



# UNVEILING DIGITAL REALITIES:

EXPERIENCES OF KEY-AFFECTED GROUPS OF  
CYBER SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE  
IN SRI LANKA

By Dharini Priscilla  
for Search for Common Ground.  
December 2023





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# BACKGROUND

## What is CSGBV?

Cyber sexual and gender-based violence (CSGBV) is any act that is committed, assisted, aggravated, or amplified by the use of information communication technologies or other digital tools which results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual, psychological, social, political or economic harm or other infringements of rights and freedoms (UN Women).

Although it is not a new phenomenon, CSGBV has escalated rapidly since the onset of COVID-19—with serious implications for the safety and well-being of women, girls, and gender diverse people. The impacts of such violence extend beyond the digital sphere, posing a significant threat to the exercise of rights both online and offline.

## How does CSGBV happen?

CSGBV is an extension of gender-based violence (GBV). As such, it occurs within a continuum of multiple interrelated types of violence against women and girls. It encompasses many forms, including intimate image abuse, doxing, trolling, impersonating, and sharing of deepfake images. CSGBV also includes misogynistic or gendered hate speech as well as efforts to silence and discredit women online, including threats of offline violence.

## How prevalent is CSGBV?

A global study by the Economist Intelligence Unit (2020) found that 38% of women have had personal experiences of online violence, and 85% of women who spend time online have witnessed digital violence against other women.

The most common forms of violence reported were misinformation and defamation (67 per cent), cyber harassment (66 per cent), hate speech (65 per cent), impersonation (63 per cent), hacking and stalking (63 per cent), astroturfing (a coordinated effort to concurrently share damaging content across platforms, 58 per cent), video and image-based abuse (57 per cent), doxing (55 per cent), violent threats (52 per cent), and the reception of unwanted images or sexually explicit content (43 per cent).

The COVID-19 pandemic led to an intensification of CSGBV, as women's and girls' lives shifted online for work, school, social activities and more. UN Women data from India, Sri Lanka, and Malaysia showed a 168% increase in the volume of and engagement with misogynistic online posts and tweets during COVID-19 related lockdowns.

In Sri Lanka, 3566 cybercrime incidents reported to the Sri Lanka Computer Emergency Readiness Team in 2019 – before COVID. There was a drastic increase in incidents reported to SLCERT during the pandemic with 16,376 incidents reported in the year 2020 and 18,214 incidents reported in 2021. In 2021 out of 18,214 cybercrime incidents reported to SLCERT, a staggering 16,975 incidents were related to social media (SLCERT).

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## Who is it at risk?

As with all forms of violence against women, CSGBV affects women and girls in all their diversity. But certain groups are at heightened risk.

Women who face intersecting forms of marginalization, including women with disabilities, women from religious and ethnic minority groups, migrant women and LGBTQ+ people, are all disproportionately affected.

Young women and girls, who are more likely to use tech for learning, accessing information and connecting to peers, also face heightened exposure to online violence.

Women in public life—namely women human rights defenders, activists, journalists, and women in politics—face increased rates of online violence too.

## What kind of impact does CSGBV have?

The impact of CSGBV can be as harmful as offline violence, with negative effects on the health and wellbeing of women and girls as well as serious economic, social, and political impacts.

CSGBV can restrict the online activity of women and girls and inhibit their access to the Internet—increasing the digital gender divide and restricting women's voices in public participation. CSGBV can also exacerbate offline forms of violence—including sexual harassment, stalking, intimate partner violence and trafficking or sexual exploitation.

It is important to remember that CSGBV is a form of gender-based discrimination and a violation of human rights. But existing laws, policies, and frameworks to prevent and respond to GBV have not kept pace with technological developments, and there are significant gaps in knowledge and evidence about how to prevent and eradicate it.



