5 on the scale of 1 to 10 – that is, 25 respondents out of 100 of whom 48% were 30 years old or younger. Most other responses were relatively evenly distributed between 6 and 10 on the scale, as the chart shows below, indicating that the value gained from experiences of using the internet are quite mixed.

On a scale of 1–10 how pleasurable is the experience of using the internet (according to age group)



Figure 13: On a scale of 1–10, how pleasurable is the experience of using the internet?

Responses from interviewees showed that reasons for self-expression and/or self-censorship on the internet are complex and varied from person to person according to the various identities they hold as well as the intersecting axes of privilege, oppression and inequality. For an example, while being cisgender might afford you more space for expression than if you were transgender, within cisgender, there are different levels of expression afforded to you depending on whether you're a man or a woman.



Hasini, a cisgender woman, feels that if she wants to express a view, she prefers face-to-face conversations rather than using the internet to express herself to many

people, because she feels safer with the former. Whereas Vijay, a cishet man who also belongs to an ethnic minority, feels that his ethnicity has not affected his ability to access the internet, especially when considered alongside his privilege as a cishet man.

"What I mean is no one stopped me from using the internet for any of my identities. But when the state brings a ban it's for everyone. All are affected. So, on a personal level I would say nothing is affected."

For Vijay, the speed at which it is possible to obtain information online and how that same speed breaks down barriers in distance to allow faster communication, are also conducive factors for more expression on the internet.



Hiran is a popular YouTuber in Sri Lanka who has been open about his queerness from the very beginning of his channel.



When asked about how his gender identity and sexuality have affected and been affected by the internet, he differentiated between his accepting his identity and his becoming comfortable with fully expressing his identity. He shared that while he had already come to terms with his sexuality while growing up (acceptance), it was the response to his YouTube videos and his social media presence that made him comfortable with expressing his identity.

Lakshmi, who identifies as a heterosexual woman, said that on Facebook for example, her identity as a woman makes using that platform difficult.



She says that she would like to post more pictures, as other women also like to do. But she and other women she knows don't do that often because of the kinds of



“I think that I have a mild case of anxiety and so I limit myself because I can’t deal with the responses and don’t need to deal with the back and forth of responses and the way things are perceived by people. - Hasini

comments and attacks they could face. She has to think about it several times before she posts a picture. If she shares articles that draw on her interest in feminist politics, she receives a lot of “unwanted comments.”

“Sometimes to avoid such comments I don’t share things on Facebook. But I somehow still continue to write, although I don’t write about some things to avoid these unnecessary comments.”

Lakshmi thinks the internet helps for self-expression, but that is not the only space in which she expresses herself and she prefers more face-to-face interaction such as in group discussions, because she feels she can express herself more clearly and confidently there. Hasini, who is primarily English speaking and uses the internet in English, says she limits her usage of the internet for three reasons: “Because I am a woman, I live in a small city, I run a business that involves children.” She adds though that the main reason overall is that, as a person who deals with anxiety, she finds the internet can be a space that aggravates her mental health, so she would rather limit her usage and engagement.

“I think that I have a mild case of anxiety and so I limit myself because I can’t deal with the responses and don’t need to



deal with the back and forth of responses and the way things are perceived by people. People don't also understand what you are trying to say – when you put something that is anti-colonialist, then they ask do you hate white people? Sometimes I just don't have the bandwidth for it. You know, opinions may be mild and people don't care, but I think I internalise how people perceive me, what people think and what are the repercussions. The anxiety feeds into the other stuff – I am a woman, they know where I live, what if, what if, what if. What happens now, this is such an unnecessary mental occupation when I put something up so I minimise that."



Thivya in contrast, wants to get to a point where she can be more vulnerable to some communities she has met online and comfortable talking about herself more. She recognises that she could find empathy and support online in closed groups. Following a personal experience she shared, although in the third person, someone had reached out to her telling her how much it had helped them. If she posts to a closed group she says, it is less likely that she will be judged and more likely that she will find empathy and support. However, she also said she struggled to some degree with dependency on her online life, explaining how a recent accidental deactivation of one

of her profiles left her feeling like 'this was the worst thing that could happen' to her.

"I almost lost my mind – this felt like was the worst thing that could ever happen to me – I felt I couldn't go through all that effort and find friends again – I realised I didn't have backups of all my content – and when I got my profile back, I realised how fucked up that was, that it was messed up – the dependency scared me."

Selvy, who ranked the importance of the internet as a site of self-expression at 5 (on the scale from 1-10) when taking the online survey, reduced it to 3 when speaking to her later in an interview. She says the internet is a difficult place to express oneself freely, all the friends she has on Facebook are not necessarily her friends in real life and all her 'real-life' friends are not on social media. So she finds herself expressing herself more face-to-face, so the internet isn't as important to her as a site of self-expression and she has further reduced her sharing of posts and information online.



For Krishani, a cisgender heterosexual woman, the online space allows her a freedom of expression that she doesn't always enjoy in her offline life, even if she is aware





“It’s really really hard. Since we cannot share information over the phone or the internet, we wait to meet in person. It takes time as all of us have to make time to meet in one place. This should be changed. There should be safe freedom of speech.”

- Arya

that freedom exists in a bubble of people she has carefully chosen. She says that people she knows may get offended at some of the things she says and so she has learnt to censor herself in her offline life, but she does not have to do that as much online – she gets to control what she says on her timeline, she can object to something if she wants to.

“I get to have a voice. I do more expressing on the internet than expressing myself in public. Sharing something on my timeline or being able to think and say something online is a lot easier and risk free in a sense, there is less backlash.”

Outside of her timeline however, she is aware that she could face a lot of backlash.

Aarya is uncertain if she is being monitored, has fears of being hacked and does not save a lot of information on her phone out of fear, so she deletes it. She has also limited her usage on Whatsapp and does not share much information on the platform. For security reasons, she and other trans people choose to meet in person and discuss any issues they have or want to talk about.



“It’s really really hard. Since we cannot share information over the phone or the internet, we wait to meet in person. It

takes time as all of us have to make time to meet in one place. This should be changed. There should be safe freedom of speech."



Vijay, spoke of control and monitoring of online spaces that impacts personal safety and security in the online space. He identified this control as "political or otherwise," and "everything is recorded. Monitored. All the authorities will know it." As a result, he has changed the way he uses the internet space, self-censoring himself online.

"I am more careful now in the internet space. When it comes to issues of sexuality, I feel there are more safe spaces on the internet. But when it comes to political issues, the internet feels unsafe."



Family was another often cited reason limiting presence and expression on the internet. For Aarya, a transgender heterosexual woman, her parents and now her lover are the reasons for limiting her expression online. For Hasini –

"my in laws are on social media and they are not liberal as I am and so when something happens, they will think something else – oh god she is so vocal, oh god is she an activist."



Thivya, is more comfortable on Twitter and Tumblr because her family is not on those platforms and she can be more free about her identity, which includes her sexual orientation as a bisexual person. She disabled her Facebook and Instagram accounts in part because her family was on the platform, and she felt she could only be a bystander – unable to post anything about herself or fully express herself and in fear of being outed. Her family knows she works on issues relating to the LGBTQ+ community, but does not know that she herself identifies as a bisexual.

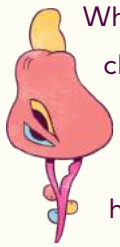


Shirani, a transgender heterosexual woman, shares Aarya's concerns about family. She was on Facebook pre-transition as a cis man and as she began going through the transition, she occasionally posted photos of herself in a saree. However she received negative comments for expressing her gender identity and notes that a lot of that came from some members of the (queer) community. This, as well as her concerns that too much attention on her gender identity would bring shame to her husband's family, has forced her to censor herself on her current Facebook account. While she uses the account to share work related content on HIV treatment and transgender rights, she restrains herself in sharing private photos



that could lead to negative comments.

Some of those interviewed shared experiences of ethnicity intersecting with the online space, although as explained earlier in the section on limitations of this study, people's reservations with being identified as an ethnic minority mean that the survey responses do not reflect a picture that can easily be read.



When Thivya was on Facebook, she changed her profile name because she was uncomfortable with her name being used to identify her as Tamil, because she did not see that as her whole identity.



Selvy, who is from the east of Sri Lanka, offered an example of how her ethnic identity as a Tamil got caught up in a conversation online.

After anti-Muslim riots in Digana in 2018, she had questioned the violence against Muslims in an online post. She says Tamil people commented on the page as well as in private messages asking why she was supporting Muslims and she was attacked for this online. When recently she was involved in a protest where Tamil and Muslim activists came together to demand the reform of the Muslim Marriage and Divorce Act, and she posted photos of the event online, she faced backlash from both communities.

"Some Tamils asked me why I was interfering in Muslim issues and that it was none of my business and some Muslims asked me the same thing."

Krishani is careful about how she says things online, but feels that she may have an advantage being a Sinhalese person. For example, she realised that while she felt like she could speak out openly on a video being circulated online on post-war reconciliation, Tamil and Muslim friends who spoke to her privately said they could not because they feared being attacked online on the basis of their ethnicity.



EXPRESSION AND PERFORMANCE

During interviews, some of the respondents reflected on the value as well as the challenges of expression on the internet turning into performance – or the fact that some forms of expression are actually performance.



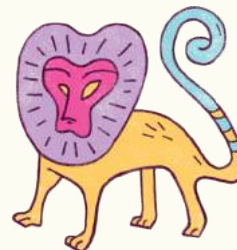
Thivya spoke about the ‘constant edit of oneself’ online which spills over into offline lives as well.

“When someone is there, you make it look better or worse – you make more of an effort because you know someone is watching you and that constant evaluation online impacts your personality offline as well. You constantly edit yourself when you talk to someone in real life. We don’t actively think about it, but it’s there.”



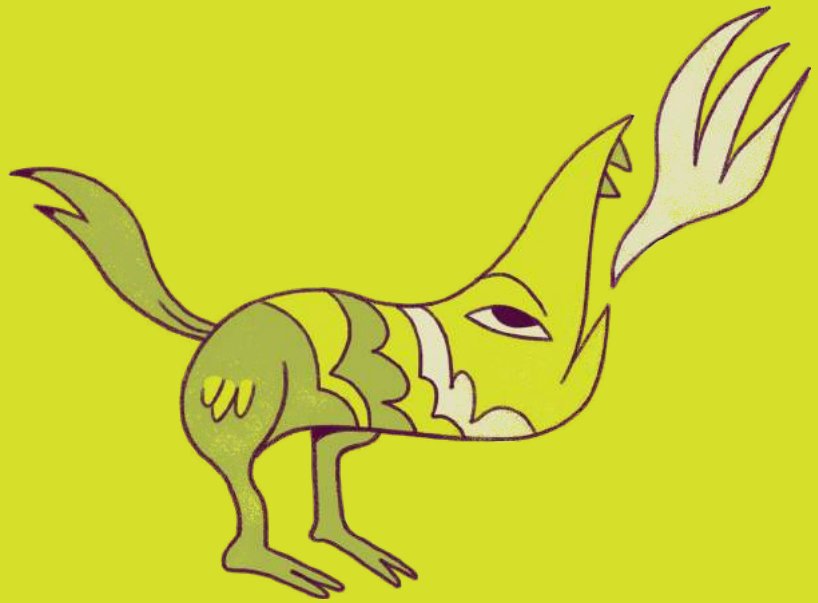
Viran, whose non-binary identity is less complicated to navigate online than offline, reflected on the inverse of what

Thivya talked about. “Gender performance in real life is not a choice, it’s out of necessity to survive”, they said, observing that while all gender expression is essentially performance, the internet can give you space to be more honest in this performance whereas offline you often perform in order to fit in and not stand out.



“Gender performance in real life is not a choice, it’s out of necessity to survive” - Viran

Therefore, it was clear that respondents saw the value of the internet and online spaces in understanding at a personal level their own gender and sexual identities, and/or changing the perceptions or understanding of others. However, their experiences varied significantly in terms of how free they felt to express themselves online, with several having to compromise for the sake of safety, security or peace of mind (these also being states affected by other factors such as ethnicity). The respondents’ willingness to express themselves was also tied closely to experiences of violence, harassment and abuse, as discussed in the following section.



Internet Use and Expression Online

Violence, Harassment, Abuse

A 2019 report by Ghosha, Groundviews and Hashtag Generation that monitored Sinhala, Tamil and English language Facebook pages from Sri Lanka, observed patterns of sexist, homophobic and transphobic speech that directly and indirectly harassed women and LGBTQ+ people. While existing laws including the penal code can be used to address such violence (Annex 3), the same penal code

criminalises LGBTQ+ people, thus making the law and law enforcement authorities an unlikely avenue for relief and redress.

Sixty two percent of respondents had been at the receiving end of abusive comments. This represents the highest percentage of violence reported. The form of violence that came in second place (56%) was the receipt of unwanted images that were sexually explicit or demeaned women through violence.

