

# Bangladesh LGB Needs Assessment Survey Report

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March 2015



## Executive Summary

Boys of Bangladesh (BoB), Roopbaan, as well as some individuals as a voluntary contribution, conducted a survey to scale the current needs of the lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) community of Bangladesh, devise a strategy plan to move forward in materializing those needs, identify the challenges faced by community members and put forward some possible suggestions to overcome those challenges.

BoB is the oldest and the largest network of self-identified Bangladeshi gay men from home and abroad. It is a non-registered and non-profit organization run by a pool of volunteers aiming to bring the LGB community together and advocate for their social, political and legal rights.

Roopbaan is a Bangladeshi not-for-profit, non-political, volunteer-based platform for people who believe in the freedom and human rights to love. Besides publishing Roopbaan - The Fagazine, it organizes various events to promote its mission and vision.

The survey conducted is the first of its kind where 571 self-identified LGB individuals from across the country participated. The survey aimed to obtain robust and comparable data that would allow a better understanding of the LGB community in Bangladesh. Another objective of the survey was to successfully gauge the opinions and expectations of the members of the community before the community as a whole could embark on any large-scale public awareness campaign for LGB rights in Bangladesh.

The survey data was collected through an anonymous questionnaire which was filled by the participants both online and manually. It collected views, perceptions, opinions, and experiences of individuals aged 18 years or over who identified as being lesbian, gay, or bisexual. The topics covered were related to various issues with an emphasis on sexual identity, cultural and religious factors, legal awareness and accessibility, experienced discrimination, and community belongingness and vision.

The key findings of this survey indicate a generally positive attitude of the LGB community members in Bangladesh with regards to mobilizing the community to work towards a social and legal change by creating awareness about diverse sexualities and issues related to it. The findings also indicate an urgent need for psycho-social and legal support for many LGB individuals who are at high risk of abuse and harassment.

Some of the recommendations provided by the research based on the findings include:

- Mobilizing the young middle-class LGB community members to bring about social, legal, and political changes by organizing social awareness campaigns
- Setting-up of psycho-social counseling support centers or groups for individuals at high-risk of self-harm due to their sexual orientation and gender identity
- Working towards a cultural shift from the stress on heternormative relationships and marriage
- Striving for legal reform by repealing outdated laws such as BPC 377 and incorporating new laws that take diverse sexualities, genders, expressions and the rights associated into account
- Setting-up of legal centers or groups where LGB individuals facing abuse or harassment may seek help

- Incorporating sex-education in schools, colleges and universities to raise awareness on sexuality and gender and address all kinds of harassment, including bullying, due to one's perceived sexual orientation and/or social constructs of gender
- Setting up of a research and documentation center in Dhaka to document magazine and newspaper articles, research work, and events related to the LGB movement in Bangladesh. A research center of this kind may offer support to the legal and psycho-social support centers working for the LGB community.

## Introduction

Due to the immense lack of discourse on homosexuality and a staunch heteronormative culture with regards to marriage and sexuality, diverse sexual identities do not hold any legitimate status in the national space of Bangladesh. In fact, since Bangladesh is a Muslim dominated country, non-normative gender and sexual behavior is considered immoral and sinful and “there continues to be a culture of collective denial of the existence of same sex sexualities in the country” (Rashid, Standing, Mohiuddin, & Ahmed, 2011, p. 4).

Insufficient and limited discourse on the part of scholars, policymakers, researchers, and activists on issues related to diverse sexualities and rights often result in these issues being biased, misrepresented, or being mostly health-focused. The lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) community, therefore, remains underground and thrives in secrecy, and only MSM (men who have sex with men) and transgender groups working under the umbrella of HIV/AIDS organizations receive some visibility (Rashid, Standing, Mohiuddin, & Ahmed, 2011). These groups, however, are seen as being separate from the LGB community due to differences in class, educational status, language, and visibility (Bondhopadhyay & Ahmed, 2010).

However, since 2000, some underground groups of gay men belonging to middle and upper middle classes in the metropolitan cities of Bangladesh have gradually started to use public spaces and the internet to build up a community and connect with other LGB individuals. (Rashid, Standing, Mohiuddin, & Ahmed, 2011). Since the beginning of this increased visibility online, a few groups, such as Boys of Bangladesh (BoB), and other committed individuals have been working to raise awareness about issues related to diverse genders and sexualities. The community initiatives led by platforms such as Boys of Bangladesh (BoB) and Roopbaan, Bangladesh’s first ever LGBT magazine, have contributed in mobilizing the LGB community to a great extent. Hence, despite various hurdles, the LGB movement in Bangladesh has been gaining momentum in recent years.

However, such visibility also led to sporadic backlash and is feared to have pushed the community further into the closet. The community itself has been critical of such initiatives, calling for a need for retrospection and more informed and strategic actions.

Moreover, Bangladesh is at a crucial juncture where conflicts between progressive and regressive forces are also rising. These divergent forces can be noticed even in the policies adopted by the government. Although in the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) 2013, the government of Bangladesh categorically acknowledged the existence of the LGBT community in the country, it rejected recommendations to decriminalize same-sex activities under the pretext of upholding cultural and religious norms and the laws of the land (Boys of Bangladesh, 2013).

Given these circumstances, the LGB community itself is often hesitant regarding taking steps to become more visible and starting a movement for equality. Some members of the community feel that the opportune time for a LGB movement has not arrived in Bangladesh yet, and steps to initiate such a movement will only result in a harsh social and political backlash.

Therefore, it became imperative to successfully gauge the opinions and expectations of the members of the community through a large-scale needs assessment survey before the community members could plan to move forward.

Executed by BoB, Roopbaan and some individuals as a voluntary contribution, the survey that was subsequently developed is the first of its kind where 571 self-identified LGB individuals from across the country participated. The survey is the culmination of a community effort to scale the current needs of the community, to devise a strategy plan to move forward in materializing those needs, as well as to identify the challenges faced by community members and come up with possible suggestions to overcome these challenges.