# METHODOLOGY

## Our objectives

The “Caught in the Web – Tackling Gendered Drivers of the Conflict and Exclusion in Cyberspace” project, seeks to advance effective responses to gendered online hate speech (GOHS) and cyber sexual and gender-based violence (CSGBV) in Sri Lanka.

In 2022, as a part of the project, Search for Common Ground Sri Lanka (SFCG) conducted consultative workshops with key affected groups of CSGBV. The project’s objectives can be summarized as follows:

- **Understanding Diverse Online Experiences:** We recognized that the digital experiences of key affected groups varied significantly due to differences in their identities, the platforms they utilized, and the unique challenges they encountered offline because of their marginalized identities. Our primary aim was to gain a comprehensive understanding of these distinct experiences.
- **Post-COVID Analysis:** Considering the significant changes in online interactions in the post-COVID reality, we aimed to investigate how online dynamics evolved for these groups. Despite the substantial efforts by various stakeholders and civil society organizations in Sri Lanka to promote digital safety and prevent online violence, there has been a limited focus on comprehending the real-life experiences of these groups in digital spaces. Our research aimed to address this gap to better inform our project’s priorities and activities for its final year.

- **Evaluating Reporting Mechanisms:** Given that the main objective of our project is to enhance the effectiveness of response mechanisms, we considered it imperative to explore the reporting practices of the key affected groups. While there is substantial global data about the online experiences of these groups, there is limited data that specifically discusses their perspectives about the existing reporting mechanisms in Sri Lanka.

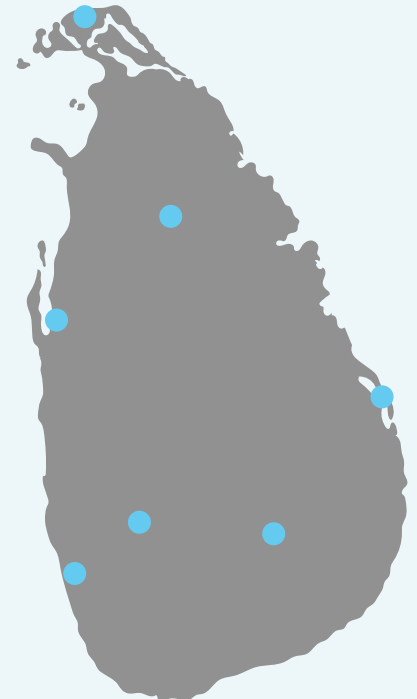
## Our sample

For this consultation, we identified three primary key affected groups who are often targeted by CSGBV:

- Youth representatives from local universities
- Members of the LGBTQ+ community
- Women in local government

Our sample encompassed individuals from seven districts across Sri Lanka: Colombo, Jaffna, Vavuniya, Puttalam, Kurunegala, Batticaloa, and Badulla. We engaged with a total of **20 university students, 18 members of the LGBTQ+ community, and 11 women in local government.**

These groups were chosen because their unique experiences and challenges were well-aligned with the focus of our project activities. Importantly, it's worth noting that many participants held intersecting identities, including women with disabilities, activists/journalists, and women from ethnic and religious minorities. While our primary data collection and analysis focused on the three key affected groups, it must be noted that our sample was inherently intersectional, and the participants' intersecting identities influenced their online experiences.





## Our approach

We conducted separate one-day consultative workshops for each of the key affected groups, with a focus on three key thematic areas:

- **Social Media Behaviour:** We explored the platforms they used, the purposes of their online presence, and their comfort and safety levels within these platforms.
- **CSGBV Experiences:** We delved into the types of violence, harassment, and hate they encountered online, identifying prevalent forms and the profiles of the perpetrators.
- **Reporting Practices:** We investigated their reporting practices, both online and offline, the entities they were more inclined to report incidents to, their feelings about the reporting process, and the support they sought when experiencing CSGBV.

Additionally, we probed into factors that either encouraged or discouraged reporting such incidents.