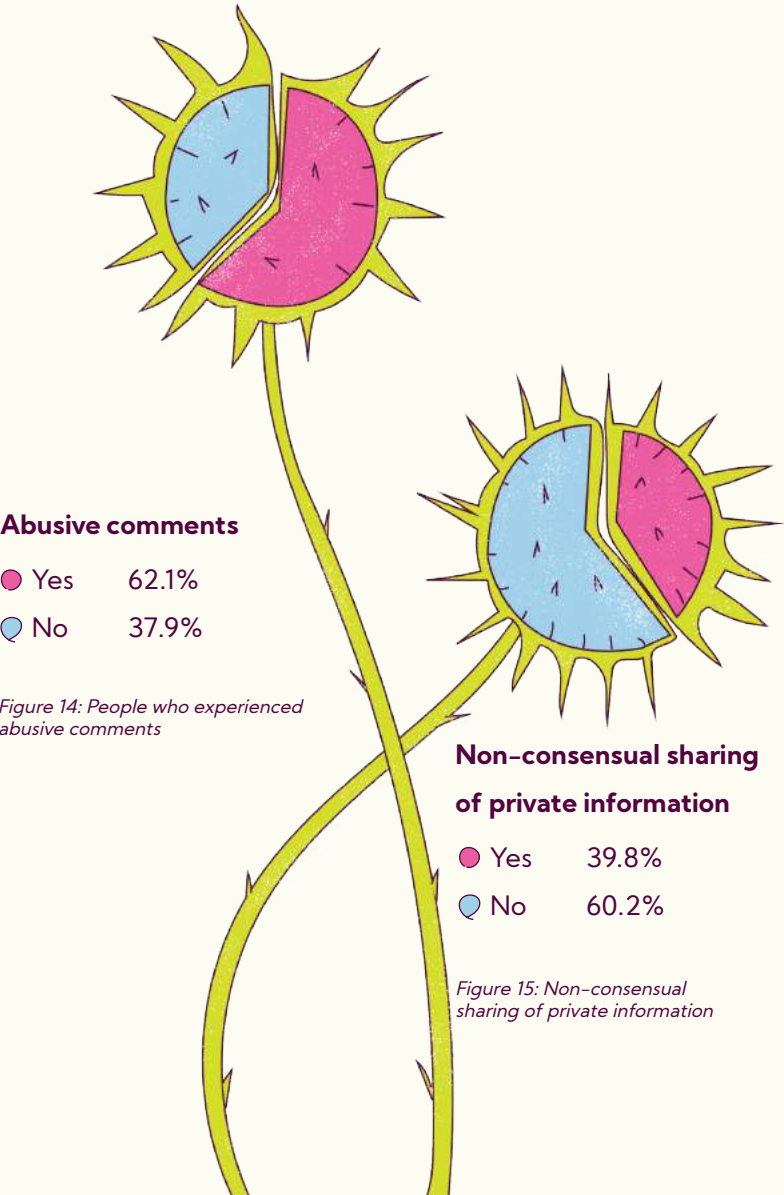


Figure 14: People who experienced abusive comments

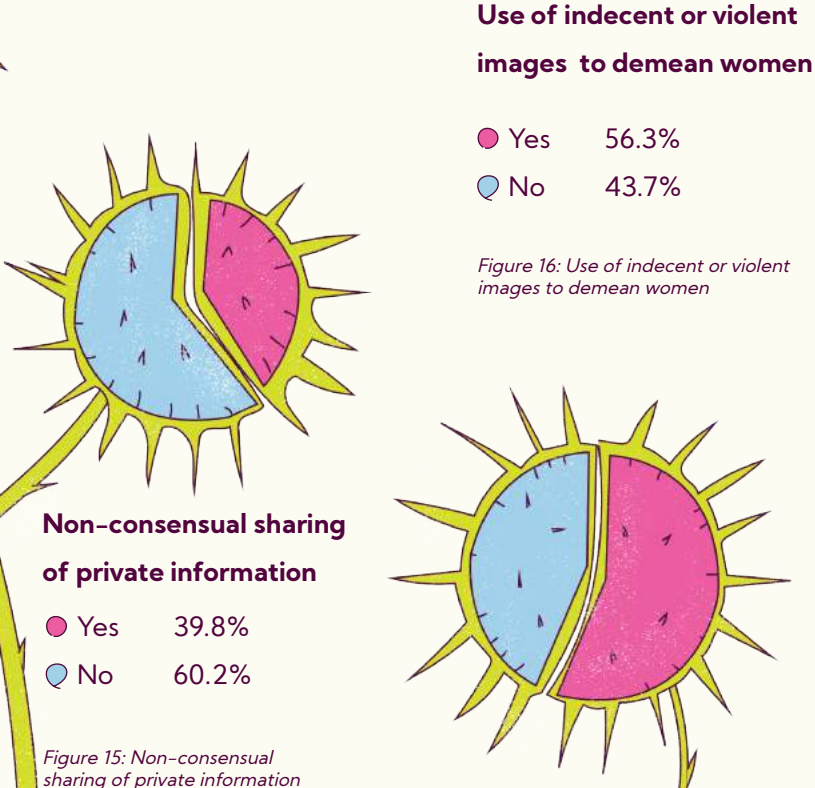


Figure 15: Non-consensual sharing of private information

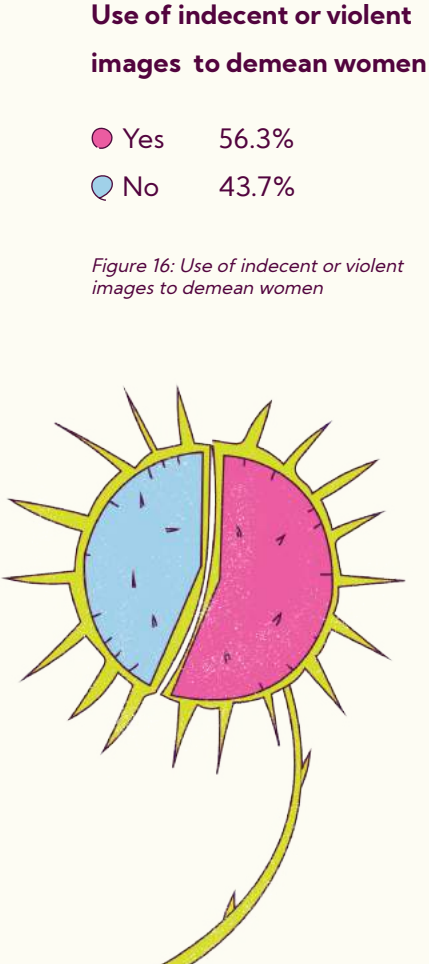


Figure 16: Use of indecent or violent images to demean women

Only women get harrassed on the internet

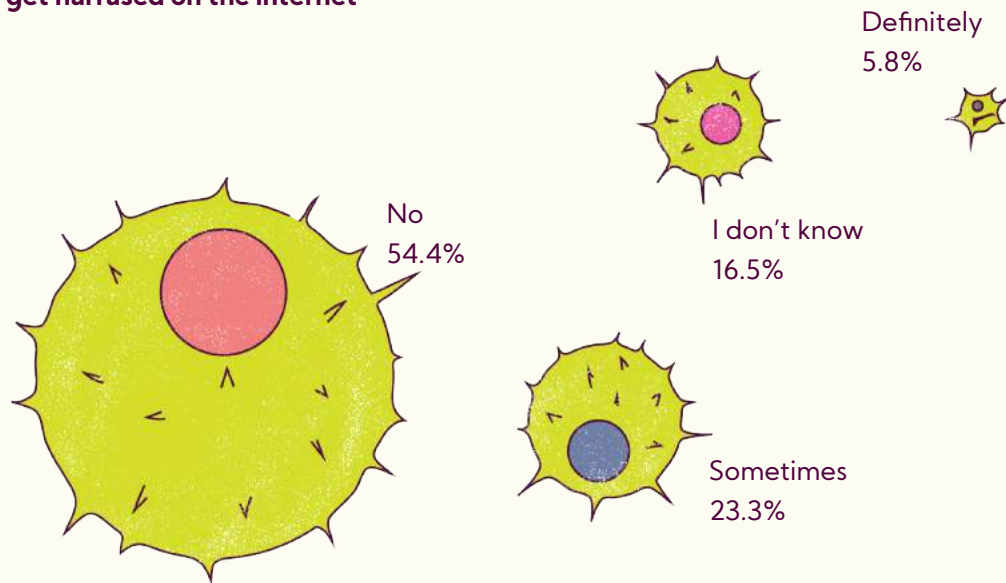


Figure 17: Only women get harrassed on the internet



When asked to rate the above statement in relation to their personal experience and knowledge, more than 50% of respondents agreed that not just women get harassed on the internet. Though about 20% thought that it could be possible sometimes. Vijay said the violence against women that he sees online, does mirror the violence in everyday offline life. He said his female friends talk about it, seek help for violence they face online and they come to him for help because he works in the field of Information Technology (IT). He said,

"it's true that women face harassment on the internet, it's a well-known truth. It also happens for the sexual/gender minority groups. In such situations we have helped to get legal aid and we have supported people in all the ways possible."

For Hasini, the further down one goes on what she calls the 'privilege scale', the more harassment people face, and this is not necessarily something faced only by women. She was also concerned about people who may not be able to handle the trolling, bullying and harassment online.





Lakshmi said that in her observations online, people who have a gender expression that goes beyond the binary of man or woman or have a sexual orientation that is not heterosexual, face considerable harassment and criticism and when they express that online. “You can’t bear to see the comments sometimes, it is so bad,” she said. And in her experience all the negative comments she has seen in cases like these have been made by men. For Lakshmi, the worst part of the internet is the harassment women face on it. She wanted some way for abusive comments to be blocked or there to be strict policies to make the space safer.



Hiran, a popular YouTuber in Sri Lanka who is open about his queerness on his channel, noted that the initial reception of his videos was largely positive and encouraging and it was as his audience grew that negative comments started increasing. At first, he took the negative comments personally and was discouraged to the point of considering shutting the channel down. But he slowly learnt to disconnect himself from the negative and abusive comments and has now reached a point at which his fan base responds and fights back for him. “I don’t have to say anything”, said Hiran, noting that the fans do this of their own volition.

Hiran observed a difference in responses according to platforms too. In his experience, most negative responses happen on YouTube and Facebook, with people making homophobic and transphobic comments on his videos. Instagram, where he shares updates from his personal life, is different and he found that even responses that could be considered negative are phrased in polite language. Hiran explained his decision to join Instagram saying “I thought it’s a social media platform for open minded people”.

Thivya (who posts both in English and Tamil – roughly 40% of her content is in Tamil) has seen bullying and belittling – particularly of women – on some pages dominated by men on subjects that are commonly thought to be more popular among men – such as comic books.



“There was this page that I was a part of, when you post something related to it, the majority of guys bully you or knock you – I saw a lot of that. They were specifically mean towards girls and they would say ‘this is so lame’. I thought that page was informative and cool and that I could meet like-minded people.”

However, Thivya also pointed out that men also faced harassment on the same site sometimes,



“I know people who support gender equality but they don’t do it online because they know the backlash will follow. My friends who are queer don’t post anything online so they don’t face discrimination or violence that way.” - Thivya

and that being gay or being a woman by itself made a person vulnerable to harassment and it was dependent on what they posted.

“I know people who support gender equality but they don’t do it online because they know the backlash will follow. My friends who are queer don’t post anything online so they don’t face discrimination or violence that way. Trans people – when I spoke to them for my dissertation, they said it is how you present yourself – they say some trans people are flamboyant and very subtle – they said if you are flamboyant and show off then you will face more harassment – I don’t agree with that, but that is truth. The more active or expressive someone is about their identity, there is a higher chance they will be harassed.”

Thivya has not seen any backlash simply because of her ethnic identity, but says there are clearly issues that seem to trigger a negative response in people and she has seen backlash based on the content she posts; for example, content on sexual and reproductive health and rights, on LGBT issues, on female genital mutilation. A significant amount of backlash is linked to religion and culture – ‘this is against God’ or ‘this is immoral’ or ‘this is not what we are supposed to do.’ She says that when she posts this content in



Tamil, some of the backlash is because she is speaking negatively about her community – “because I am one of ‘us’ talking about this.” She does not post anything personal in Tamil. Selvy says her identity as a woman has been attacked online, when she shares posts that deal with sexual orientation or identity as part of her work with youth groups. People respond to her online with comments like, “why have you posted these; what is your sexual identity and orientation; do you want to come sleep with me?” She has responded by ignoring some of them, reporting them to the police in some cases, and sometimes, if she feels there is the space to engage productively with someone making the comments, she has done that.



Selvy is not alone in having these responses to the violence. We found out that, when faced with violence, a majority of our

respondents chose to report the violence to the platform on which it occurred. Many also chose to ignore it. Very few people decided to report violence that happened online to a legal system and during our discussions it was revealed that there were several reasons for this; violence that occurred online not being considered serious enough to be reported to a legal system, lack of awareness that our laws can address online violence, lack of faith in the legal system, a wariness of reporting if the violation occurred in the

context of a pre-existing romantic or sexual relationship. There were also fears of being arrested under the Penal Code themselves if they reported to the Police. Other responses to violence included blocking the abusers.

Actions taken against abuse

Ignored it

Yes	46.6%
No	53.4%

Figure 18:
Action against abuse: ignored it

Reported it to the platform

Yes	58.3%
No	41.7%

Figure 19:
Action against abuse: reported it to the platform

Reported it to a legal system

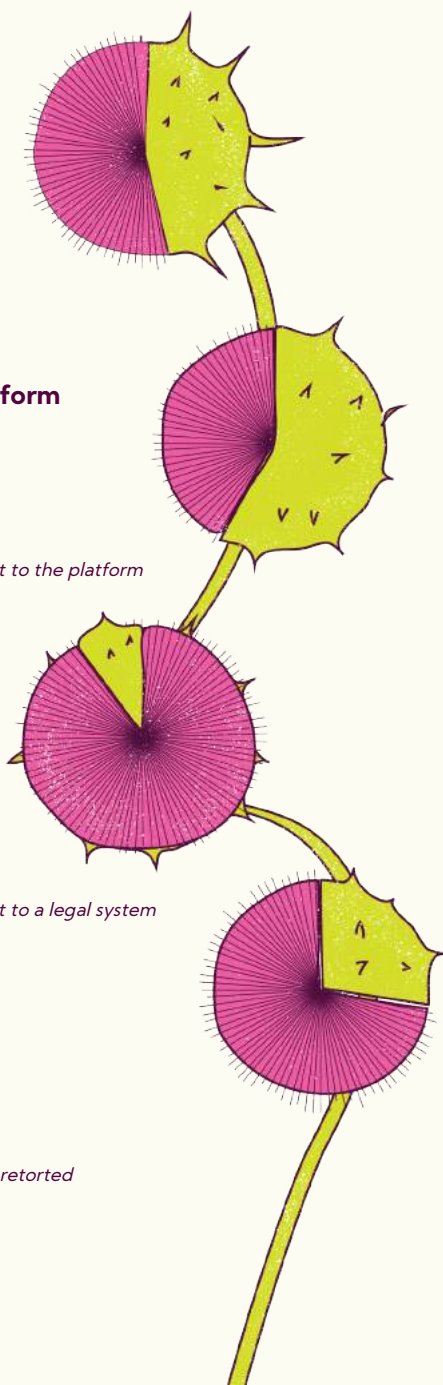
Yes	9.7%
No	90.3%

Figure 20:
Action against abuse: reported it to a legal system

Retorted

Yes	27.2%
No	72.8%

Figure 21: Action against abuse: retorted





“They took a screenshot and posted it online with my profile photo and my number was visible. A person scolded me in filth and this post was seen by 140 people and shared about 30 times. I had to change my profile picture to something else (to distance myself from the harassment).” - Krishani

Krishani also spoke of a culture of ‘naming and shaming’ – where someone could screenshot a post or comment they didn’t like and post it online – a personal experience she went through as well.



“This was a political opinion I had sent to someone I knew, on Whatsapp. It was private to someone I went to school with, I didn’t realise I hadn’t had a conversation with them before, but they were on my contact list. They didn’t recognise my number and said, ‘who is this, I am going to report it.’ They took a screenshot and posted it online with my profile photo and my number was visible. A person scolded me in filth and this post was seen by 140 people and shared about 30 times. I had to change my profile picture to something else (to distance myself from the harassment).” (Krishani)

These experiences in turn affect expression and use of the internet as also discussed in the previous section. For Selvy, as a woman, there is very little space to share posts that deal with “sexuality, how we see sex, sex education, posts about women’s bodies.”



“Being a woman I can’t share these even though I wish to share them on Facebook. Some of the women I know have shared these but screenshots were taken and then shared through fake IDs and those women have been harassed on the internet.”

Selvy would like to track and identify people who are using fake profiles and help to prevent and stop harassment. She says there is only one person she knows of in the north and

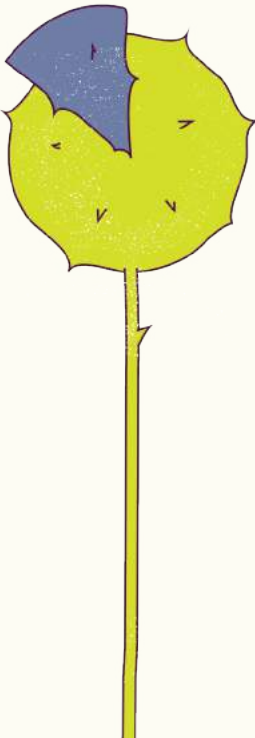
east of Sri Lanka who has the knowledge to do this but it takes time and is not easy.

The survey also asked respondents if they had ever participated in any technology-related violence and while numbers were small compared to the receiving end of violence, the charts below illustrate that some people had participated in inflicting harassment, abuse and violence.