The survey aimed to obtain robust and comparable data that would allow a better understanding of the LGB community in Bangladesh. The data was collected through an anonymous questionnaire which was filled by the participants both online and manually. It collected views, perceptions, opinions, and experiences of individuals aged 18 years or over who identified as being lesbian, gay, or bisexual. The topics covered were related to various areas with an emphasis on sexual identity, cultural and religious factors, legal awareness and accessibility, experienced discrimination, and community belongingness and vision.

The survey asked a range of questions about an LGB person's experiences including:

- sexual orientation and sexual identity
- discrimination
- rights awareness
- violence and harassment
- the social context of being an LGB person
- religious and cultural barriers
- personal characteristics, including age and income group
- roles and expectations from the LGB community

Although the LGB community in Bangladesh is complex and diverse like any other society due to differences in class, education, gender, religion, and sexual practices, some common trends and themes emerged from the survey. The need for social awareness campaigns, psycho-social and legal support for LGB individuals are also highlighted through this survey.

## Methodology

The survey was conducted both online and manually. For the online portion of data collection, Survey Monkey, a commercially available online survey tool, was used. For the manual portion of the survey, a snowball sampling method was applied. It was initiated by nine surveyors, most of whom identify as members of the LGB community.

Due to the sensitive nature of the topic, it was deemed necessary to make the participants feel safe and secure while filling out the survey form so as to not hamper or alter their answers due to external factors. Therefore, the survey was released online using a survey tool which allowed for the participants to remain completely anonymous and feel safe behind the curtain of the internet. The online survey also allowed the researchers to access a higher number of participants within the comparative short time of research (about two months) and helped reach out to the more invisible middle and upper middle class LGB individuals of the country.

For the manual portion of the survey, a snowball sampling method was used as it lets the researchers identify a few members of the target population and allows them to involve others within their network for the data collection process. In this way, it was ensured that the participants in the survey were mostly self-identified members of the LGB community and not labeled by the researchers themselves. Moreover, the snowball sampling method allowed for the researchers to access a higher number of research participants through the initial nine surveyors who were already part of the LGB community. Given the sensitive nature of the topic, accessing these participants directly would have been very difficult and hence the snowball sampling method was deemed as the most effective for this particular research.

The target population of the survey was defined as:

- People who describe themselves as being under the lesbian, gay, or bisexual (LGB) umbrella terms.
- People who currently live in Bangladesh
- People who are at least 18 years old

The Hijra (or transgender/transsexual/intersex) population was not targeted because:

- i. Hijra community is more visible than the LGB community.
- ii. The socio-economic realities of the Hijra and the LGB communities are different in Bangladesh
- iii. The needs of the Hijra and the LGB communities are different
- iv. The Hijra community has already been recognized by the government
- v. There are many existing organizations and projects working on the Hijra community and its issues.

The survey took place from September 5<sup>th</sup> to October 31<sup>st</sup>, 2014 and used a predominantly quantitative questionnaire to collect its data. The questionnaire was developed by a team of experts and was composed of mainly closed single-response questions – both affirmative and negative (Yes/No) - as well as multiple response questions. Respondents also had the opportunity to complement their responses with additional remarks in their own words in a text field after each question.

The questionnaire had a total of 70 questions which were phrased in both English and Bangla simultaneously. This made the survey accessible to a more diverse group of people who could answer in either language based on their individual language preference. Moreover, diversity and access to participation was increased by taking geographical factors into account. The survey was conducted in seven different districts of Bangladesh in order to account for geographical differences in the data.

For the online portion of the survey, social media platforms, e-mails, websites and various other outlets were used to reach out to members of the community through existing contacts, word of mouth and individual communication. For the manual portion of the survey, nine surveyors, most of who identify as members of the LGB community, were selected through an open call from seven divisions of the country. They were then brought to Dhaka for training on how to conduct surveys and then they went to on to previously self-identified LGB members of the society and distributed printed versions of the questionnaire to them.

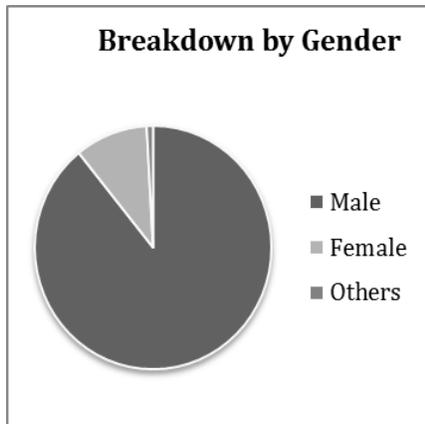
Despite the attempts of the researchers to make the survey as representative of the LGB community as possible by using these tools and methods, some limitations still remain. Firstly, both the online survey and the manual survey using the snowball sampling method failed to bring out the lesbian population out of their deep closets and hence females are markedly underrepresented in the survey. Since women do not enjoy the same social, legal, and religious liberties as men in the dominantly patriarchal Bangladeshi society, lesbians are often hesitant about speaking out about their sexuality (Rashid, Standing, Mohiuddin, & Ahmed, 2011). Also, many women may not have access to the internet, unlike men who have the social liberty to step out of the bounds of their homes and access the internet using cyber cafes. Therefore, maybe for this intersection of the participants, one-on-one interviews would have been more effective than using online surveys or the snowball sampling method.

Secondly, most of the respondents belonged to metropolitan cities such as Dhaka and Chittagong, and only a few geographical locations were targeted by the researchers, leaving out many small towns and villages. This also raises the question whether the researchers' aim of surveying a representative LGB group was achieved. According to World Bank data, as of 2013, only 6.5% of the population in Bangladesh had access to the internet. Therefore, the majority of the population of Bangladesh could not be reached through an online survey and this is one of the major limitations of this research. Also, since only middle or upper-middle class individuals who are educated and literate in internet usage could access the online survey, many members who fall under the LGB umbrella term but are not literate (such as individuals who identify themselves as MSM/kothis) were not able to take part in the

survey. These limitations seem to have some pointed effects on the findings of the survey, especially the aspects related to abuse and oppression.