During these consultative workshops, we also identified several case studies, some of which are detailed in the subsequent findings section, to illustrate the realities of CSGBV reporting in Sri Lanka.

Our methodology employed a participatory workshop approach, which involved discussions, group activities, and individual feedback sessions to comprehensively address the three thematic areas and ensure a well-rounded understanding of the experiences and challenges faced by the key affected groups.

# FINDINGS

## SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE

### University Students

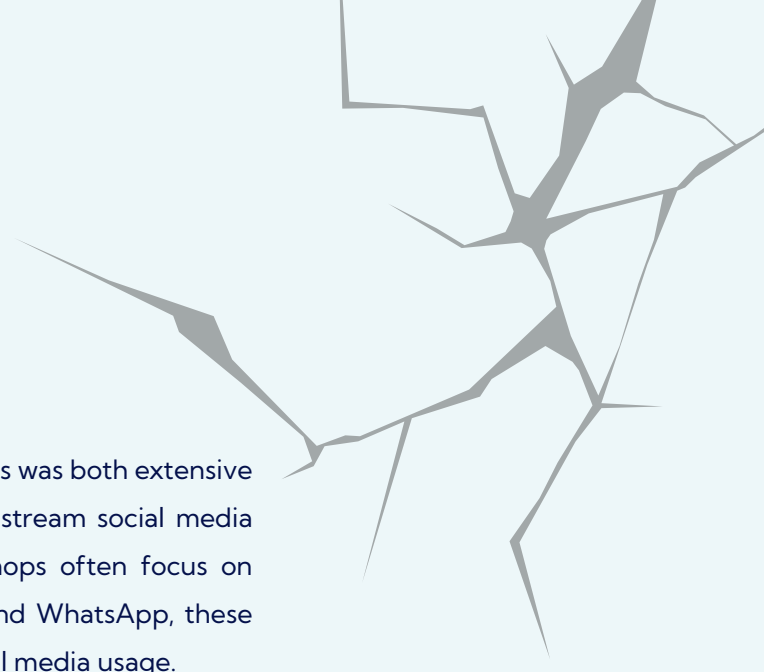
The social media landscape among university students was both extensive and varied, extending beyond the confines of mainstream social media platforms. While conventional online safety workshops often focus on popular Meta platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp, these students exhibited a wide-ranging repertoire of social media usage.

In addition to the usual suspects, they engaged with platforms such as Discord, TikTok, and Snapchat. The students' utilization of platforms beyond the mainstream indicates a broad spectrum of interests and a willingness to explore unconventional means of communication. However, remarkably, Facebook remained the dominant platform of choice for the majority of students.

What set this group apart was their adept use of social media for educational purposes, exemplified by the widespread adoption of SHAREit, a platform celebrated for its data-free file-sharing capabilities. The active use of social media for educational purposes, especially through SHAREit, underscores the evolving role of these platforms in academia.

Furthermore, students displayed a penchant for short-lived, visually captivating interactions on social media, gravitating towards memes, reels, and short-form content. This preference for short-timed and visual-based content suggests a dynamic and visually oriented communication style among young people of Sri Lanka.

Finally, many were actively involved in various online communities and group chats, forging connections beyond the confines of the physical campus, which reflects their desire for connection, transcending geographical boundaries.



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## LGBTQ+

The social media landscape for the LGBTQ+ community also exhibited diversity and complexity, particularly with regards to text-based communication platforms. Unlike other groups, this community did not gravitate towards a single universally popular platform; rather,

preferences varied widely among individuals. These preferences were often rooted in personal identity and the perceived level of safety provided by each platform.

For instance, gay men within the group tended to favour platforms offering privacy and anonymity, while trans women preferred platforms that facilitated open expression of their identities. These nuanced platform preferences based on identity and safety considerations underline the importance of tailored online experiences for marginalized groups and underscores intersectionality of identities within the LGBTQ+ community.