Abusive Comments

- Yes 14.6%
- No 85.4%

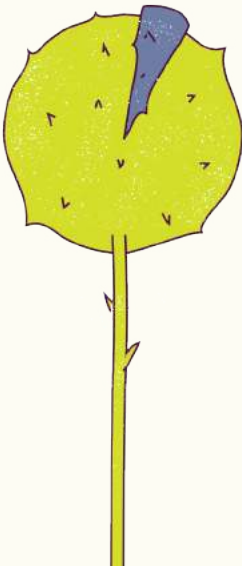
Figure 22: Participation in violence: abusive comments



Direct threats of violence including threats of sexuals and/or physical violence

- Yes 5.8%
- No 94.2%

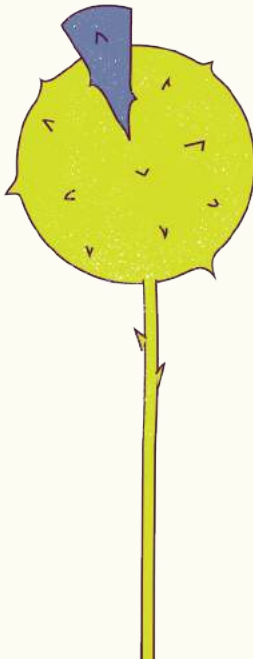
Figure 23: Participation in violence: Direct threats of violence, including threats of sexual and/or physical violence



Hate speech, social media posts and/or email, often

- Yes 8.7%
- No 91.3%

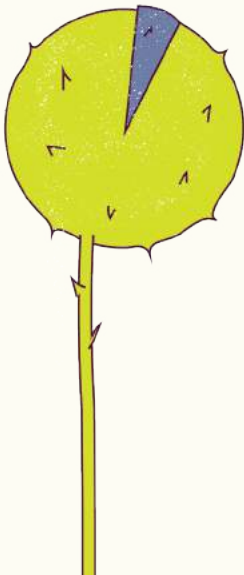
Figure 24: Participation in violence: Hate speech, social media posts and/or email, often targeted at an identity



Use of sexist and/or gendered comments or name calling

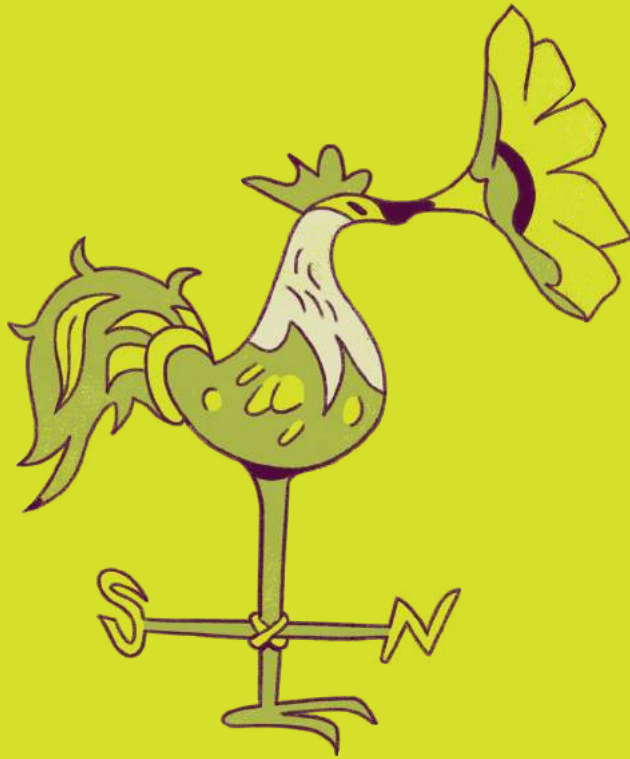
- Yes 5.8%
- No 94.2%

Figure 25: Participation in violence: Use of sexist and/or gendered comments or name-calling



During one of the focus group discussions, those who said they participated in abusive comments and threats of violence said that, most often, these were in response to violence they themselves received. “If someone calls me a [derogatory term in Sinhala for a gay man], I will retort that if I’m one, they are too”, said one of the respondents during a discussion. However, they also observed that LGBTQ+ people are capable of hate speech on the basis of ethnicity, religion, gender, etc. as much as any others and sometimes find themselves caught up in heated debates and arguments online. As noted by Pasan Jayasinghe, “often, and jarringly perhaps, queer people themselves are directing homophobic slurs at Muslims and anyone speaking up in their defence. This speaks perhaps to the fact that race remains the dominant foundation of identity for most Sri Lankans, eclipsing other identities” ([Jayasinghe, 2019](#)).

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Finding Community and Livelihood

*Finding Community and
Locating Activism*

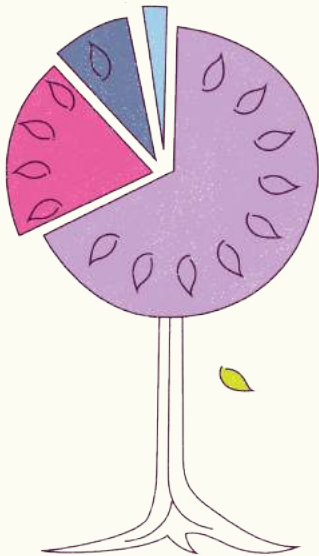
Nearly 70% of respondents said that the internet connects them to people more easily. While this seems like a simple enough answer, especially given how smartphones have made it possible for people to connect instantly, our conversations with some of the respondents revealed more nuance to their answers. A majority of respondents said diverse people participate and engage in debate and conversations on the internet, with 63% saying definitely and 29% saying sometimes. As mentioned in the introduction, this research sought to go beyond how LGBTQ+ activists

use the internet for activism and instead explored how LGBTQ+ people in Sri Lanka use the internet in everyday life. However, for many of our respondents, the activism they do on the internet is very much part of their everyday life. As their experiences below show, helping others find community through the internet is a key part of this activism. While not all respondents consider themselves to be activists or doing activism, community and activism are often so closely intertwined that we can consider them together in this section.

The internet connects me to people more easily

Definitely	68.0%
Sometimes	20.4%
No	8.7%
I don't know	2.9%

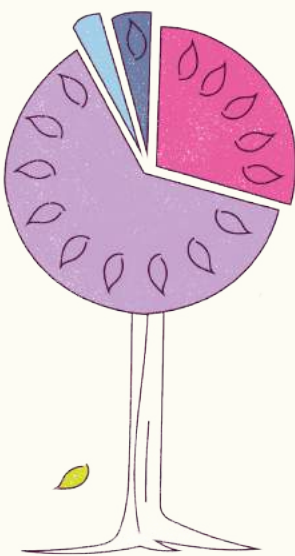
Figure 26: The internet connects me to people more easily



Diverse people participate and engage in debate, conversations on the internet

Definitely	63.1%
Sometimes	29.1%
No	4.9%
I don't know	2.9%

Figure 27: Diverse people participate and engage in debate, conversations on the internet





Diaspora Tamils who have heard about Aarya over her Facebook or her page or email, try and meet her when

they come to Colombo, and she feels they also are slowly opening up to talk about issues related to transgender people. This is a relatively new occurrence. Using the internet as a site to express her identity has in turn given others, who may be feeling the same way, the confidence to reach out and connect. For her, the negative comments, her picture being shared without permission, fake profiles operating with her picture, have also affected her activism and the work she does for the trans community.



Shamal uses his work social media accounts to ensure that people searching for information on trans identity and procedures are able to access that information in local languages.

Shirani said the internet provides her with a "huge opportunity to give information to the society and to my community" and has made her mobile number available on her personal and work social media accounts. "We used to get a lot of wrong information", said Shirani, emphasising how seriously she



and others in the community take their role in providing correct and timely information. She said that a lot of young people from both

Colombo and other parts of the country are now using the internet to find information about their gender identity and that trilingual support is more crucial than ever to make sure they are not misinformed. She receives calls even at midnight because confusion or worry about gender identity can have a toll on people's mental health and they seek community when they feel the most alone.

For Thivya, the internet helped her meet other queer people online and offline, which had a significant impact on her. She said she understood others better through the internet, for example the asexual community.



"I used to think 'asexual' was not real – they just don't want to have sex for some reason is what I thought. But I spoke to some asexual people online and it blew my mind! It really changed my perspective and I understood that it is so much more about relationships and platonic relationships in society too."

She also felt that people were more free in expressing themselves online than in person.

"When I meet other queer people in real life in forums, for example, or a conference, the conversation is restricted to homosexuality being illegal, violence

based on sexual and gender identity. But when you speak to people online, they talk about so much more – not being able to date, problems in expressing sexual and gender identity, what clothes to wear, problems on Tinder – I haven't seen people talk about these things in person in my experience and that was very interesting."



She began talking to people anonymously on Tumblr, but after establishing a certain level of trust, the conversation expanded to include Whatsapp and Instagram. She met some people in her offline life, sometimes in other countries and they kept in touch. "When you meet one person, the rest find you somehow." For Thivya, being able to meet diverse people she never thought she could meet is one of the best parts of being on the internet, particularly given her conservative background which meant she couldn't meet many of the people she wanted to. Through closed groups and clubs online, she has met people of different identities which has helped her feel better about herself and "less alone."

"I am more comfortable speaking to someone online than in person, it is easier to speak to someone through a screen because it is quite intense to do it in person."



"When you meet one person, the rest find you somehow." - Thivya

Selvy said that when she has shared posts that deal with issues of gender and sexual identities, people have approached her and shared their personal stories with her too and in that way has connected to people through the internet. She feels that they see her as someone safe to speak to.



Hiran thinks that his videos have had an influence on the way his followers and fans perceive gender identity and sexuality. He noted



that the depiction of LGBTQ+ characters in Sri Lankan popular culture as well as the perceptions of LGBTQ+ people through mainstream media are often negative or derogatory. While his videos don't focus on gender identity and sexuality, he finds that the characters he plays, the everyday issues that are the thematic focus of his videos, and the glimpses into his personal life that he shares on some platforms are having an influence on people's understanding of gender identity and sexuality. He shared examples of fans and followers who have written to him saying his videos have made them change their mind for the better about LGBTQ+ people and of transgender people and cross-dressers who reach out to him after watching his videos to inquire about finding community.

These examples illustrate that LGBTQ+ people create, offer and find community online in a multitude of ways and it's not always by putting issues of gender identity and sexuality at the forefront. Just being able to see queer and trans people express themselves freely on the internet, on whatever topic, seems to encourage people to reach out in search of community.



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Finding Community and Livelihood

Livelihood

Do you use the internet for your livelihood?

While 30% of respondents said they never use the internet for their livelihoods, a majority said that they either always or sometimes use it for their livelihoods. With the modern workplace being increasingly dependent on information and communications technologies, this is no surprise. However,

we wanted to better understand the experience of LGBTQ+ people in using the internet as a space to conduct livelihoods and to support the growth of livelihoods and the kinds of opportunities and challenges they have experienced in using it as such.

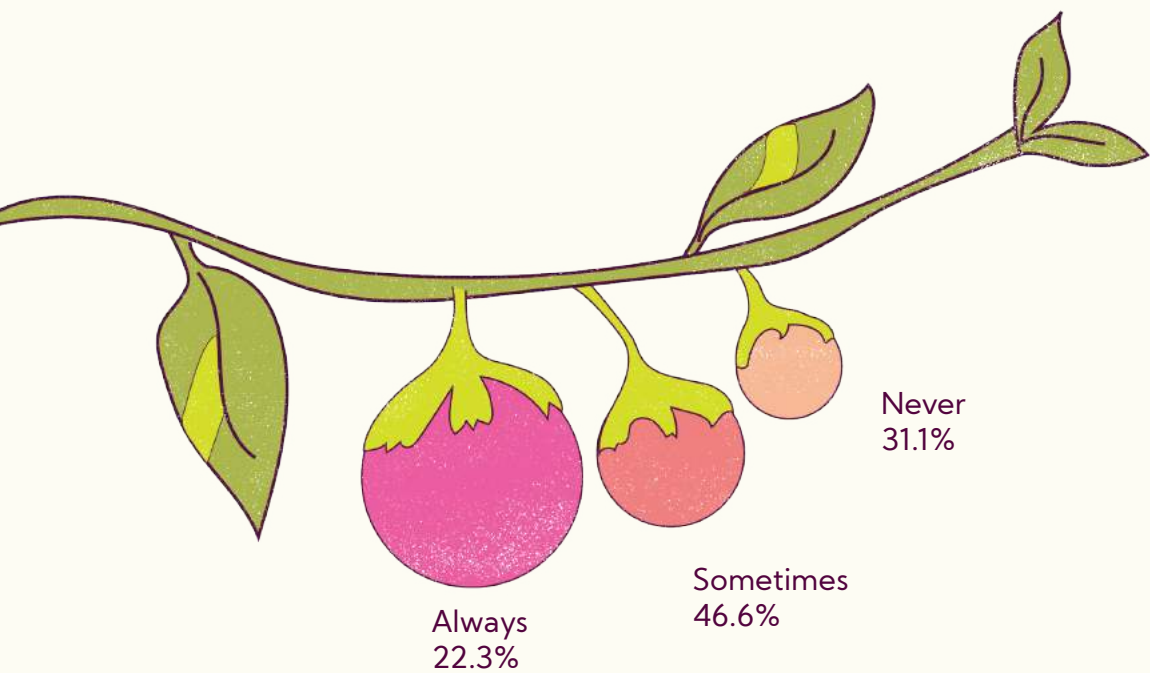


Figure 28: Do you use the internet for your livelihood?



Since childhood, Hiran had a dream of becoming an actor and being part of the film industry. However, he maintained a low profile in school and didn't take part in school theatre productions except in minor roles. Later, he tried his hand at several conventional nine-to-five jobs but found such a routine to be challenging. With his sights still set on being part of the film industry, he followed a diploma course in film direction. It was while feeling aimless and not knowing what his next step would be that he decided to make a YouTube channel and post his first video in the style of character skits popularised by the likes of Lily Singh. His channel became an overnight sensation, possibly due to the fact that it was the first of its kind in Sri Lanka, and he has managed to develop the channel into a partial but stable source of income through YouTube earnings.

Hiran wants his content to go mainstream so that he can run his YouTube channel full time and access advantages such as brand endorsement which bring in more income. However he feels it is harder for him to get such opportunities compared to those whose expression and performance are heteronormative. "Man in a saree" is not an image most brands in Sri Lanka are comfortable with, he said. Hiran remains hopeful though and his success on the internet

has shifted his focus, at least for now, from joining the film industry. He feels he occupies a niche in the current YouTube landscape of Sri Lanka that gives him an advantage.

For Arya, the space created by the internet for self-expression has also earned her a certain positive recognition, through which she has gained opportunities to take part in training programmes overseas, speak in groups and that has helped her learn more. Despite the space online platforms provide, she still prefers face-to-face interactions when it's possible –



"I express more in such spaces as I can read their face. Whether they understand, or they ask a question, I can clarify it then. So face-to-face is more comfortable for me to express more."

The internet has had a profound effect on sex work as well. The sex workers we spoke to in focus group discussions and interviews agreed that for those who are able to access even a basic smartphone and have learnt to use websites, Whatsapp, Viber, etc., the internet has to a large extent replaced soliciting in person. While sex work is not explicitly criminalised in Sri Lanka, [soliciting sex in public and maintaining brothels are offences under the law](#) (Lanka Standard, 2012). LGBTQ+ sex workers also

experience further discrimination due to the criminalisation of their identities. Sex workers reflected on some of the ways in which the internet helps them earn a living through sex work, while circumventing these laws.

Women sex workers (cisgender and transgender) shared that having a mobile phone through which clients can contact them directly, and through which they can maintain relationships with regular clients, has reduced the need to solicit clients out in public. Messaging applications on smartphones also make it possible to share photos and videos with clients and potential clients without the risks involved in physically showing themselves. While somewhat aware of the digital breadcrumbs any kind of communication using the internet can leave (whether for sex work or otherwise), sex workers consider the benefits of the internet, such as increased autonomy over conducting their livelihood, to far outweigh the risks. Their position is further reinforced by [a recent judgment](#) (Colombo Times, 2020) in which a magistrate said “there were no prevailing laws in Sri Lanka since colonial times against a woman who independently engaged in prostitution as a means of earning a living”.