## Demographic Highlights and Analysis

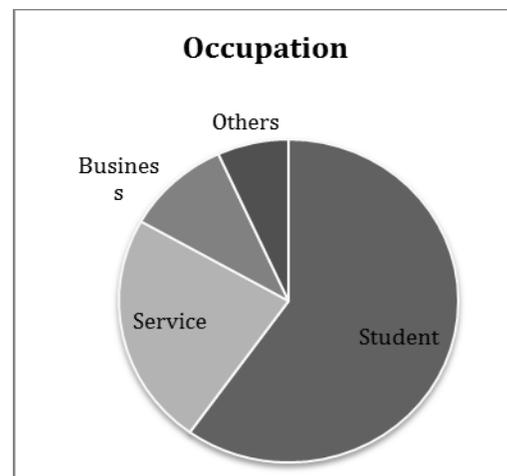
A total of 571 respondents completed the survey, out of which 89.1 % identified as male, 10.0% identified as female, and 0.9% identified as 'other'.



Many factors can be said to have caused the relative under-representation of the female population in the survey. Firstly, women are comparatively less vocal about issues related to sexuality or sexual orientation in the dominantly patriarchal society of Bangladesh. This is because instilling values of shame and modesty is a big part of a girls' education in all classes of the society—"...shame is not only a desirable quality, it is an essential attribute of virtuous women which must be instilled in girls before puberty" (Blanchet, 1996 as cited in Karim, 2012, p.58) . Secondly, women, unlike men, have next to no sexual freedom and mobility

due to social and cultural barriers—" Boys and men have somewhat better options for privacy in life as they have more mobility, freedom and a more relaxed 'curfew time' at home. The liberty of movement, recreation and interaction with peer groups outside the home actually allows them to explore life, selfhood, and, consequently, bodies and sexualities" (Karim, 2012, p. 91)

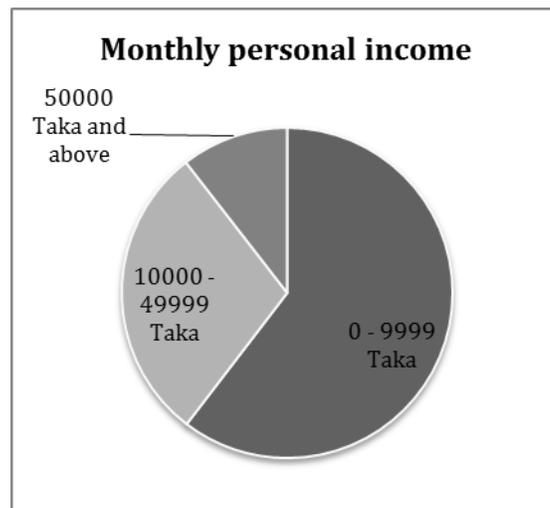
Due to this strong patriarchal setup in Bangladesh, there are very few lesbian identified members in the active LGB groups in Bangladesh. However, there is evidence from informal meetings, research, and workshop activities that more than a 1000 self-identified lesbians reside in the capital city alone, though they live in complete secrecy (Rashid, Standing, Mohiuddin, & Ahmed, 2011). Therefore, this underrepresentation of the female population is not due to the absence of lesbian individuals in the country, but rather due to the limitations of the survey which were highlighted in the methodology section of this paper.



With regards to occupation, a majority of the participants (59.9%) were students and the average age of the survey group was 25 years. This is not surprising as Bangladesh is currently experiencing a 'youth bulge' where more than 40-50% of the Bangladeshi population is now under the age of 24, "with a significant bulge centered on the cohorts aged between 15 and 24"("Bangladesh-People", 2012).

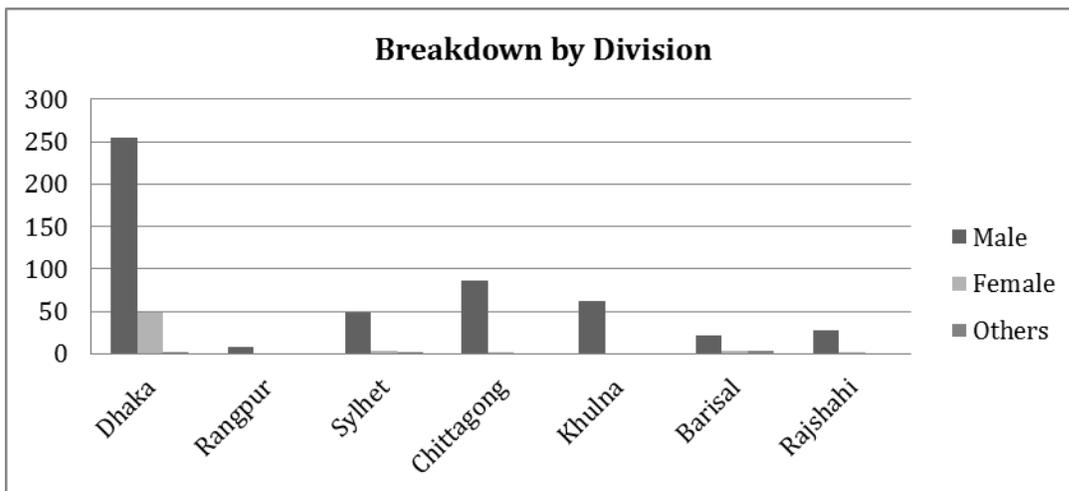
Service holders (23.3%) and business personnel (10%) also participated in the survey, though they are under-represented in comparison due to the above mentioned youth bulge. It can also be attributed to factors such as students having comparatively higher computer literacy and easier access to the internet. Students aged 25 years or so in a Bangladeshi society might also have more freedom to explore as they are not as restrained by familial obligations or social and cultural norms as sections of the population who are more mature in age.