Furthermore, social media was heavily utilized for dating and connecting with like-minded individuals, with platforms like Tinder, Grindr, and Blued being prominent choices for meeting and dating fellow LGBTQ+ individuals. The community also actively engaged in various group chats and online communities for networking and support.

The prevalence of dating apps within this community demonstrates the role social media plays in facilitating connections and relationships – which is not often possible to facilitate online due to discriminatory laws and social stigma. The high involvement in various online networks and group chats further emphasizes the communal and supportive nature of social media for the LGBTQ+ community.

The prevalence of dating apps within this community demonstrates the role social media plays in facilitating connections and relationships.

## Women in Local Government

In contrast to the previous groups, women in local government displayed a more restricted and conservative approach to social media usage. Their digital engagement primarily revolved around mainstream platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and YouTube. Less enthusiasm was observed for emerging platforms like TikTok, which some women deemed potentially detrimental to their public image and political careers. The conservative social media habits of women in local government indicated a certain level of caution and concern for their public image while aversion to platforms like TikTok revealed their apprehension about potential reputational damage in the pursuit of political careers.

Social media was predominantly used for personal communication, sharing photos, and promoting their political advocacy. However, it was apparent that these women were not fully capitalizing on the diverse features and benefits of social media platforms. For instance, while Facebook was the most widely used platform among this group, many were unaware of the potential advantages offered by Facebook advertising for political advocacy. There was also a general lack of awareness regarding the negative influence that bots could have on their social media posts, highlighting the need for enhanced digital literacy within this demographic.

This limited use of social media for political advocacy and a lack of awareness about advanced features like Facebook advertising and the impact of bots on their posts underscore missed opportunities for effective engagement with constituents. This calls for greater digital literacy and strategic social media utilization to maximize the influence and effectiveness of women in local government.

The conservative social media habits of women in local government indicated a certain level of caution and concern for their public image,

## Overall Observations

Across all three groups, there is a pervasive trend of diverse and evolving social media usage, reflecting the broader societal shift toward digital communication. However, the university students stand out for their wide-ranging exploration of social media platforms, reflecting their curiosity and adaptability in utilizing these digital tools. The LGBTQ+ community showcases the nuanced relationship between identity and platform preference, emphasizing the importance of safe and respectful online spaces for marginalized groups. In contrast, women in local government exhibit a more cautious approach, primarily utilizing mainstream platforms for personal communication and political advocacy, while exhibiting hesitation to engage with emerging platforms like TikTok due to concerns about potential reputational harm. Collectively, these findings from our consultations emphasize the multifaceted nature of social media behaviour, driven by individual needs, identities, and awareness levels, with potential implications for their educational, community-building, and political endeavours.