Melony, a cisgender gay man, shared that after getting on the internet 10 years ago, he has

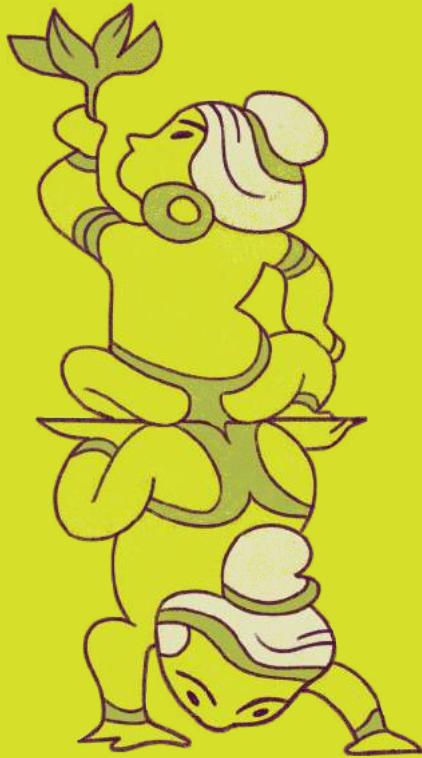
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been able gradually to shift his work as a sex worker online and that now 100% of the time his clients find him online. He solicits in several ways online. He advertises his services on several local advertising websites which we are not naming in this report, in order to maintain confidentiality of survey respondents as well as others who use the sites. A monthly advertisement costs about 500 Sri Lankan rupees (approximately USD 2.75) and, for Melony, the income cancels out this cost. He also responds to advertisements by potential clients on these sites and makes observations on the clientele of each website in terms of age, class, etc. Melony also uses his presence on Facebook to connect with potential clients and his earlier Facebook account (which was shut down by Facebook due to the company's real name policy, explained further in the section on 'Regulation by the State and Platforms') had nearly 4,000 people as friends which gave him access to a large network. In addition to the websites, he uses messaging apps to share photographs and to connect with clients.

Therefore, it is clear that, as with other internet users, LGBTQ+ people are using the internet as a tool and/or a site for their livelihood and that there are challenges and opportunities in doing so that are specific to their gender identity and sexuality. However, there is precarity in livelihoods that are dependent on the internet,

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especially given that the platforms used by the interviewees are all owned, operated and controlled by third parties whose policies can sometimes be discriminatory towards LGBTQ+ people, whether on purpose or not.



Finding Community and Livelihood

*Content: Consumers and
Producers*

According to [Feminist principles of internet usage](#) “Women and queer persons have the right to **code, design, adapt and critically and sustainably use ICTs** and reclaim technology as a platform for creativity and expression, as well as to challenge the cultures of sexism and discrimination in all spaces.” While there is a right to produce content to the same extent that we consume it, LGBTQ+ people in Sri Lanka shared their experiences in actually exercising this right.

It is interesting that most of the respondents (82%) see themselves as daily consumers of

the internet but not many see themselves as producers of content on a daily basis (30%). This raised some questions on whether and why they passively consume information as well as how they perceive and understand the production or creation of content. During interviews, our respondents reflected on this. Those who considered themselves producers of content saw themselves this way because they produced original art, or content that has a social currency attached to it or is for a social good.

How often do you use the internet as a consumer of content?

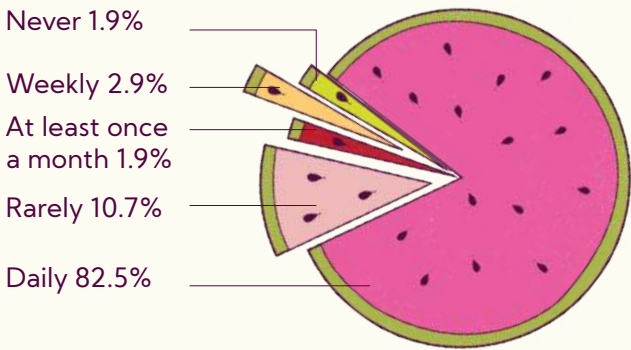


Figure 29: How often do you use the internet as a consumer of content?

How often do you use the internet as a creator of content?

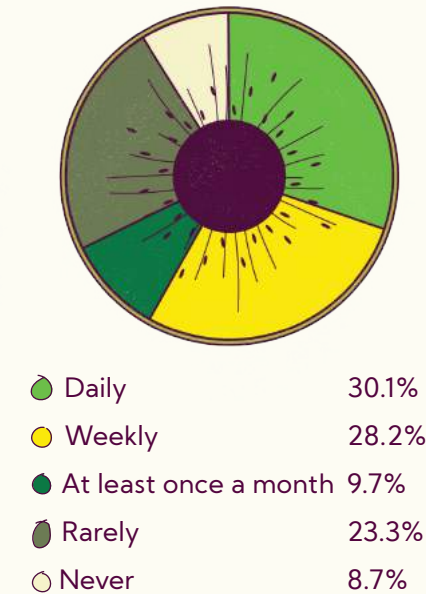


Figure 30: How often do you use the internet as a creator of content?



Hiran, the YouTube star, is very clear that he is a content creator. The very first video that Hiran uploaded to his YouTube channel went viral and he attributes this to the fact that it was possibly the first of its kind in Sri Lanka. As an openly gay man cross-dressing and performing, Hiran was influenced by the content produced by Lily Singh and recalls that in Sri Lanka, the most popular YouTube stars at the time were cisgender heterosexual men like JehanR and Gappiya. He reminisces about making the first video and notes that he didn't necessarily plan it and just went with how he felt at the time; that he "had to stop doing nothing and make something, anything". He made the video using his laptop webcam and it remains one of his most popular videos to date.

For Aarya, search engines are the best part of the internet, because it's possible to find an answer to almost any question, and it is possible to teach yourself new skills.



"Earlier I didn't even know how to chat. But later I self-taught myself, using the internet. Likewise there are plenty of things you can learn by yourself through the internet. Also Google Maps! If I want to go somewhere, if I activate the app I can go to even unknown places very easily."

Aarya saw herself as a producer of content, writing about trans issues in Tamil in a city in the north of the country. When she finds content in Tamil, she finds the engagement

I can find information on the internet about topics that are considered taboo, problematic by society

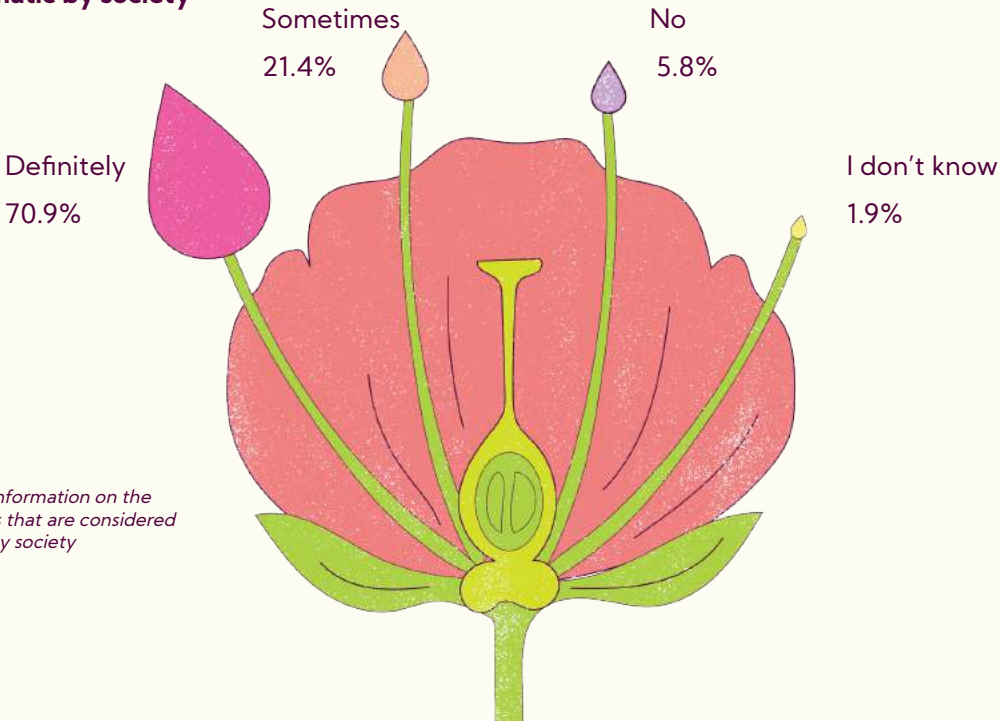


Figure 31: I can find information on the internet about topics that are considered taboo, problematic by society

with her followers is much higher. She would like to create an app for transgender persons, particularly for those in the city she is from.

"I would like to create an app for the transgender persons. I would like to learn about how to make it. I don't have any knowledge regarding that. So what is blocking me in this regard is I don't know whom to ask, where I can learn about this, and I don't have money to pay for the course."



Viran consumes content on the internet on a daily basis but says they produce content only rarely. Their daily content consumption includes engaging with content produced by others and the occasional tweet, but as an artist, they don't consider these acts to be any kind of content creation. For them, the content they produce rarely is their art that is posted on Instagram. "From an artist's perspective, creating is about something you make", Viran says. It is art they return to when asked what they'd like to do more on the internet. They want to create more art, explore more themes including gender, and post more regularly. "Art doesn't bring income to the extent I'd like, but that's because I haven't put enough time and energy into it", they say, half-jokingly, noting that capitalism is what is stopping them from doing this. This is not a joke though. They

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have a full-time job in a creative field which takes up most of their time and energy, which means there isn't a lot of motivation to create art in their spare time. Another reason is that the main device they use to make art right now is not mobile. Viran is currently saving for an iPad so that they can create art during their daily commute. So while the feminist principle on internet usage remains true for Viran, factors such as cost of devices and time are deterrents to fully exercising this right.



Vijay sees himself as a producer of content – blogging, doing translation work, and producing music and literature which are produced and shared online.

He also contributes/produces content for Wikipedia and Noolaham.



Lakshmi has been able to find clarity on issues of sexuality and gender using the internet, using Facebook, websites and YouTube.

Based on what she learnt, she has also produced some content in Tamil. She considers herself a producer of content and describes this content as posts on platforms such as Facebook, which are about discrimination and oppression in society. She also considers pictures she puts up – often of nature and also pictures of herself – as content.

Krishani said she has learnt a lot online about the rights of women, and the internet has also helped her learn a lot more about the LGBTQ+ community.



She doesn't really see herself as a producer of content, or does not consider the posts she puts up on platforms such as Facebook, as content. For her, producers are people like Instagram influencers who make videos, have blogs or produce material personally or professionally, but not for media houses.

"I think a producer of content in my opinion – Instagram influencers who make videos, have blogs, or personally or professionally who does it as their job, but their thing not for a place or media house."

Zara also had thoughts on how she defines content production. She makes a lot of threads on Twitter on a regular basis but doesn't know if she thinks of it as content. "Content is what people produce for other people to see. Engagement is the point of content. I don't necessarily want attention." So in this definition, Zara doesn't see herself as a content producer because a lot of her threads are just a stream of consciousness for herself or a way to vent. However, she notes that other people do think of her as a content producer. She also reflects on the fact that



on Instagram she regularly posts photos of her cats but once again is not sure she'd call that content production although the photos are taken by her and the captions are by her. Zara's hesitation in identifying as a content producer resonates with Krishani's definition of content production as something that has a certain value or social currency attached to it, such as what is produced by Instagram influencers.



Hasini does not consider herself a producer, and said a producer would be someone who puts up original writing and blogs and material of their own.

Simply sharing an interesting article would not be producing content, but sharing an opinion on the article would be.



The internet gave Thivya clarity on topics related to gender and sexuality that were not otherwise easily available or where she had no access to people to talk to about it.

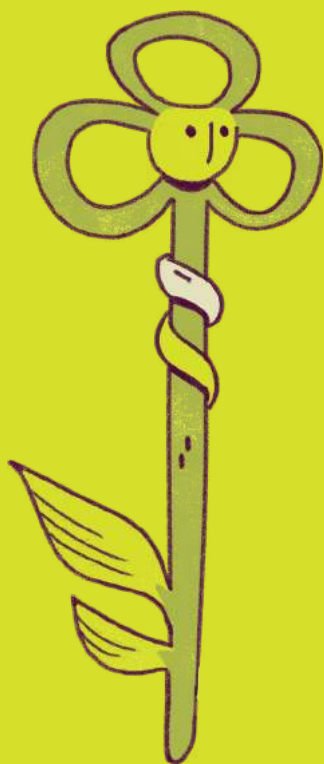
However, having grown up primarily studying in Tamil and in a Tamil-speaking household, a challenge she faced was that most of the information she found when she was much younger was in English and she faced challenges understanding technical terms. She said information in Tamil is still limited even today but, having learned English, she

is better able to access this content. She considers herself a producer – to produce is to generate anything original in any format. She began writing through her exposure to online platforms and blogs and prefers people giving her feedback online rather than face-to-face. And publishing online, she said, felt like it was 'out there' instead of it staying in a notebook or a word document.

Selvy says she hasn't really thought about whether she is a producer of content. She shares posts about different things and her own photos, but has not thought of that as her own content that she is sharing.







It is clear from these discussions that while LGBTQ+ people using the internet in Sri Lanka seem to exercise their agency online to some degree in creating content, many are resistant to identifying and acknowledging such activities as content creation or production. However, in a platform economy in which every click and even every scroll is producing information and insights about us as well as producing revenue for the platforms, it is important to strengthen people's capacities to critically evaluate what their internet usage means and results in.



Access and Regulation

Access

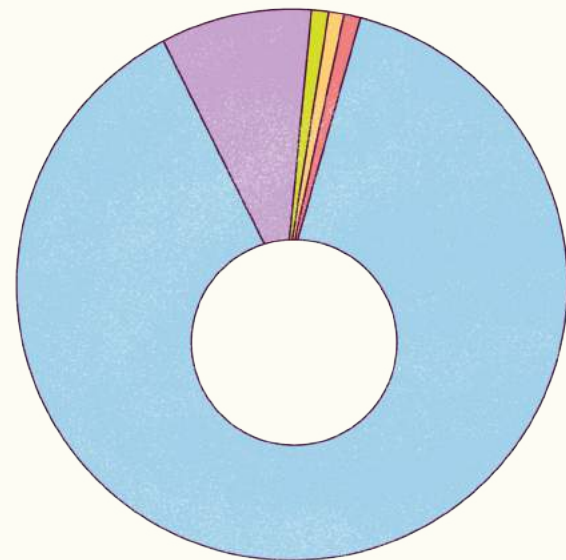
Internet access remains low in Sri Lanka with only 40% of the population currently considered to be digitally literate (Galpaya et al., 2019) and only 34% of the population using the internet as of 2017 (International Telecommunication Union, 2017). Access is a broad topic of discussion and following are some of the areas we discussed in relation to how access to the internet affects LGBTQ+ people in Sri Lanka.

-  Control over devices and internet access and reasons
-  Cost of devices and internet connection
-  Regulation by the state and platforms
-  Language (discussed in a later section on language and terminology)

CONTROL

Our questions about self-expression were not limited to expression and performance of gender identity and sexuality, so this section considers various forms of expression that happen on the internet.

What is the device you most often use to access the internet?