As most of the participants were students in terms of occupation, 60.4% of the participants reported that their monthly income is in the lower end of the scale, between Tk. 0/- to Tk. 9,999/- (i.e. \$ 128). However, about 29% of the participants said their monthly income ranged from Tk. 10,000/- to Tk. 49,999/- (i.e. \$ 128 to \$642) whereas 10% of the participants reported to earn Tk. 50,000/- or more per month (\$642+). Since the average monthly income bracket of a middle-class Bangladeshi household is Tk.10,000-Tk. 199,000 ( \$128-\$ 2,561) (“Economic Social Stratification of Bangladesh”, 2008 ), it can be seen that at least 39% of the respondents belong to the middle class. The number maybe presumed to be higher considering the students may have only mentioned their individual earning but might belong to higher income middle class households. This can be seen as an achievement for the surveyors as the middle class LGB community in Bangladesh is the most invisible due to its heightened sense of social, moral, and religious propriety.

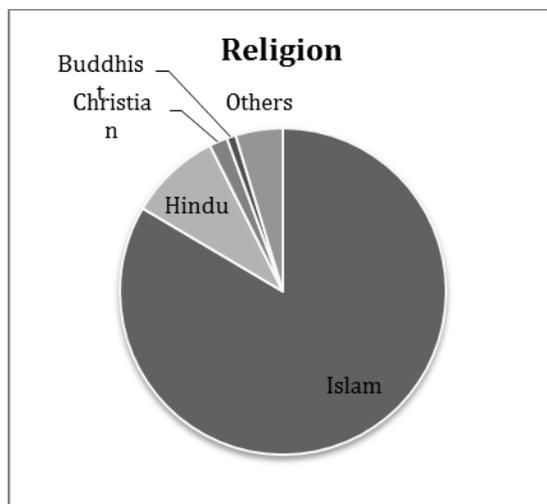


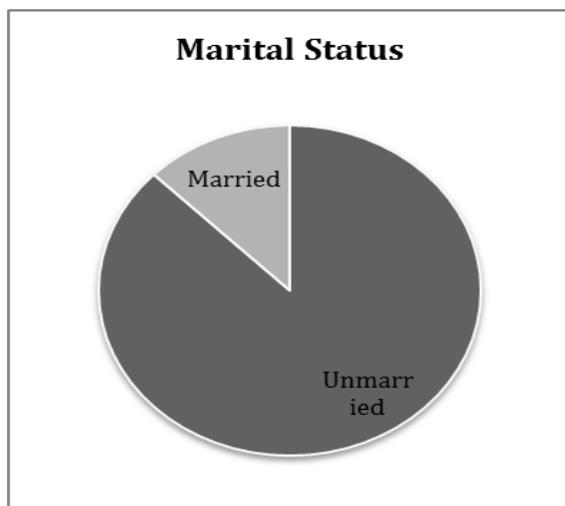
Geographically, the survey population is diverse as respondents from the seven (7) divisions of Bangladesh completed the questionnaire. The majority of the respondents (53%) came from the capital city, Dhaka, whereas 15% of the respondents came from Chittagong, 11% from Khulna, 9 % from Sylhet, and the remaining 12% from Rangpur, Barisal, and Rajshahi. This ensured that the data collected was not only limited to big metropolitan cities such as Dhaka and Chittagong, but included few small towns from the rest of Bangladesh. However, due to limitations of time and resources, only a few geographical locations were targeted by the researchers. Also, since a majority of the survey-takers came from

metropolitan cities, the survey findings might be biased towards the experiences and opinions of LGB members living in urban areas.



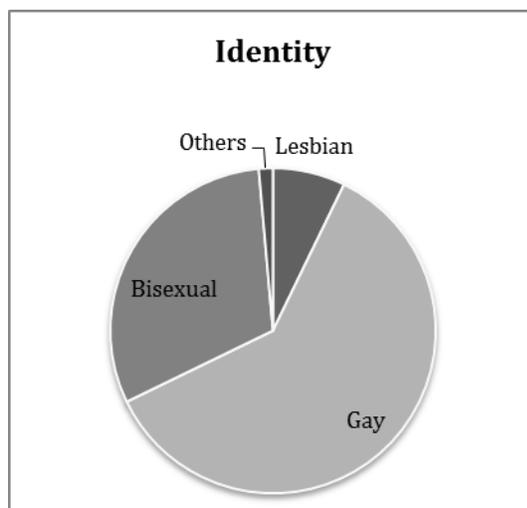
Since Bangladesh is predominantly a Muslim country, with 89.5% of the population being Muslim, 9.6% being Hindu, and 0.9% belonging to other religions (“Bangladesh Demographics Profile”, 2014), the participants were also predominantly Muslim. 83.5% of the participants said they follow Islam, 9.1% said they follow Hinduism, 1.8% said they follow Christianity, 0.9% said they follow Buddhism, whereas 4.7% answered ‘Other’.





Majority of the respondents were unmarried (87.4%) whereas 12.6% said they were married. Since same-sex marriages are illegal in Bangladesh, it has to be assumed that the 12.6% of the participants (i.e. 72 individuals in number) are currently in heterosexual marriages despite identifying as being LGB. Whether these individuals identify as being bisexual or gay/lesbian is indeterminable.