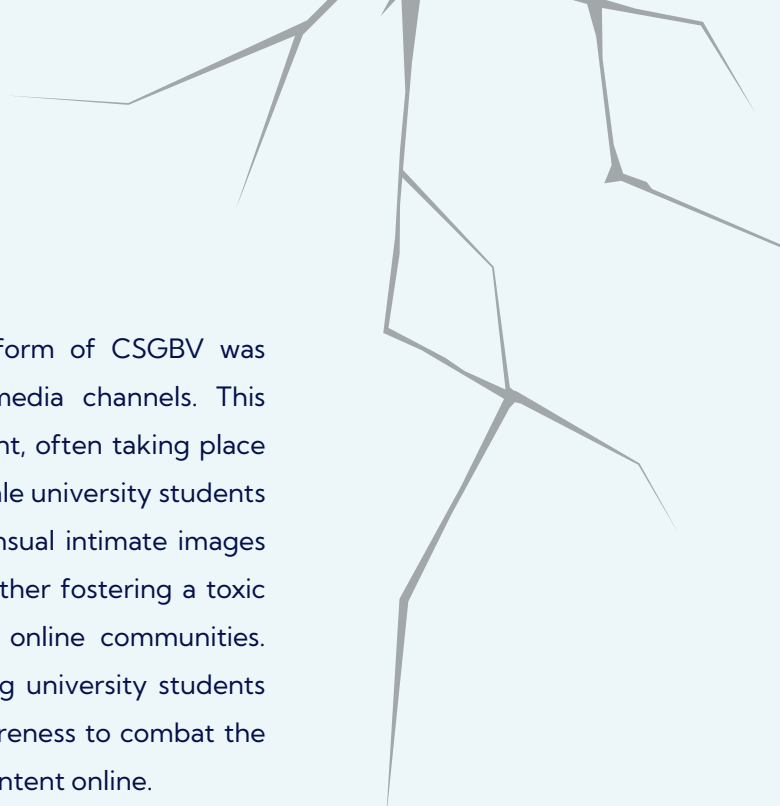
## CSGBV EXPERIENCES

### University Students

Among university students, the most prevalent form of CSGBV was online harassment and trolling through social media channels. This encompassed both sexual and emotional harassment, often taking place in group chats and private messages. Shockingly, male university students reported a distressing trend of sharing non-consensual intimate images of their female peers within these group chats, further fostering a toxic environment of gendered online hate speech in online communities. The normalization of gendered hate speech among university students highlighted a pressing need for education and awareness to combat the perpetuation of misogynistic and sexually explicit content online.

The consultation also revealed that instances of violence against female university students were often instigated by their own peers, including male friends and ex-boyfriends. Moreover, female students, particularly those from the North and East regions, grappled with issues of impersonation and fake accounts, underscoring low levels of digital literacy in these areas. Some problems mentioned by students seemed avoidable with better digital literacy, such as controlling tag settings to prevent unnecessary tagging. The issue of impersonation, especially among female students from regions with lower digital literacy rates, points to the importance of digital literacy programs as a means of prevention.

The discussion also highlighted the rampant sexualization of girls and women on social media, exemplified by Facebook groups and pages sharing non-consensual images, objectifying content, and promoting misogynistic sentiments. This normalized sexualization of women on social media underlines the urgency of combating objectification and non-consensual sharing, calling for stricter regulations and education on consent.



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## LGBTQ+

The LGBTQ+ community encountered a high prevalence of dating violence online, with sexual and romantic relationships initiated through social media often leading to harassment, outing, and unauthorized sharing of intimate images. Privacy violations were a major concern, with

individuals often feeling monitored by people they knew offline. Misinformation and disinformation about LGBTQ+ individuals were common, sometimes stemming from real-life incidents like protests about other issues (such as protests during the Aragalaya) being misrepresented as pride marches, furthering stereotypes and homophobia.

It was also mentioned that some individuals use social media to further perpetuate homophobic stereotypes. For instance, some participants mentioned they are often tagged in news posts about child abuse or HIV prevalence insinuating that the individual from the LGBTQ+ community must have something to do with the incident.

Participants also reported harassment and targeted attacks, affecting not only LGBTQ+ individuals but also their cisgender and heterosexual allies who were seen with them online. The harassment manifested in both public and private contexts, involving past or current acquaintances, strangers, and individuals who held prejudiced views against gender and sexual minorities. The community's vulnerability to online harassment, often involving both known acquaintances and strangers, emphasizes the need for strong legal protections and support systems for LGBTQ+ individuals.

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## Women in Local Government

Harassment towards women in local government was predominantly public, taking the form of public pages or memes created to troll them, tagging them in hateful posts, and posting misogynistic comments on their content. Character assassination was a prominent type of harassment, as individuals repeatedly targeted and criticized various aspects of their personality, including appearance, attire, and personal lives. There was also an excessive level of scrutiny and judgment surrounding any personal posts made by these women on their public platforms. Participants emphasized that the harassment and hate speech extended to their family members, including spouses and children.