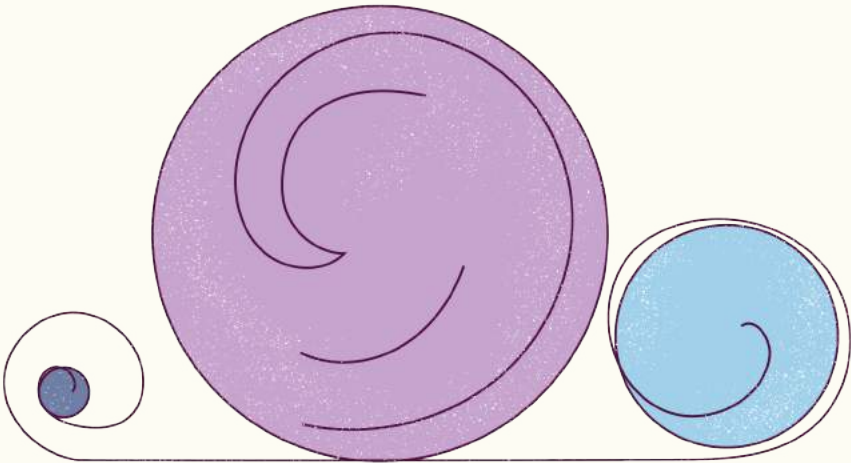
	Mobile phone	88.1%
	Laptop Computer	8.9%
	Tablet	1.0%
	Desktop computer	1.0%
	Other	1.0%

Figure 32: What is the device you most often use to access the internet?

Eighty eight per cent of respondents use the mobile phone as their primary device to access the internet, with a smaller percentage using laptops as the primary device. Research shows that [smartphones are driving internet use in Sri Lanka](#) (Galpaya et al., 2019) which further confirms this survey finding.


How much control do you have over the primary device you use to access the internet?

- Full control 62.7%
- Not answered 30.4%
- Somewhat control 6.9%



Due to a technical error in the survey administrator repeating a different question in the Tamil survey and omitting this question, it was unanswered by about 30 respondents. Therefore, it is difficult to understand a pattern, although over 60% of those who responded said they have full control over the primary device they use to access the internet. At the very least, the above findings taken together indicate that most respondents seem to have their own mobile phone and control of it.

Figure 33: How much control do you have over the primary device you use to access the internet?



Aarya’s access to the internet was controlled due to her identity as transgender woman – by her parents, her school

and the monitoring of her social media pages by people known to the family — and now by lover. Her phone was taken away by her parents when she was young and she had no access to social media for a long time. Now she has more control over what is posted but her lover has her password. As a result of the controlled access, her usage is also limited – the little that gets posted also invites negative backlash, including from the media. There is some self-censorship.

"We are careful in what we post on our page. There is no freedom. So we share information on a closed group only. Not in public. I don't even have any freedom to post my picture as I wish."

She has faced identity theft where her picture was downloaded and used on another fake profile which posts damaging content and 'my image gets damaged in the community,' Aarya said.



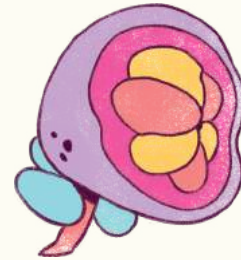
Vijay and Lakshmi feel their identity has not affected their access to the internet via their devices, though for



Lakshmi her identity has affected the way she uses the online space.

Selvy said she feels she has no control over her device because all apps she uses take her data

and so there is no security as such. The rules



Her phone was taken away by her parents when she was young and she had no access to social media for a long time. Now she has more control over what is posted but her lover has her password.

and conditions imposed by the apps mean that she has to give up a lot of control, but she is still using those platforms. She says she is not happy about this at all and thinks there should be alternatives so that personal data does not get misused.



COST

Our questions about self-expression were not limited to expression and performance of gender identity and sexuality, so this section considers various forms of expression that happen on the internet.

During focus group discussions, participants raised the cost of devices and internet connections as a major barrier to accessing the internet. This is supported by [research that shows the cost of 1GB of internet is not affordable for 60% of the population](#) (Galpaya et al., 2019). Participants shared that many of them use prepaid mobile connections and that if they don't have money for a recharge when data runs out, their access becomes limited to spaces that have WiFi, such as their workplaces. While many people use the internet for pleasure and especially like consuming video content, they are constantly cognisant of the fact that these take up a lot of their bandwidth. This corresponded with Melony's experience. "I use data cards and often there are money problems when it



comes to data", he says explaining that internet access depends on whether he can afford to reload data or if a friend can help out.

Sri Lanka was the first country in South Asia to introduce 4G mobile internet in

Participants shared that many of them use prepaid mobile connections and that if they don't have money for a recharge when data runs out, their access becomes limited to spaces that have WiFi.

2012 but news reports show that despite increasing 4G coverage around the country, subscriber penetration for 4G [remains at 14.66 per cent as of the first quarter of 2020 and is expected to reach 33.1 per cent by 2025](#) (Daily News, 2020). Unaffordability of connections and devices are cited as reasons for these low levels. In the meantime, [the state and private sector are beginning to invest in 5G infrastructure](#) (Sunday Observer, 2020) for the country, which will lead to deepening inequalities in how people access and use the internet if these challenges around cost are not addressed.

REGULATION BY THE STATE AND PLATFORMS

[Internet shutdowns have now become a common occurrence across the world](#) (Access Now, 2020) including in South Asia. Internet shutdowns are defined as anything from a total internet blackout over an entire country or area to the blocking of specific websites or applications. They are becoming more frequent and are lasting longer too. There were [at least 3 internet shutdowns](#) (Access Now, 2020) in Sri Lanka in May 2019 during the nationwide curfew due to anti-Muslim riots. [NetBlocks reported](#) that a number of social media sites including Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, YouTube, Viber, Snapchat and Facebook Messenger and Twitter were blocked during these shutdowns. NetBlocks [also estimated a loss of USD 30,000,000 to the economy](#) due to the internet shutdown of March 2018. In addition to such shutdowns, the blocking and censoring of specific websites, especially news websites and blogs, has been going on for years.

So if your livelihood is dependent on the internet, such shutdowns can have an effect on your monthly income. Melony experienced



this when some of the websites on which he advertised his services were blocked by the government in the period from around 2010

to 2015. He thinks the blocking was due to underage people advertising their services on these sites but it nevertheless affected people like him too. The sites were unblocked after the government changed in 2015 but given that Sri Lanka has recently gone through another government change, he thinks it's possible for some of the sites to be shut down. Melony also shared that the police and law enforcement are aware that sex workers use the internet to solicit customers but that so far they have not tried to interfere with this except in the cases of underage people.

For Selvy, current political regimes could restrict access due to concerns of national security, and that could in turn affect her work and activism. But at present she faces no personal restriction in access to the internet. Krishani and Thivya who are both from Colombo, also face no controls or restrictions on access to the internet and in Thivya's case, she enjoyed this access from a young age.



It is evident from survey responses that the preferred platforms for self-expression are not platforms that users have much control over, such as Facebook and Whatsapp. While most respondents were not using platforms that give users more autonomy (not using due to various reasons including lack of information about alternatives, lack of user

proliferation on alternative platforms, lack of space on devices for multiple platforms, etc.), many of them were aware that having full control over their device did not mean they had full control over the data they share on the platforms they use through these devices.



Lakshmi spoke about the control apps and sites have over data, which she does not like and therefore she is very selective about where she shares her information.

"I think I have control over my device and use of the internet and if I want to use it, I will use it. No one interferes there. And only I use my device. At the same time, when I open some search engine or download a few apps, we have to submit our email id, or phone number. At that point I don't give it. I just quit that app or use something else. I feel like that is control, so I don't use them. I am managing my use with other apps without giving personal details for all the sites."

Melony shared some of the challenges he has faced due to [Facebook's real name policy](#) (The Verge, 2018). As mentioned before, he



had a thriving network of about 4,000 contacts on Facebook. While his profile photo is of him as a cisgender man, his profile name is his female

drag/cross-dress name which is how he has been known by everyone in everyday life for the last two decades. One day when he logged into his account, he was informed that Facebook had disabled his account for violating the platform's Statement of Rights and Responsibilities. No information was given on which clauses he had violated. His Facebook account is a key communication channel for his livelihood and an attempt was made to recover it. While changes to Facebook's real name policy now allow users to use 'the name they go by in everyday life', in order to recover an account you need to show official identification documents or any other kind of identification such as a utility bill addressed to the name they use on the account. This is not an option for Melony who has no intention to change his legal name and whose identification documents and all other correspondence are done through his legal name. Melony has had to give up hope of ever recovering his Facebook account and has opened a new account through which he is trying to rebuild his network.

It is evident that while internet access remains a common issue across the country for many people, there are issues experienced by LGBTQ+ people that are specific for the community, the consequences of which could have a direct impact on their lives and livelihood.



Access and Regulation

Preferred Platforms and User Culture

The survey explored respondents’ preferred platforms and their user behaviour on those platforms in several ways.

- a) *What do you use the internet most for?*
- b) *Of all the platforms you use, which do you think provides you a space for expression most?*
- c) *How do you rate your skills on using the internet?*

Responses to these questions provided us with several dimensions of how respondents use the internet as well as reasons for some of their preferences.




Responses to this question must be understood with cognisance that it was interpreted differently by each respondent. It was interpreted both as what people do the most while being on the internet and for what people get on the internet. For example, when it comes to health information, some interpreted as something they sometimes do while they are on the internet while others interpreted it as something they’d always get on the internet to look for (and for which they will never look for offline). There was additional confusion because some of

I use the internet for

	Always	Some times	Never
Banking	16.5%	49.5%	34%
Blogs	37.9%	36.9%	25.2%
Calls	58.3%	38.8%	2.9%
Chatting	52.4%	37.9%	9.7%
Dating	13.6%	42.7%	43.7%
Emails	65%	20.4%	14.6%
Forums	33%	47.6%	19.4%
Gaming	21.4%	44.7%	34%
Health information	37.9%	45.6%	16.5%
Instant Messaging	61.2%	30.1%	8.7%
Livelihood	22.3%	46.6%	31.1%
Porn	19.4%	51.5%	29.1%
Research	55.3%	32%	12.6%
Search Engines	58.3%	32%	9.7%
Sexting	12.6%	42.7%	44.7%
Sexual Pleasure	12.6%	49.5%	37.9%
Social Networking	55.3%	35.9%	8.7%
Video Streaming	44.7%	37.9%	17.5%
Work	59.2%	34%	6.8%

the activities in the list were purely online activities (for example, social networking, video streaming, email, etc.) while others could happen online and offline (for example, research, work, health information, etc.). There was also lack of clarity between certain activities such as the difference between work and livelihood or between chatting and instant messaging. An activity like gaming was understood in terms of people who play video games and identify as gamers, which meant people who always play other electronic games didn't necessarily select 'always'.

As a group, this is what the respondents appeared to be telling us.

-  *I always use the internet for blogs, calls, chatting, emails, instant messaging, research, search engines, social networking, video streaming and work.*
-  *I never use the internet for dating and sexting.*
-  *I sometimes use the internet for banking, blogs, forums, gaming, health information, livelihood, porn, and sexual pleasure.*



Melony, who is 46 years old, first started using the internet in 2010. He was from a small town in the North-Western Province of Sri



The internet was also useful for him to connect with others in the gay and cross-dress community in Sri Lanka.

Lanka and for the longest time believed that his homosexuality was a mental illness. This was the only information he got from the people around him as well as the media available to him. He started using the internet for work and started looking up information on HIV and AIDS. This proved to be the gateway to his then finding information on the internet about sexuality and sexual orientation and coming to terms with his identity as part of himself while also learning more about how his identity is criminalised. The internet was also useful for him to connect with others in the gay and cross-dress community in Sri Lanka. His current usage of the internet

is mostly for email, chatting, research and social networking. He occasionally uploads content when there's something special but his usual behaviour on the internet is to watch videos, leave comments on social media and Gossip Lanka, and to re-share content that he feels is important. A recent example he mentioned is the "Parisara Lady (Environment Lady)" video which is a reference to a video that went viral in which a District Forest Officer challenged a proposal by government ministers to build a playground in a protected mangrove area. Melony was one of many netizens in Sri Lanka who shared the video in admiration of the officer's integrity.



Shamal never uses the internet for dating or sexting. He explained that for him dating is not a casual activity and that he believes the

emotional connection needed to form

a relationship cannot be found on dating apps. He's also very concerned about his privacy online and rarely shares photos of himself or any other personal information. So, sending sexually explicit messages or photos is not something he's comfortable doing. He sometimes watches porn but also said he never uses the internet for sexual pleasure. This dichotomy seemed to stem from an understanding of sexual pleasure using the internet as something that involves two-way communication.

Many of the respondents we spoke to through focus group discussions and interviews, were knowledge workers whose jobs involve handling of information. This resonates with how they use email; 65% said that they always use the internet for email but only 10% said email provides them with a space for expression. However, during a focus group discussion with a group of sex workers, they raised that their most preferred method of communication for work as well as in their personal lives was not included in the survey. That is, telephone calls. While it is understandable that a survey focused on internet use did not include telephone calls and SMS, this feedback shows that approaching it as information and communications technologies (ICTs) rather than just the internet would ensure that experiences of more people are documented. While sex workers use apps and websites to connect with potential clients, the group noted that phone calls remain a preferred method of communication for clients.

Shirani, a trans woman who is an activist, also noted the continuing importance of telephone calls. While she doesn't share a lot of information from her private life on her social media, her mobile phone number is listed in the Facebook page for her organisation that works on the rights of transgender



people. “I get calls even at midnight and I try my best to speak to everyone who contacts me”, says Shirani observing that even though people, especially young people, find her and her organisation online, they still prefer to contact the organisation on the telephone because of the privacy offered to them by the relative anonymity of a phone call. She’s also empathetic about the late night calls saying that often that is when people feel the most alone and vulnerable and also when they are able to discuss issues of gender and sexuality without others in the household overhearing them.

Therefore it is important to consider online user behaviour and culture within the broader spectrum of other ICTs.

As mentioned earlier, research shows that [almost all internet users in Sri Lanka are social media users](#) (Galpaya et al., 2019). Respondents of our survey displayed a higher preference for Facebook, Whatsapp, Instagram, IMO and Twitter as platforms that give them most space for expression. Below are some of the reasons they gave for these preferences, as well as some of their concerns about these platforms.

Of all the platforms you use, which do you think provides you a space for expression most?

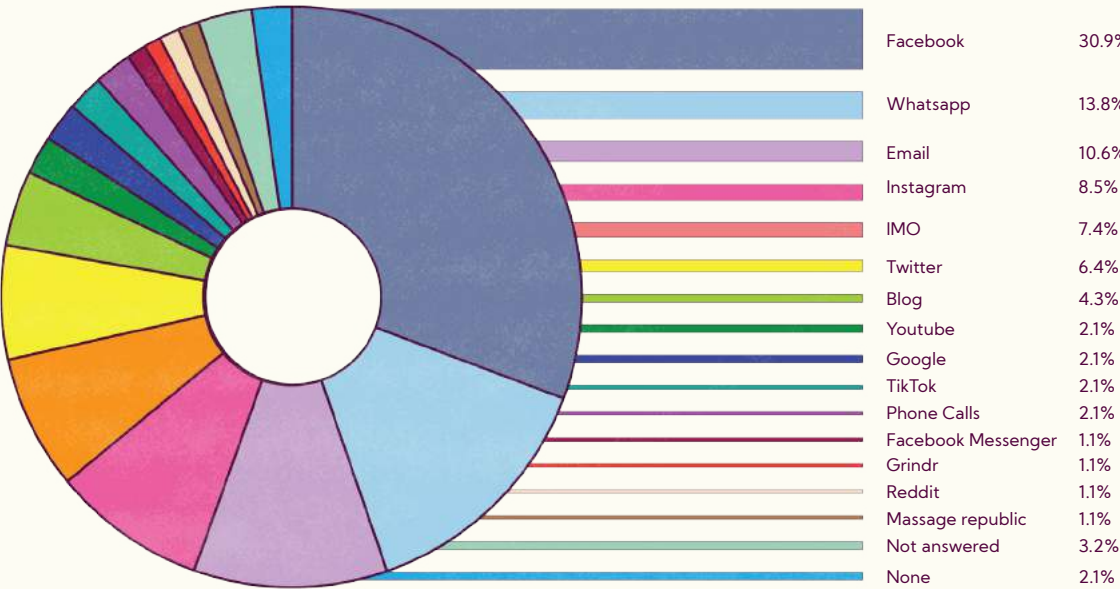


Figure 34: Of all the platforms you use, which do you think provides you a space for expression most?