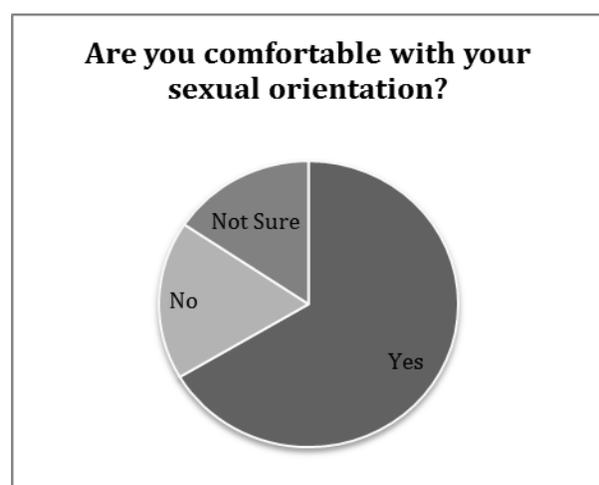
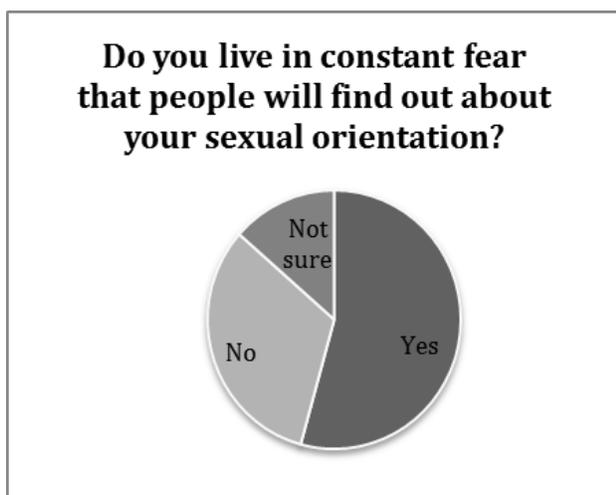
### Issues related to sexuality and sexual identity



In terms of sexual identity, a large percentage (60.6%) identified as being gay, whereas only 7.2% identified as being lesbian, and 30.8% identified as being bisexual.

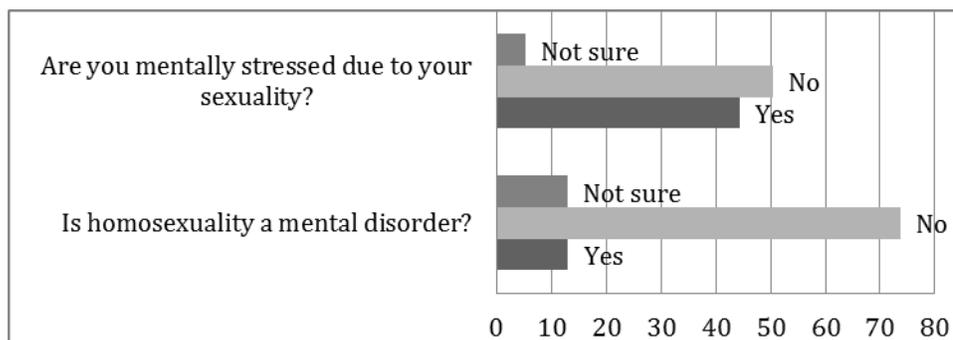
One of the interesting recurring themes in the data is that of self-contradiction and dichotomy. This is exemplified by the questions in the survey “Are you comfortable with your sexual orientation?” and “Do you live in constant fear that people will find out about your sexual orientation?” Although a large percentage (66.5%) said ‘yes’ to the first question, an equally large percentage (54.3%) also replied ‘yes’ to the second

question. This suggests that there is a possible dichotomy between personal beliefs and existing knowledge or socially accepted constructs. This also highlights the struggle between personal desires and practices with that of social constructs of gender and sexuality.



Moreover, although 66.5% of the respondents said they were comfortable with their sexual orientation, 66.6% said that only 0-5 other individuals know about it. When asked who they have confided in, 51.7% said they confided in other homosexual friends, 21.4 % said they confided in heterosexual friends, 10.5% said colleagues/classmates, and a small percentage (8.3%) said they confided in family members.

This can indicate that since majority of the respondents are young, they are still in the process of constructing their sexual and gender identities and are not yet economically or socially independent enough to announce their true sexual identities. Moreover, sexuality is not something that is readily discussed with family members in a conservative culture such as Bangladesh. Fear of not being accepted or being misunderstood by family members may make it harder for many LGB individuals to come out to their families. Since all identities in Bangladesh is constructed in relational terms with others, complete agency with regards to sexual identity is not possible--“Bangladesh continues to be essentially a very clannish society, where the emancipation of the individual is often very hard, if not impossible, and the individual is usually defined in relationship to his family, his social circle and milieu, and the degree to which he has been able to fulfill the social expectations that are laid on him” (Bandhopadhyay & Ahmed, 2010, p. 22).



Again, although majority of the survey-takers (73.7%) did not believe that homosexuality is a mental disorder, 25.7 % admitted that they would change their sexual orientation if given the chance and about 44.3% of them admitted to feeling mentally stressed due to their sexual orientation. Out of these 44.3%, 69.6% admitted to feelings of depression, 60.1% admitted to feelings of frustration, 26.5% admitted to having suicidal thoughts, and 20.9% admitted to harboring self-hatred. When asked whether they have sought professional help to alleviate such problems, a staggering 72.9% answered they had not sought help.

## Issues related to sexual practices and behavior

When asked whether they prefer random sex partners, regular sex partners, lovers, or life partners, majority of them swayed towards having life partners (51.7%) , lovers (45.2%), and regular sex partners (30.5%), although 21.2 % said they prefer random sex partners. This may be an indication that the members of the LGB community strive for commitment and stability in their relationships but are often unable to fulfill these needs due to a constant flux in situations (for example, being forced into heterosexual marriages by family members). Again, in answer to how they find partners or community friends, 83.7% of the respondents said they do so through the internet. This may be the case because the internet provides a sense of security as maintaining anonymity is easier online.