Image-based sexual violence was another common issue, with images of these women being manipulated, sexualized, and shared as genuine to tarnish their reputations, particularly during election seasons. This harassment extended to creating fake tweets, WhatsApp messages, and Facebook posts that were falsely attributed to these women, often accompanied by threats, and demands for sexual bribery. The creation of fake content and demands for sexual bribery exemplify the malicious intent behind such actions and emphasize the importance of robust legal measures to hold perpetrators accountable. These experiences of women in local government underscore the urgent need for policies, education, and advocacy to combat online violence against female leaders.

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## Overall Observations

The experiences of these three diverse groups shed light on the pervasive nature of CSGBV in the digital realm while also revealing distinctive patterns within each community. A shared concern across all three groups is the prevalence of online harassment, reflecting a broader societal challenge in combating toxic digital behaviours. Notably, the university students' experiences underscore the normalization of non-consensual image sharing and gendered hate speech within their peer groups, emphasizing the need for digital literacy and proactive intervention.

The LGBTQ+ community's encounters with online dating violence, privacy violations, and disinformation highlight the unique challenges faced by this marginalized group, underscoring the importance of tailored support and education for LGBTQ+ individuals. In contrast, women in local government grapple with character assassination, manipulated images, and media bias, highlighting the distinct challenges faced by women in positions of authority. Collectively, these observations underscore the need for robust legal measures, comprehensive support systems, and inclusive policies to address the multifaceted issue of CSGBV, recognizing that each group's experience, while sharing commonalities, necessitates tailored strategies to combat gender-based violence in the digital sphere.



# REPORTING PRACTICES

## University Students

In terms of reporting CSGBV incidents, university students exhibited a reasonable understanding of how to report such incidents on social media platforms, demonstrating awareness of community standards and the process for reporting hateful content and fake accounts.

However, their awareness of offline reporting mechanisms and relevant laws concerning CSGBV was notably low. Going to the police was the most common but also the least favored option due to a pervasive lack of trust in law enforcement's efficacy in addressing these issues. Language barriers, especially for students from the North and East regions living in Colombo, further hindered their ability to articulate their concerns effectively. When inquired about seeking legal support, the students seemed to be unaware and unclear about why and how victims would seek legal support for incidents of CSGBV. This widespread lack of trust in police and legal support reveals a systemic issue and underscores the urgent need for measures to improve both accessibility and effectiveness in addressing CSGBV.

Participants highlighted the need for on-campus support services, pointing out the absence of psychosocial support for gender-based violence, including CSGBV. They also recognized the value of youth-led support groups and peer support networks, suggesting the potential development of mobile apps to facilitate reporting and support. These suggestions reflect a proactive approach to addressing CSGBV within the university community, highlighting the potential for innovative solutions and education programs.

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### **Case study from the University Students Group:**

An 18-year-old girl faced harassment and threats from her former boyfriend, who threatened to expose her private images if she didn't engage in a romantic relationship with him. Determined to seek help and justice, the girl decided to visit the National Child Protection Authority (NCPA) along with her friends. However, due to the time it took to gather her friends, a few days passed, including her birthday, when she reached the NCPA. Upon her arrival, she was informed by an officer that, since her birthday had occurred during the intervening days, she no longer qualified as a child according to NCPA guidelines. The officer advised her to approach either a local police station or the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) for assistance with her complaint.

In this scenario, the officer at the NCPA demonstrated a lack of sensitivity and flexibility in handling the victim's case. By strictly adhering to age-based guidelines, the officer failed to acknowledge the emotional distress and coercion the victim had experienced. This missed opportunity to provide support and guidance highlights the need for better training and a more empathetic approach when dealing with cases of harassment, especially in the context of CSGBV.

## LGBTQ+

The LGBTQ+ community's challenges in reporting CSGBV incidents underscore the unique vulnerability of this group.

The LGBTQ+ participants, many of whom predominantly used text-based platforms, faced challenges in reporting violence, harassment, and hate speech within group chats and personal messages. They emphasized the necessity for improved moderation in online communities where non-consensual images were being shared.