FACEBOOK

- 🍃 Reach is high for posts/ photos/ videos, especially when managing Facebook Pages.
- 🍃 It can be used conveniently on desktop as well as through the mobile app.
- 🍃 Can use Sinhalese.
- 🍃 It's very easy to use.
- 🍃 Facebook and my blog. Because people read what I write on these two platforms and I have a reach to others as well.
- 🍃 Very useful to express my opinions.
- 🍃 I like that translation feature that Facebook has.
- 🍃 Facebook can be a negative space. Also with Facebook, we are not the consumers, we are the product. People need to be more aware of that and careful.
- 🍃 A few years ago when I was very active on Facebook, there was a lot of sexist stuff. You couldn't post anything about gender, whether you are ranting or sharing news, people get pissed, there are negative comments.

INSTAGRAM

- 🍃 Instagram is a place that I feel I can express my identity- me as a person, my interests and my queerness which I am very proud to put out there.
- 🍃 It's safer, more positive, allows me to be more selective of who follows without being confrontational.
- 🍃 Good to showcase art.
- 🍃 Sri Lanka doesn't talk about critical thinking at all. Even Instagram influencers – companies are just trying to sell their products to us.
- 🍃 I want to join Instagram but there's so much content and I don't know if I want that. Instagram will be an overload – people are posting all the time. Instagram runs in a way to keep you engaged all the time.

TWITTER

- ✎ I guess Twitter provides the freedom of speech in a short way. You don't have to write much or complain much.
- ✎ I believe Twitter is a wonderful place for discourse, where you get to experience the views of a very diverse group, on any and all subjects.
- ✎ I am mainly on Twitter and Instagram. Closed my Facebook and Tumblr accounts because of toxic environments I needed to get away from.
- ✎ Strong, communicative, amazing queer presence. Strong queer community and conversation. All in spite of LKA (Sri Lankan) Twitter's general shittery.
- ✎ My family is not on (Tumblr) and Twitter so I am more comfortable to express myself there.

TIKTOK

- ✎ There's more room to play on it.

TUMBLR

- ✎ Everyone's weird there. Nothing is sacred in other platforms, but Tumblr always kept it real.
- ✎ It's a good platform for people with different identities like me to meet and discuss things.
- ✎ My family is not on Tumblr (and Twitter) so I am more comfortable to express myself there.
- ✎ I started writing because of Tumblr and blogs. I was motivated to create more content.

GOOGLE

- ✎ To search for information, for knowledge, for relaxation.

REDDIT

- ✎ Because it's anonymous.

HOW DO YOU RATE YOUR SKILLS ON USING THE INTERNET?

Can build a website

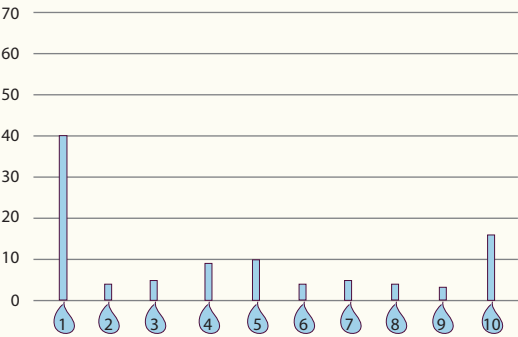


Figure 35: Expression online: can build a website

Can write code

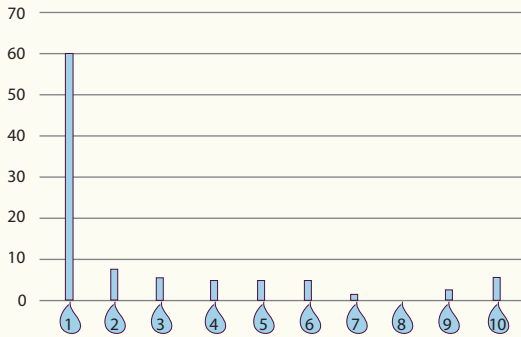


Figure 36: Expression online: can write code

Can use search engines

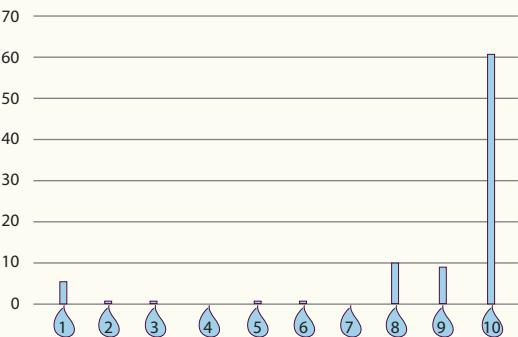


Figure 37: Expression online: can use search engines

Can participate in social networks

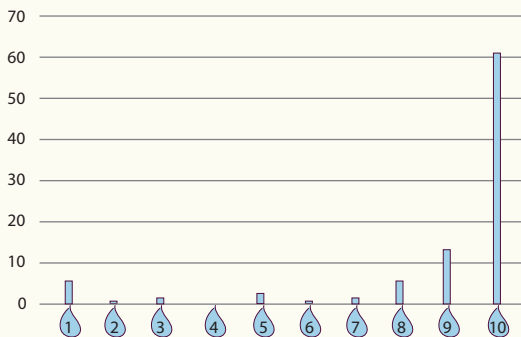


Figure 38: Expression online: can participate in social networks

Can blog

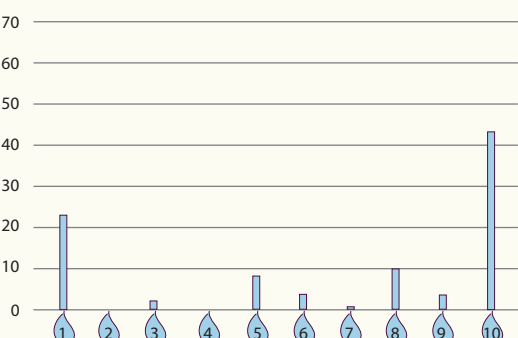


Figure 39: Expression online: can blog

Can participate in forums

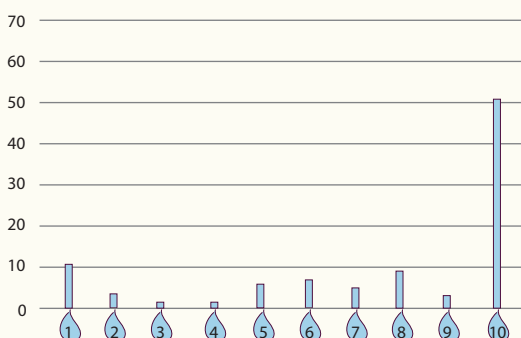


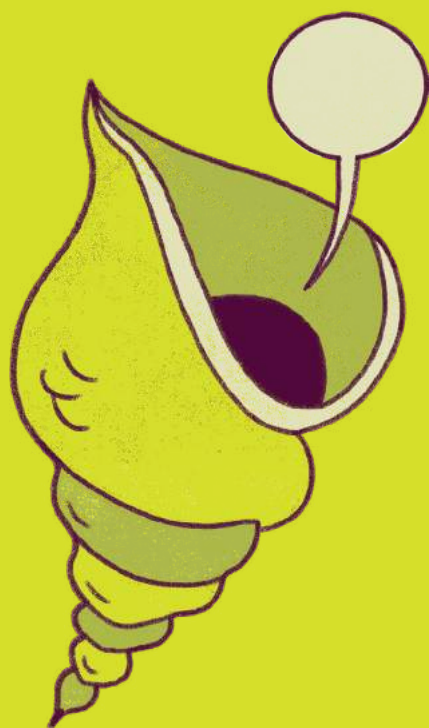
Figure 40: Expression online: can participate in forums

Responses to this question corresponded with the earlier sections on what people most use the internet for and which platforms provide most space for expression. Most respondents rated themselves high for skills in participating in social networks, forums and groups, using search engines, and blogging. On the last, it was interesting to note that some respondents mentioned the blogging platform Tumblr as important to their self-expression as queer people (respondents in English as well as Tamil). However, a significant number of respondents rated their skills at blogging as 1 (never done before) as well and this could possibly be due to [blogging becoming a less popular medium](#) (Blog Tyrant, 2020) as social media began to rise in popularity and offer ways to micro-blog.

Many respondents indicated that they had never coded or built a website. This is not surprising given that these are still considered to be specialised skills. However, [rising popularity in low-code platforms](#) (Gineers Now, 2020) as well as predictions that coding literacy will in future become [as ubiquitous as language literacy](#) (Davis, 2019) means the need to develop these skills will increase in the near future, especially for younger people entering the job market. As the previous sections have shown, many respondents have control over their devices but the level of autonomy they experience on platforms is quite low, often leading to self-censorship

Developing skills related to building and co-creating autonomous platforms on the internet could be particularly empowering for LGBTQ+ people.

or control by the platforms. This is especially true for LGBTQ+ people, which also shows that developing skills related to building and co-creating autonomous platforms on the internet could be particularly empowering for them. While the [National Digital Policy of 2019](#) (Ministry of Digital Infrastructure and Information Technology & the Information and Communication Technology Agency of Sri Lanka, 2019) notes the need to “foster digital literacy and lifelong learning skills development for elderly, disabled, women and marginalised groups”, it is not possible to effectively cater to the needs of those marginalised due to their sexuality, gender identity or sexual behaviour as long as they remain criminalised by the law.



Access and Regulation

Language and Terminology

Language is never just a tool of communication and this is true in Sri Lanka too. Issues around language and terminology in Sri Lanka are complex and historically so (Perera, 2011), and have far reaching social, political and economic consequences. One of the most recent national issues on language was [the new government's decision to not sing in the national anthem in Tamil](#) (Al Jazeera, 2020) during the 2020 Independence Day celebrations. Language politics play out on the internet as well. Citizens often point out that official news sources of the state such as the [President's Media Division](#) (Gopikrishna, 2020), the [Department of Government Information](#) and the [Official Government News Portal of Sri Lanka](#) (Aingaran, 2019) issue information only in Sinhala and English.




"...it is vital that we recognise how an issue as seemingly small as language inequality can hinder an individual's daily life, access to services and search for justice" (De Sayrah, 2017).

While people's experiences of how language affects their everyday life in terms of ethnicity, geography, class, etc. are documented in Sri Lanka, the intersection of sexual orientation and gender identity is not as well documented. This section shares some of the experiences and observations shared by respondents.

As mentioned earlier in the sections on methodology and limitations, the survey was trilingual in English, Tamil and Sinhala. It was completed by respondents as follows.

Out of the focus group discussions we had as part of the survey, two were conducted in Sinhala, two were in Tamil and one was in Sinhala and English.

Languages the survey was completed in

 Tamil	42.7%
 English	35.9%
 Sinhala	21.1%

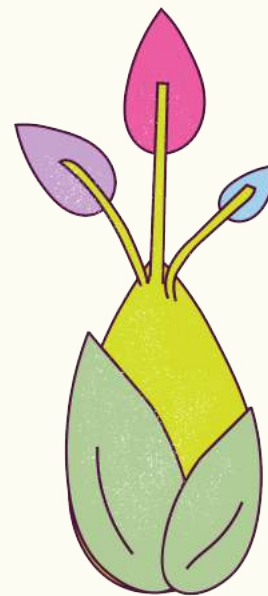


Figure 41: Languages the survey was completed in

Language and terminology were explored in this study in the following ways.

- What are the primary languages the respondents used on the internet?
- What has the experience of using the internet in local languages of Sinhala and Tamil been like?
- What have been the issues with navigating terminology around gender and sexuality in English vs Tamil and Sinhala?

LANGUAGES USED ON THE INTERNET

The survey asked what languages the respondents spoke and what languages they used on the internet.

20% of the respondents said they were trilingual (English, Sinhala and Tamil) but only 2% use all three languages on the internet. Most respondents are bilingual in their daily life and were bilingual on the internet as well. Over 30% of respondents used only English on the internet and conversations during focus groups and interviews showed that respondents found Sinhala and Tamil keyboards to be too cumbersome and opted to use English phonetically to communicate in Sinhala and Tamil on the internet. Therefore, the high use of English on the internet has to be understood not only in terms of language but also in terms of English (Latin) script being used to communicate in Sinhala and Tamil.

Languages spoken and languages used on the internet

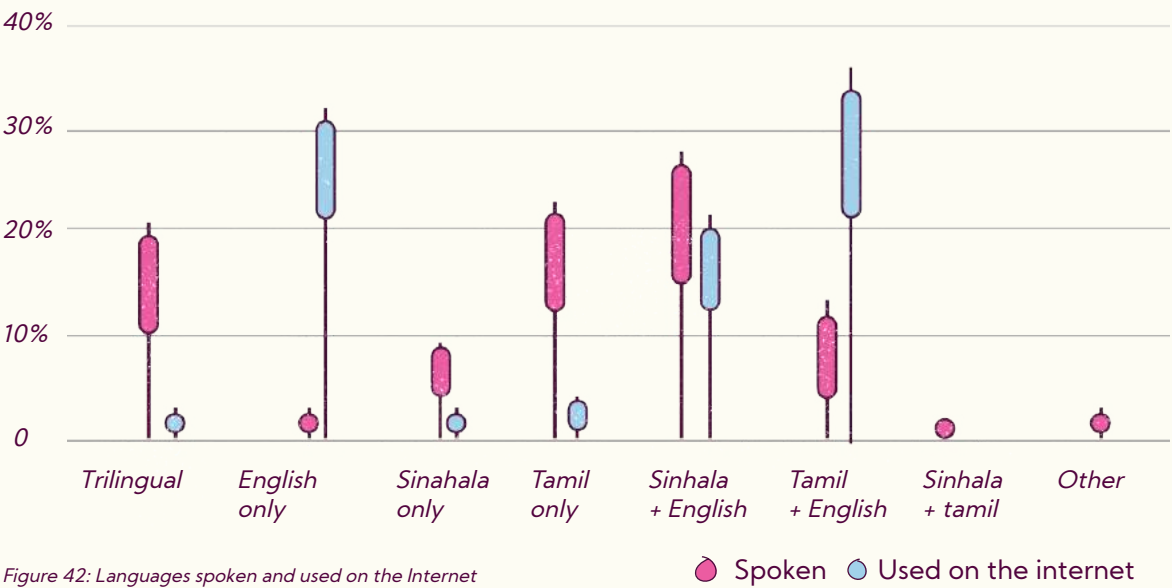


Figure 42: Languages spoken and used on the Internet



Many respondents reflected on the effect language has on how they use the internet. Melony and Shirani both shared that using English on the internet is unavoidable but makes it harder for them to express themselves fully and effectively. Sinhala unicode and improvements in Sinhala-English and English-Sinhala translations on Google Translate have made a huge difference to Shirani as an activist. "I can



send an email to Geneva in Sinhala", she said referring to how online translation tools make it possible to better connect with human rights advocacy at international level.