## Issues related to morality, religion, and culture

The theme of inner-conflict and dilemma in the participants is evident from the answers related to morality and religion as well. Although 68.8% said that they do not judge same-sex activities to be immoral and 73.2% said that they do not consider homosexuality to be a sin, 46.2% said that they believe themselves to be sinners. The survey made a distinction between same-sex activities and same-sex love, but the respondents' answers to whether these two were morally right or wrong did not vary significantly. In response to why the participants believed same-sex love to be immoral, the common themes that emerged were:

1. Other people's feelings should be given highest priority
2. Society and religion does not approve of diverse sexualities
3. Engaging in same-sex activities only to fulfill physical needs

### Do you consider homosexuality as a western concept?

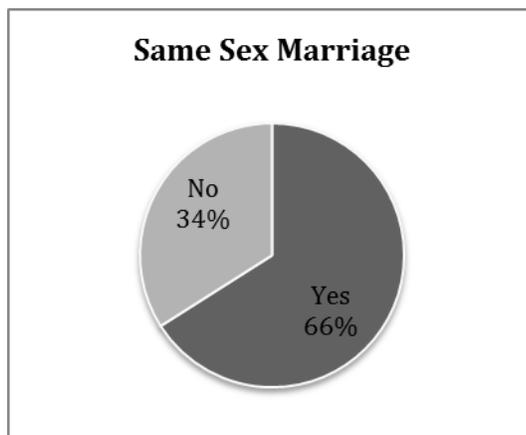


When asked whether they think their religious beliefs and their sexual orientation can co-exist or not, 41.7% said yes, 32.2% said no, and 26.1% said they are not sure. Therefore, it can be concluded that a large percentage of the participants have reached some sort of reconciliation between their religious beliefs and sexual orientation. However, about 26.1% of them still suffer from the dilemma that it poses and have not been able to sort out this conflict.

Again, although 67.4% of the respondents did not believe that homosexuality is a western concept, 52.4% of them

agreed that they had considered leaving the country because of their sexual orientation. This suggests

that the respondents are aware about the universality of diverse sexualities, but they feel they will have more sexual freedom and acceptance in the west due to social and legal support.



In terms of questions related to marriage, 57.4 % said that they are not currently under pressure from their families to get married. The reason for this high percentage may be attributed to the fact that the average age of the respondents is 25 years and almost 60% of them are still students. If respondents of a slightly more mature age group were considered, the percentage of respondents under pressure to get married can be expected to be much higher given the social context. Also, 42.2% of the participants said that they have considered getting married to members of the opposite sex and the common causes

behind this that emerged through open-ended responses were:

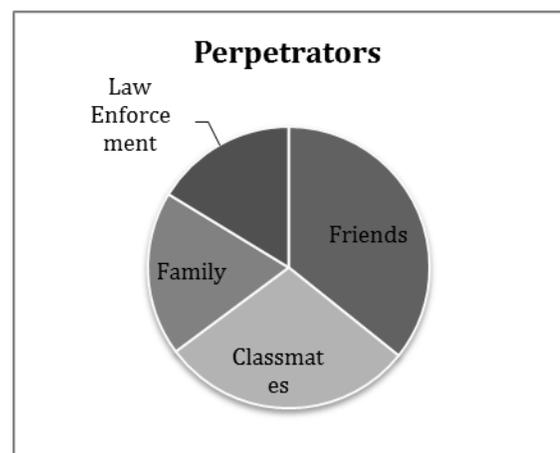
- they want to conform to social and religious norms (24.4 %)
- there is no other option available in the society (21.5 %)
- they will be pressured by their families (20.2 %)

It is important to note that more than half of the respondents (56.9 %) said that they will continue same-sex relationships even after entering heterosexual marriages and a stunning 85.1% of them admitted that they would not or have not told their spouses about their sexual orientation. Moreover, 66% of the respondents affirmed that they would have preferred same-sex marriages if they were possible in our country.

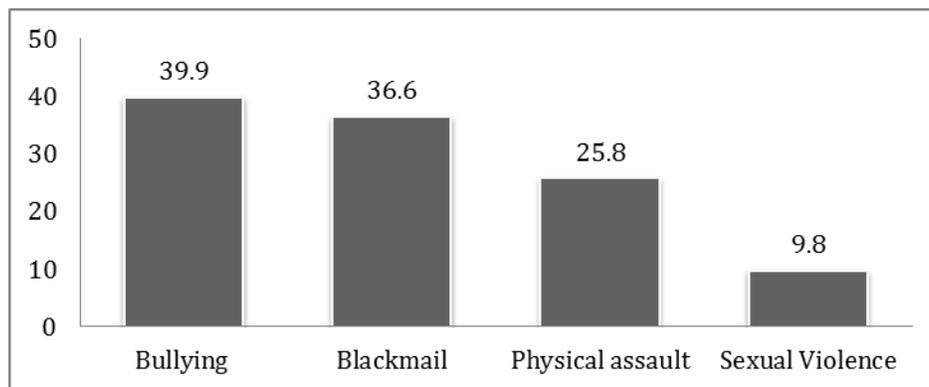
### Issues related to discrimination, legal rights, and legal awareness