An often repeated issue in our conversations about language was that most resources online are still available only in English. People we spoke to had to find ways to navigate this if English was not their primary language, with some of them taking on the task of translating



available resources to make multilingual content available for others. As Lakshmi said, an internet search in English would generate a flood of information, but few results, if at all, in Tamil.



Hasini echoed views by others that using the internet in English had many more advantages than not, primarily because there is

so much content in English.

Aarya said she knew more about issues of gender and sexuality after searching online. But the fact that most content is in English was a challenge for non-English speakers in Sri Lanka, affecting the extent of use and access to content.



"The relevant articles or interesting pieces are mostly in English. To understand it I use Google Translate. But the challenge is the translation is not accurate. Sometimes it is completely wrong. So, not knowing English or not having proper translation is a challenge. Searching in English is also difficult as I am not fluent in English."

However, in instances where platforms make an attempt to use a local language as an interface for users, there is the added challenge of which local language is selected by default. Vijay shared an experience of trying to use Google and Microsoft platforms, which were only available in Sinhala and did not include the other local language, Tamil:

"When using Google there is an important issue regarding language. I bought a new device. And then I opened Google and it is totally in Sinhala. Google is using the majority language of the



country but there are other people here and different people visit this site too. Google is not considering any of those. But Google does not consider that and Microsoft acts in the same way too."

The use of different languages online is seen as a way to communicate with different groups of people better and more closely and, as survey results showed, many respondents were bilingual online, using Sinhala or Tamil in addition to English.



Shirani, a trans woman who is trilingual, searched the internet a lot about gender identity, surgery and side effects of hormones. However she also found that there was a dearth of

information in local languages. While she was able to find information that eventually led her to others in the community, she continues to be acutely aware of the information gap those who are not literate in English experience and does her best to bridge this gap in her own work of disseminating information. She said,

"More young people are coming out now, both from Colombo and out-station [outside of Colombo]. It's important to be able to provide them correct information in all three languages."



"When using Google there is an important issue regarding language. I bought a new device. And then I opened Google and it is totally in Sinhala. Google is using the majority language of the country but there are other people here and different people visit this site too. - Vijay



For Vijay, who identified as Tamil, using Sinhala helped him to connect better with Sinhalese speaking people and groups online, and similarly with other groups when using Tamil and English respectively. Selvy also felt the same way about connecting better to people, and said that when she shared posts in Sinhala, it helped her connect and network more with the Sinhala community and expand the space for her to work. The challenge Vijay sees around the use of language in the online space is technical: not everyone is able to type in their own language (Tamil/Sinhala) because the option is not available to them. Selvy would like more translation facilities built into more platforms so she can consume content in other languages as well.



Lakshmi said that her experience has been that when writing on issues such as gender and sexuality in English, the comments are much more welcoming than when she writes in Tamil and she also feels there is a greater reach. She feels that may be because of the fact that content is primarily in English and those consuming content in English are therefore more aware of the subject against the limited exposure to knowledge and issues on these subjects in Tamil.

Use of language in the online space is technical: not everyone is able to type in their own language (Tamil/Sinhala) because the option is not available to them.


"I don't know. But there is a difference. I use Tamil. I know Tamil and that is my language. So it's easy to write. At the same time, when I write about other social issues, writing in Tamil will reach the people who I want to address. And sometimes it generates discussions on the issues. So it is helpful. But the reach is more when you write in English."

Selvy had similar experiences and said that the harassment is usually high when she posts in Tamil and the comments are abusive, but if she posts the same thing in English there are more likes and shares.




NAVIGATING TERMINOLOGY AROUND GENDER AND SEXUALITY

As mentioned in the sections on methodology and limitations, the process of translating the survey from English to Sinhala and Tamil gave rise to a challenge faced by many activists and others working on issues related to sexual orientation and gender identity and expression in Sri Lanka (and those in other countries where English is not the first language): many terms that are well established and standard in the lexicon of global LGBTQ+ activism lose their meaning or relevance in translation. For example, ස්ත්‍රී පුරුෂ සමාජභාවය (sthree purusha samajabhavaya) the Sinhala translation for gender, or பாஸ்தலை (Paalnilai), the Tamil translation for gender, are situated in an understanding of gender as a binary of man and woman only, and if used in the same way, exclude many people whose expression and experiences we wish to prioritise through this survey. A term such as queer, the trajectory of which in English speaking countries does not resonate with our local context, poses a challenge not just in translation but also in feeling, as rooted to our identities. And umbrella phrases like sexual orientation and gender identity and expression (SOGIE) can sometimes exclude the experiences of people whose sexuality and sexual behaviour are not considered normative, such as sex workers. These findings resonate with the mismatch



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between largely Western typologies of gender identity and sexual orientation and local understandings and practices, which has been explored in other academic work in Sri Lanka: for example, Nachchi in Sri Lanka who do not strictly fit into the category of transgender due to the complex ways they experience gender identity, sexuality and desire (Miller and Nichols, 2012); or the experiences of non-heterosexual and transgender individuals in Sri Lanka who “demonstrate fluidity in object choice, sex roles and sex acts” (Ellawala, 2018, p. 1321), supporting the argument that the theoretical notion of stable and coherent identities is disrupted. The politics of LGBTQ+ language and terminology must also be considered in terms of policy advocacy and responses that insist on grouping people into categories or asking us to tick boxes, and the (I)NGO industrial complex that has warped the narrative of queer liberation into one that’s focused on identity politics without an intersectional framework that considers class, caste, ability, race, etc. as well as economic, environmental and ecological dimensions. Exploring histories of terminology as well as such language will not just strengthen our activism and politics but also challenge rising conservatism and extremisms as well as neoliberal economic policies and corporate power, which are currently using identity politics both for persecution as well as pinkwashing.

So we decided to use the focus group discussions as an opportunity to have a conversation about the politics of LGBTQ+ language and interrogate why the aesthetics of certain terminologies are given priority. The discussions not only created space to question and unpack the terms that have been given to us through NGO work but also to contextualise and historicise the language through terms that are more locally used. Some of the reflections from these discussions are as follows.

-  There are two sides to the language we use as LGBTQ+ people. There is terminology we use in our work and activism (lesbian, gay, queer, etc.) and then there’s the interpersonal use of language in everyday life (ape kattiya, community eka, terms that could be translated as ‘our lot’, ‘the community’ indigenous to various localities, etc.).
-  Terminology can be useful when it comes to language socialisation. This is double-edged. On one hand, having established terminology such as gay, lesbian, transgender, etc. can be an easy way for people to locate and connect with members from the LGBTQ+ community. However, stigma associated with well-known terms can also make people hesitant to be associated with them or very strict definitions can make it difficult

for people to fit their own experience of sexuality within those definitions.

- 👉 One participant shared the example of how relieved he was to discover the term gay and how liberating it was to identify as and with the English term because until then he had found it difficult to identify with සමලිංගික (Samalingika), the Sinhala term for homosexual, given that the Grade 7 Health Science textbook had mentioned that සමලිංගික (homosexual) activities cause HIV/AIDS.
- 👉 Another participant shared limitations of LGBTQ+ terminology when it comes to community outreach. In 2011, there was a mapping of queer people in the North Central Province but they found it challenging to reach out to people using terms like gay, homosexual, etc. People in towns identified queer people in their communities through descriptions such as “person who cooks at weddings” or “person who does bridal dressings”.
- 👉 In the discussions in Tamil, the commonly used Tamil translation for the term transgender – மாற்றுப்பாலினர் (Maatrappaalinar) was considered unacceptable by some because it referred to an ‘alternative’ gender to men or women. The view was that a more neutral term was required, and the term

திருனர் (thirunar) or திருநம்பி (thirunambi for trans men) and திருநங்கை (thirunangai for trans women) is now used.

- 👉 Participants also discussed that the terms they use on the internet to refer to themselves can sometimes be different to what they’d use offline. As an example, some said that when on Grindr, most people wouldn’t understand the terms ‘Jonse’ and ‘Nachchi’ in relation to top and bottom and that even if they use the local terms offline, they have learnt to use top and bottom when using dating and hookup apps.
- 👉 Terminology is also about power. Being able to come up with terms or labels that define sexuality, sexual orientation and gender identity alludes to a certain level of power, especially when adoption of such terms becomes the basis on which people can access services or benefits, register organisations, etc.
 - A participant shared that if transgender people are to receive sexual and reproductive health services via project donations, they need a medical doctor to confirm they are transgender. There are instances in which trans people who have to present as cis for societal reasons have had to show photos of them presenting as trans in order for

doctors to believe them to be trans and issue letters to that effect. The limited understanding of terminology leads to a conflation of gender identity and gender expression.

- Terminology, whether local or received from outside, doesn't always have to be disempowering, and can be used strategically.
 - While there is no Sinhala or Tamil translation for the term queer, some activists see no need for such a translation because terminology is something we can use temporarily as a tool for the struggle for our rights and the struggle will not be forever.
 - In a discussion with people from the transgender community, they said that there are some words,/terms that are used among themselves only.

- There is terminology we use in our work, there is terminology we use locally and informally, and then there are terms that are used against us in derogatory and violent ways. These are terms that are not used within the community and are external but we see instances in which homophobic use of language is challenged or reclaimed.
 - Participants talked about an incident from 2017 when then Minister Mangala Samaraweera responded

In a discussion with people from the transgender community, they said that there are some words,/terms that are used among themselves only. Some of these terms refer to their own identity.

to a homophobic slur thrown at him by another Member of Parliament by saying he'd rather be what the slur refers to "[than a thug, thief or murderer](#)" (Weerawardhana, 2017). Many participants were in agreement that they felt proud watching him take a stand publicly, even those who were not necessarily aligned with him politically.

- When the former President Maithripala Sirisena used the term “samanalaya” (Sinhala word for butterfly) in a homophobic way, LGBTQ+ people not only protested against this but also reclaimed the term by organising under the banner of “Butterflies for Democracy”. The same Minister Samaraweera referred to earlier, [tweeting in solidarity](#) (Samaraweera, 2018) saying “I would rather be a butterfly than a leech Mr.President!!!”



Terms that are indigenous to local languages and geographical areas develop when members of the LGBTQ+ community have opportunities to meet, socialise, mobilise, etc and develop their own ways of communicating with each other. Participants noted that cisgender homosexual men, while discriminated against due to their sexual orientation, still have more opportunities to organise as well as socialise in Colombo as well as other areas due to their gender identity and expression as cisgender men. Because of this they also see a lot more local terminology and slang in the community for gay men. In comparison, not many terms have been coined for lesbian, bisexual and queer women who don't have the same freedom and autonomy as men to meet and socialise.

The above discussions revealed a rich local lexicon of Tamil and Sinhala terms related to gender identity and sexual orientation in Sri Lanka. As mentioned earlier in the report, we have begun to crowdsource the words and histories from these discussions into a [‘Glossary of Terms for Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation in Sinhala, Tamil and English’](#). While there have been some glossaries in the past, this is one that is coming together outside of a nonprofit or project context, accompanied by translations and pronunciation guides so that more people from the community can get to know each other's terms. The glossary is an attempt at localising language and terminology and recognises that decolonisation is not an exercise in nostalgia but rather a collective effort to build from our current realities while cognisant of the intersecting politics, histories and contexts, including but not limited to colonisation, that brought us to where we are.

Recommendations

LGBTQ+ people across Sri Lanka are using the internet for work, livelihoods, education, information, pleasure, to find friends, find community, and more. While it is their activism or experiences of violence that are often more visible, their experiences as a whole need to be considered by policymakers, platforms and human rights activists including those working on digital rights and freedom of expression.

The following are our recommendations to key state and non-state actors, based on the findings of this study.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO STATE



- 🔗 **Repeal and amend laws that criminalise people on the basis of their sexuality, gender or sexual behaviour.** Policies, programmes and other efforts to enable LGBTQ+ people to use the internet in free, safe and pleasurable ways in their everyday lives cannot be fully realised as long as their identities are criminalised, stigmatised and discriminated against.
- 🔗 **Include LGBTQ+ people in national ICT and digital policy-making processes.** This would ensure that public policies and programmes are informed by the needs and experiences of people marginalised on the basis of their sexuality and gender. This includes programmes and training that promotes digital economy, digital literacy, internet access for LGBTQ+ people.
- 🔗 **Develop community-led telecommunication infrastructure networks: Internet coverage does not equal internet access.** Affordable or free devices and internet connections are necessary to improve access, without compromising net neutrality. One way of addressing cost and access issues would be through community-led telecommunication infrastructure networks. [Research shows that](#) (Bidwell & Jensen, 2019) while there are challenges in setting up and deploying such networks, the benefits in terms of control and cost could transform access to the internet, especially for marginalised groups of people.
- 🔗 **Strengthen capacity of law-enforcement and other frontline ICT officials addressing technology-related violence.** This includes the capacity to recognise technology-related violence and treat it as violence; training to handle cases in non-judgemental ways that does not blame survivors and instead uses a framework

of consent and privacy, rather than harm; sensitisation on a rights-based understanding of gender and sexuality.



🔹 **State responses to hate speech and technology related violence should offer victims / survivors a choice of remedies.** These include:

- The full implementation of existing laws by interpreting as well as amending them to comprehensively address technology-related and online violence, in line with state human rights obligations. Refraining from passing and implementing blanket laws and policies that unduly restrict freedom of expression including sexual expression.
- Access to non-judgmental and free mental health and psychosocial support.
- Access to information on how to report incidences of technology related violence, how to reach civil society organisations, and how to access legal support.

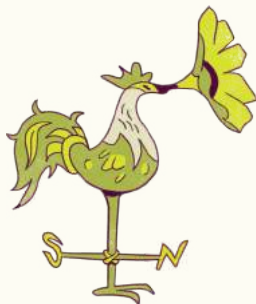
🔹 **Design and implement school-level programmes on digital security, media literacy and comprehensive sexuality education / relationship education.** This includes concepts such as consent, privacy and bodily autonomy, which are fundamental in order to express oneself in free, safe and pleasurable ways.










🔹 **Stop intentional disruption of internet or electronic communications, also known as internet shutdowns.** These include temporary disruptions as well as disruptions in specific areas or specific platforms. Internet shutdowns are an infringement of right to information and can have economic and social consequences on people's lives.

🔹 **Telecommunications-related public authorities should commit fully to the Official Languages Policy, and ensure that all its information and services are trilingual.**



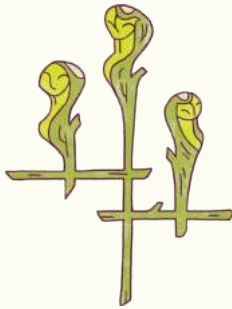


RECOMMENDATIONS TO CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS

- 
Advocate for the repeal of laws and policies that criminalise people on the basis of their sexuality, gender or sexual behaviour.
- 
Develop online resources and information on sexual and reproductive health and rights, sexuality and gender, in Sinhala and Tamil. The internet is being used by people for clarity on sexual and reproductive health and rights including sexuality and gender – their own and that of others. But there is a clear need for more informed resources in local languages and for conducive environments online to share and discuss these so that more people, including LGBTQ+ people, can find support online.
- 
Allocate resources for LGBTQ+ people to tell their own stories. This includes producing their own knowledge in their own languages, and supporting dissemination of the same.
- 
Support programmes and training, including with ICT agencies, that promote digital economy, digital literacy, internet access for LGBTQ+ people.
- 
Strengthen the knowledge and awareness of LGBTQ+ communities as to their rights online and remedies for action in situations of hate speech and violence.
- 
Expand the scope of what CSOs consider gender-based violence, to include technology related violence, in their advocacy, campaigning and support to survivors.
- 
In responding to hate speech and technology related violence:
 - Advocate for the full implementation of existing laws by interpreting as well as amending them to comprehensively address technology-related and online violence, in line with state human rights obligations.