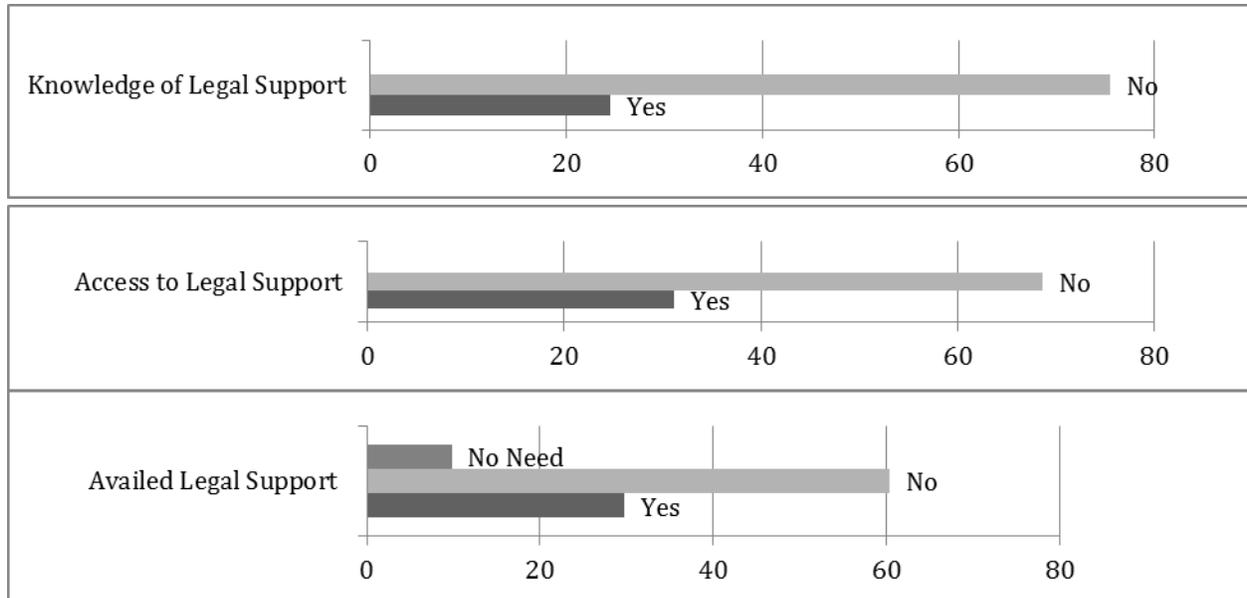
Less than half of the survey population (41%) said that they faced discrimination due to their sexual orientation, and most of them said they faced discrimination from friends (54.9%) and classmates (44.6%). Only one-fourth (25%) of them said that the perpetrators were law enforcers, whereas 11.7% pointed to teachers, 2.7% mentioned colleagues, and 2.2% referred to employers.

These comparatively low numbers can be explained by the earlier mentioned fact that the LGB individuals from the middle-class of the country are usually less visible than the lower/working classes of LGB individuals—“ Historically we find that it is visibility in a public area that leads to a significant amount of violation of rights of individual. This visibility is codependent not on the sexuality of individual, but on the gender role that



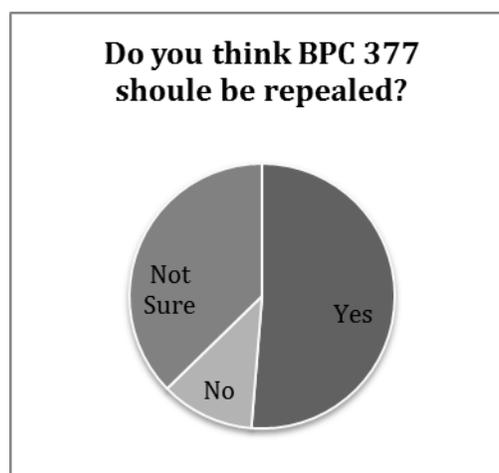
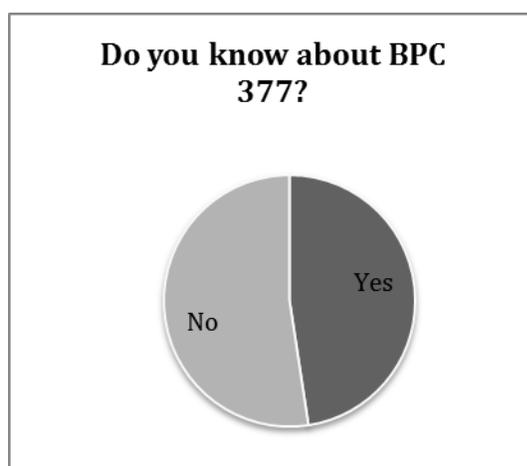
the individual plays out in public”(Bandhopadhyay and Ahmed, 2010). Hijras and kothis, therefore, are more prone to abuse and discrimination but in the tight-lipped, puritanistic middle-class of Bangladesh, discrimination due to sexual orientation may be comparatively low because talking openly about one’s sexuality is taboo—“Being a conservative society steeped in traditional values, many sexual minorities do not publicly express their sexuality. This creates a situation where identification of who is a sexual minority becomes difficult” (Bandhopadhyay and Ahmed, 2010, p. 21). Law-enforcers, teachers, employers or colleagues may have next to no knowledge about the sexual orientation of an individual belonging to this class of society. This is in contrast to the lower/working class of the society, where privacy is limited due to cramped living conditions and hence sexual activities/ orientations are more easily noticed by others in the community.





When asked about the different kinds of harassment faced by the respondents, they mentioned bullying (39.9%), blackmail(36.6%), physical assault (25.8 %), and sexual violence (9.8%). Despite such rampant forms of harassment faced by them, 75.5% said that they do not know where to get legal support, 60.8% said they have never sought legal support, and an unnerving 68.8% said that they did not even have access to legal support. Some of the common reasons for not availing legal support that emerged through open-ended questioning were:

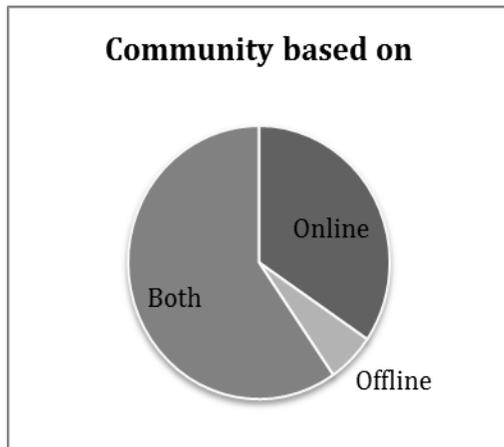
- The respondents didn't want to get tied up in a legal web (22.6%)
- There is no legal support in the country for LGB individuals (12.5%)
- The respondents are not familiar with the laws of the country (10.7%)
- The respondents felt embarrassed and didn't want to lose face in front of others (2.9%)



52.4% of the survey population was not aware about Section 377 of the Bangladesh Penal Code that criminalizes same-sex activities. This shows the marked lack of legal awareness amongst the community

members. However, more than half of the survey population also stated that the law should be repealed. 40.3% said that this can be done through creating social movement and awareness.