- Support access to non-judgmental and free mental health and psychosocial support for victims / survivors of technology related violence.
- Develop and disseminate information on how to report incidences of technology related violence, how to reach civil society organisations, and how to access legal support.

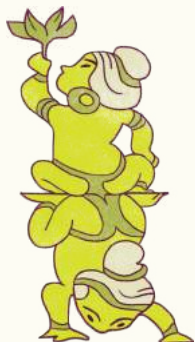
- 🍌 **Advocate for and support the development of school-level programmes on digital security, media literacy and comprehensive sexuality education / relationship education.**
- 🍌 **Strengthen legal resources and support to secure digital rights and redress for violations.**



RECOMMENDATIONS TO INTERNET PLATFORMS

- 🍌 **Adopt clear community guidelines** and terms and conditions that are in line with human rights standards on freedom of expression, and are responsive to hate speech and other forms of technology-related violence. Also take into account the specific needs of LGBTQ+ people and potential rights violations due to policies on 'real name', multiple accounts, anonymity, etc.
- 🍌 **Platforms need to have content moderation capacities in Sinhala and Tamil** as well as strengthened processes and capacities to address incidents of violence that are reported to them, including those against LGBTQ+ people.





RECOMMENDATIONS TO MEDIA

- All media institutions online (both digitally native and otherwise) should take steps to ensure non-discrimination against LGBTQ+ people in how they are represented in and reported on media platforms.** They must update the [Code of Ethics](#) by the Sri Lanka Editors Guild which currently states “the press must avoid prejudicial or pejorative reference to a person’s race, colour, religion, sex or to any physical or mental illness or disability”, so that references to gender identity and sexuality are also included in this guidance. All media institutions should ensure that these guidelines are adhered to and implemented.



RECOMMENDATIONS TO ACADEMIA

- Localising surveys and research should go beyond translation to local languages.** Time and other resources should be allocated to ensure that terminology locally used and understood is used, including in consultation with communities whose experiences are being documented.
- Expand the scope of this survey.** By repeating this survey across more locations, more could be learned on internet usage demographics among LGBTQ+ individuals, through additional factors such as the urban-rural and wealth divides for example.
- Further explore linkages between the internet and mental health for LGBTIQ+ people.** While some respondents raised the benefits

and detractors the internet poses for their mental health, this was not a topic we explored in depth within the scope of this study. The sections on expression, identity, finding community, etc. show the need to conduct research on the inter-linkages between the internet and mental health for LGBTIQ+ people in Sri Lanka.



- **Further research on the internet as a space for sexual expression, interaction and sex work.** This could include the accessing, sharing and creating of pornography, hook-up culture, transactional sex, the multiple platforms being used, all in a context of criminalisation and social stigmatisation.
- **Explore the (neo) colonial basis of terminology and local challenges to the same:** For example, how prevalent use and framing of terminologies used by LGBTQ+ communities in Sri Lanka reproduces colonial hierarchies and how exercises in decolonisation that are currently underway, are challenging this.

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Annexures

Annexure 1 - Glossary of Terms

LGBTQ+

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, as well as people of other gender identities and expression, sexualities and sexual behaviour.

Gender

Sex refers to biological aspects of maleness and femaleness whereas gender addresses behavioral, social, cultural and other aspects of the continuum of masculinity and femininity.

Gender Identity

A person's sense of being masculine, feminine, or other gendered.

Gender Expression

The way a person presents themselves including through their physical appearance to express aspects of gender or gender role. Gender expression may not always correspond to a person's gender identity.

Cisgender

Identifying with the same gender that was assigned at birth.

Transgender

Identifying with a different gender than what was assigned at birth.

Sexuality

Sexuality can encompass sex, gender identities and roles, gender expression, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy, etc. Sexuality is experienced and expressed in thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviours, practices, roles and relationships. While sexuality can include all of these dimensions, not all of them are always experienced or expressed. Sexuality is influenced by the interaction of biological, psychological, social, economic, political, cultural, legal, historical, religious and spiritual factors.

Sexual Orientation

The desire for intimate emotional, romantic and/or sexual relationships with people of the same gender/sex, another gender/sex, or many genders/sexes. Or the lack of such desire.

Lesbian

Person identifying as a woman who is attracted emotionally, romantically and/or sexually to other people who identify as women.

Gay

Person identifying as a man who is attracted emotionally, romantically and/or sexually to other people who identify as men. Not all men who engage in “homosexual behavior” may identify as gay. Sometimes the term is also used to refer to anyone who doesn’t identify as heterosexual, regardless of gender.

Queer

An umbrella term which embraces a matrix of sexual preferences, orientations, and habits of the not-exclusively- heterosexual-and-monogamous majority. Queer includes lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, transpeople, intersex persons, the radical sex communities, and many others who are exploring their sexuality. This term is sometimes used as a way of stating a non-heterosexual orientation without having to state who they are attracted to. In Anglophone countries, it is a reclaimed word that was formerly used solely as a slur but that has been semantically overturned by members of the maligned group.

Bisexual

Emotional, romantic and/or sexual attraction to more than one gender.

Pansexual

Emotional, romantic and/or sexual attraction to people regardless of their gender.

Nonbinary

A gender identity used by some people who do not identify with the binary of man/woman.

Intersex

Term for a combination of chromosomes, hormones, internal sex organs, and genitals that differs from the two expected patterns of male or female.

Heteronormativity

The assumption, in individuals or in institutions, that everyone is heterosexual, and that heterosexuality is superior to any other sexual orientation.

Coming out

The process in which a person first acknowledges, accepts and appreciates their sexual orientation or gender identity and begins to share that with others.

Homophobia

The fear and hatred of or discomfort with people who are not heterosexual.

Transphobia

The fear and hatred of or discomfort with transgender people.

Ethnicity

A sense of common ancestry based on cultural attachments, past linguistic heritage, religious affiliations, claimed kinship, or some physical traits.

Technology-related violence

Technology-related violence encompasses 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 phones, the internet, social media platforms, and email.

Annexure 2 - Quantitative Survey

1. Location*

Choose one of the following answers

Please choose only one of the following:

- ☐ Bangladesh
- ☐ Nepal
- ☐ Sri Lanka

2. What do you do?:*

Choose one of the following answers

Please choose only one of the following:

- ☐ Non-governmental organisation
- ☐ Academic or research institute
- ☐ Student
- ☐ Freelance/Independent
- ☐ Artist
- ☐ Human rights activist/advocate
- ☐ Government sector
- ☐ Private sector
- ☐ Unemployed
- ☐ Other (please specify)

3. Age *

4a. Gender*

Check all that apply

Please choose all that apply:

- ☐ Cis woman (Women who identify with the same gender as that assigned to them at birth they can choose cis woman)
- ☐ Cis man (Men who identify with the same gender as that assigned to them at birth can choose cis man)

- ☐ Trans woman (This term refers to individuals assigned male at birth who are actually women.)
- ☐ Trans man (This term refers to individuals assigned female at birth who are actually men.)
- ☐ Intersex (Term for a combination of chromosomes, hormones, internal sex organs, and genitals that differs from the two expected patterns of male or female.)
- ☐ Non-binary (A gender identity label used by some people who do not identify with the binary of man/woman)
- ☐ Genderqueer/gender non-conforming (A gender identity label often used by people who do not identify with the binary of man/woman)
- ☐ Prefer not to say
- ☐ Other (please specify):

4b. Sexual orientation *

Check all that apply

Please choose all that apply:

- ☐ Heterosexual/straight (Heterosexual refers to attraction to members of the other gender/sex)
- ☐ Gay (A sexual identity term used by some (but not all) people who are only or mostly to those of the same gender/sex)
- ☐ Lesbian (A sexual identity term used by some (but not all) women who are mostly or only attracted to other women.)
- ☐ Bisexual/ Pansexual (Bisexuality refers to attraction towards men, women and non-binary people. It does not imply equal degree of attraction, simply significant attraction towards all or more than two genders)
- ☐ Queer
- ☐ Prefer not to say
- ☐ Prefer to self-describe:

4c. Other *

Check all that apply

Please choose all that apply:

- ☐ Disabled/differently-abled
- ☐ Ethnic minority
- ☐ Indigenous person
- ☐ Migrant
- ☐ Marginalised group on the basis of caste
- ☐ Marginalised group on the basis of race
- ☐ Prefer not to say
- ☐ Not applicable
- ☐ Other:

5. Email/contact details (optional)

6. Languages spoken

7. Languages used on the internet

8. Where do you access the internet? (Choose as many as applicable)

Check all that apply

Please choose all that apply:

- ☐ At home
- ☐ At work
- ☐ While travelling
- ☐ At a cybercafe
- ☐ Other:

9. What is the device you most often use to access the internet?*

Choose one of the following answers

Please choose only one of the following:

- ☐ Desktop computer
- ☐ Laptop computer
- ☐ Mobile phone
- ☐ Tablet
- ☐ Other

10. How do you rate your skills for the below statements on a scale of 1 to 10 where 10 is can do with ease and 1 is never done before?*

- ☐ Can build a website
- ☐ Can write code
- ☐ Can use search engines
- ☐ Can participate on social networks
- ☐ Can blog
- ☐ Can participate in forums/groups on the internet

11. How much control do you have over your primary device that you mentioned in 9?

Please check the statement(s) that are the most applicable to your situation.*

Choose one of the following answers

Please choose only one of the following:

- ☐ Can build a website
- ☐ Can write code
- ☐ Can use search engines
- ☐ Can participate on social networks
- ☐ Can blog
- ☐ Can participate in forums/groups on the internet

12. How often do you read the terms and conditions before installing a mobile application or computer software?* Choose one of the following answers

Please choose only one of the following:

- ☐ Always
- ☐ Often
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Never

13. Has your gender identity affected the way you use the internet? *

Choose one of the following answers

Please choose only one of the following:

- ☐ Definitely
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Not really
- ☐ I don't know

14. Has your sexual identity affected the way you use the internet?*

Choose one of the following answers

Please choose only one of the following:

- ☐ Definitely
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Not really
- ☐ I don't know

15. Has access to the internet changed how you understand gender and sexual identity?*

Choose one of the following answers

Please choose only one of the following:

- ☐ Definitely
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Not really
- ☐ I don't know

16. Has access to the internet changed how you perceive people of different gender and sexual identities? * Choose one of the following answers

Please choose only one of the following:

- ☐ Definitely
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Not really
- ☐ I don't know

17. How important is the internet in your self-expression on a scale of 1 to 10, where 10 is essential and 1 is not important at all? *

Why? *

18. What do you use the internet most for?:*

Please choose the appropriate response for each item:

	Always	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Work	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Research	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Livelihood	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Dating	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Chatting	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Calls	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Banking or financial transactions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sexting	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Porn	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Gaming	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Social networking	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Health information including sexual and reproductive health (pregnancy and menstrual apps)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Video streaming	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Blogs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Forums	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Email	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Instant messengers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sexual pleasure	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Search engines and other websites	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

19a. How often do you use the internet as a consumer of content on the internet:*

19b. How often do you use the internet as a creator of content (blogs, vlogs, memes, code, instagram posts, uploading photos, etc.) on the internet*

20. Please rate the following questions based on your experiences:*

	Definitely	Sometimes	Not really	I don't know	No
Diverse people participate and engage in debate/conversations on the internet.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The internet connects me to people more easily.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can find information on the internet about topics that are considered taboo/problematic by society.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Only women get harassed on the internet.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The same violence we see in the offline world is replicated on the internet.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

21. Have you experienced any of the following?

Check all that apply

Please choose all that apply:

- ☐ Direct threats of violence, including threats of sexual and/or physical violence (e.g. threats like "I am going to rape you")
- ☐ Abusive comments
- ☐ Unwanted receiving of sexually explicit materials

- ☐ Hate speech, social media posts and/or email, often targeted at an identity (Speech or expression that specifically attacks a person's or a group of people's race, religion, gender identity or sexuality.)
- ☐ Use of sexist and/or gendered comments or name-calling
- ☐ Unauthorised access and controlling of access
- ☐ Non-consensual sharing of private information
- ☐ Use of indecent or violent images to demean women
- ☐ Abusing and/or shaming a woman for expressing views that are not normative, for disagreeing with people and also for refusing sexual advances
- ☐ Advocating femicide (Femicide is generally understood to refer to the intentional murder of women because they are women, but a broader definition includes any killings of women or girls. (This definition might not be inclusive of intersex persons.)
- ☐ Impersonation and identity theft
- ☐ Mobbing, including the selection of a target for bullying or harassment

22. Have you participated in any of the following?

Check all that apply

Please choose all that apply:

- ☐ Direct threats of violence, including threats of sexual and/or physical violence (e.g. threats like "I am going to rape you")
- ☐ Abusive comments
- ☐ Unwanted receiving of sexually explicit materials
- ☐ Hate speech, social media posts and/or email, often targeted at an identity
- ☐ Use of sexist and/or gendered comments or name-calling
- ☐ Unauthorised access and controlling of access
- ☐ Non-consensual sharing of private information
- ☐ Use of indecent or violent images to demean women
- ☐ Abusing and/or shaming a woman for expressing views that are not normative, for disagreeing with people and also for refusing sexual advances
- ☐ Advocating femicide
- ☐ Impersonation and identity theft
- ☐ Mobbing, including the selection of a target for bullying or harassment

23. What was your response to the violence? Check all that apply

Please choose all that apply:

- ☐ Reported it to the platform
- ☐ Ignored it
- ☐ Retorted back
- ☐ Reported to a legal system
- ☐ Other:

24. Did you talk about this with anyone? (optional)

Choose one of the following answers

Please choose only one of the following:

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

25. Rate your experience of using the internet from pleasurable to not on a scale of 1 to 10
(10 is highly pleasurable)*

26. Of all the platforms you use, which do you think provides you a space for expression most? Provide a brief answer:

27. Are you interested in talking to us more about your experience of using the internet?
If yes, please share with us the best way to reach you:

Annexure 3 - Desk Review

Desk Review of literature from Sri Lanka that explores inter-linkages between the internet and gender, sexuality, ethno-religious nationalism, etc.

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Annexure 4 - Overview of Legal Framework

Overview of laws in Sri Lanka that address technology-related violence (Source: Delete Nothing)

Sri Lanka does not have a specific law that directly addresses technology-related violence but there are sections of the Penal Code can be used to this end, as well as some other laws.

Penal Code

Section 345 on sexual harassment

Section 372 on extortion

Section 483 on criminal intimidation

Section 388 on criminal breach of trust

Section 399 on cheating by personation

Section 286(a) (1) Obscene Publication and exhibition relating to children

Section 288(a) Hiring or employing children to act as procurers for sexual intercourse

Section 286(b) and (c) Duty of person providing service by computer to prevent sexual abuse of a child

Computer Crime Act, No. 24 of 2007

Section 3 on securing unauthorised access to a computer an offence

Section 7 on dealing with data

Obscene Publications (Amendment) Act (No. 22 of 1983)

The Prevention of Domestic Violence Act, No. 34 of 2005

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