## Roles and expectations from the LGB Community



A large percentage of the respondents (80.2%) said that they consider themselves as part of the LGB community. 59.6% said that their community is based both online and offline. About 90.5% of the respondents said that they have LGB friends that they meet with at least once a week. This suggests that not only do the respondents have a sense of sexual identity and a level of comfort identifying with the LGB group, but that there is also a potential inner-network already in place within the community.

When asked whether there is a social movement going on with regards to the LGB community, 71.8% said yes. However, a large percentage (61.2%) said that they were not a part of it but less than half (44%) said that they would like to be part of the movement.

Again, about 27.7% thought that the movement is going in the right direction, 37.7% said that it isn't going the right direction, and about 35% said that they were not sure. However, when asked why they thought the movement was not going in the right direction, 35.6% said that they didn't know, whereas 15.6% said that it was due to lack of planning.

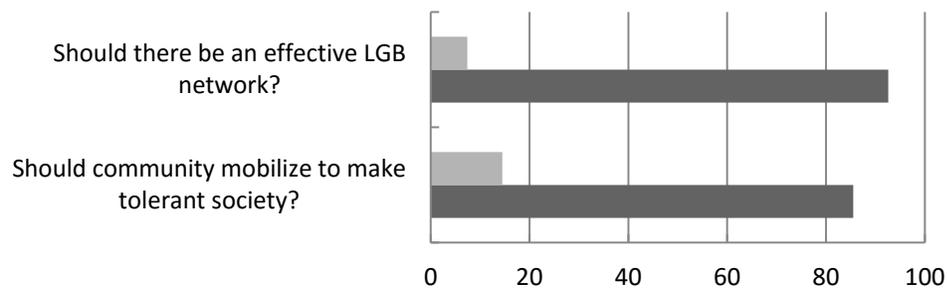
On the other hand, a majority of the respondents (85.5%) said that the community should mobilize to make the society more respectful/tolerant about LGB individuals. They said that this can be done through:

1. Seminars and campaigns that raise awareness (20.9%)
2. Increasing social communication and discussion (15.8%)
3. Working together in an organized manner (13.1%)
4. Establishing groups/organizations working on this issue (10.2%)



Moreover, 92.6% of the respondents reported that there should be an effective network of the LGB community throughout the country, and this network should be used to organize awareness campaigns

(83.9%) and get-togethers (61.4%).



## Conclusion and recommendations

The findings of this survey indicate a generally positive attitude of the LGB community members in Bangladesh with regards to mobilizing the community to create awareness about diverse sexualities and issues related to it. The findings also indicate an urgent need for psycho-social and legal support for many LGB individuals at high risk of abuse and harassment.

Firstly, the high percentage of respondents who admitted to harboring self-hatred and suicidal thoughts but not seeking any professional help clearly indicates an urgent need for raising awareness regarding diverse sexual identities and psycho-social counseling support centers for members of the LGB community who may need professional help to come to terms with their sexuality.

Again, the high percentage of LGB individuals who admitted that they are/will enter heterosexual marriages but will not disclose their sexual orientation to their spouses bears testament to the crucial need for social awareness and acceptance in order to prevent possible dysfunctional marriages which are based on mistrust and in which the sexual and emotional needs of either party might not be sufficiently met.

The need for legal and political reform and movement for LGB rights in Bangladesh is emphasized due to the fact that a majority of the respondents faced/are facing different forms of harassment but are unaware where they can get legal help. The findings emphasize the growing need for legal counseling and support for members of the LGB community. They also indicate that many cases of heinous crimes such as blackmail, physical assault and sexual violence go unpunished due to the outdated laws of the country regarding diverse sexualities. Therefore, the need for new and improved specific laws with regards to sexual and reproductive matters is also made apparent.

Moreover, the fact that most of the perpetrators of discrimination were either friends or classmates is of concern as it points to a substantial need for education regarding sexual bullying and need for awareness on diverse sexual identities in the schools, colleges, and universities of the country.

Lastly, since a majority of the respondents answered that the community should mobilize to make the society more respectful/tolerant about LGB individuals, it is evident the community members believe

that there is a need for a common platform/network that would work towards organizing mass movements to create awareness regarding LGB rights and issues. The survey also sheds positive light on the fact that a large intersection of young middle-class LGB individuals are eager to be mobilized, which can be a key factor in bringing about change on a national level.

Therefore, the key recommendations based on these findings are:

- Mobilizing the young middle-class LGB community to work together to bring about social, legal, and political reform by organizing social awareness campaigns.
- Setting-up of psycho-social counseling support centers or groups for individuals at high-risk of self-harm due to their sexual orientation
- Working towards a cultural shift from the stress on heteronormative relationships and marriage
- Striving for legal reform by repealing outdated laws such as BPC 377 and incorporating new laws that take diverse sexualities and rights into account
- Setting-up of legal centers or groups where LGB individuals facing abuse or harassment may seek help
- Incorporating sex-education in schools, colleges and universities to raise awareness on sexuality and gender issues and cope with bullying based on sexual orientation and/or social constructs of gender.
- Setting up of a research and documentation center in Dhaka to document magazine and newspaper articles, research work, and events related to the LGB movement in Bangladesh. A research center of this kind may offer support to the legal and psycho-social support centers working for the LGB community.

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