Reporting hateful content on platforms like TikTok and Facebook revealed discrepancies in response times, with Facebook being slower to act in some cases. Participants also expressed uncertainty about the community standards of different platforms, lacking clear guidelines on what constituted a violation.

Offline reporting mechanisms were met with reluctance, primarily due to concerns over potential harassment and exposure of their gender and sexual identities. Since homosexuality is criminalized in Sri Lanka, the fear of evidence of same-sex relationships being used against them discouraged reporting. It was also evident that seeking legal support was uncommon, primarily due to a lack of knowledge about LGBTQ-friendly lawyers and the perceived expense of hiring legal representation.

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### **Case study from the LGBTQ+ Group:**

A gay man had his smartphone stolen, and a few days later, he received a call from the thief who had discovered personal images and videos on his phone, revealing his sexual orientation. The thief threatened the man, demanding sexual bribery. Distressed and seeking help, the victim went to the police station to report the incident. However, instead of offering support, the police officer questioned the victim about why he had those images on his phone. When the victim explained that this was irrelevant, the officer discouraged him from pursuing a complaint, citing the potential time and cost involved in seeking justice and advised him to buy a new phone with the money instead.

The police officer's behaviour reflects a troubling lack of sensitivity, victim-blaming, and a failure to provide the necessary support. Instead of addressing the victim's distress and threats, the officer questioned the presence of personal images on the phone, which is irrelevant to the criminal act. This response not only perpetuates victim-blaming but also dismisses the seriousness of the threat. The officer's suggestion to buy a new phone rather than pursuing a complaint further exacerbates the problem, undermining the victim's right to seek justice and protection from harm.

## Women in Local Government

Participants from this group displayed limited awareness of CSGBV, often viewing such violence as normal for individuals in public-facing roles, which led to under reporting incidents. They were also unfamiliar with reporting mechanisms on the platforms they commonly used, such as Facebook.

These women were more inclined to report incidents to the police compared to the other groups, likely due to their affiliations with the local government and the informal influence they held over local police stations. However, even when they had personal connections with the police, concerns about public scrutiny and gossip often deterred them from reporting cases. These concerns point to the broader societal challenges and stigma associated with reporting gender-based violence.

The women also highlighted a significant lack of understanding of CSGBV within local police stations, attributed to low digital literacy and social media awareness among law enforcement. Seeking legal support was infrequent, driven by concerns about privacy and a lack of clarity regarding how lawyers could aid in making complaints to the police.

Even when they had personal connections with the police, concerns about public scrutiny and gossip often deterred them from reporting cases.



### **Case study from the Women in Local Government Group:**

A woman working in local government faced a distressing incident where manipulated and doctored images of her engaging in explicit sexual activity were disseminated across private Facebook groups. Upon discovering this, she reported the matter to the police. Instead of taking immediate action, the police requested the woman to identify the individual behind these posts. She tracked down the person's profile name and subsequently, the police urged her to search for any mutual connections or identifying information that could reveal the person's true identity. After extensive personal efforts and investigation, the woman successfully identified the person's real identity and presented this information to the police, essentially resolving the case herself.

The police's behaviour in this case raises concerns about their approach to handling cases of CSGBV. They exhibited a lack of proactivity and responsibility by shifting the burden of investigation onto the victim. Rather than promptly pursuing the case and protecting the victim's rights, the police relied heavily on her to identify the perpetrator. This not only places undue stress on the victim but also underscores the need for law enforcement to be more proactive, sensitive, and efficient when addressing CSGBV incidents, ensuring that victims receive the support they deserve.

## Overall Observations

A shared challenge among all three groups is the widespread reluctance to report incidents to the police, rooted in a lack of trust in law enforcement's efficacy and concerns about potential repercussions. Across all groups, there is also a prevailing need for education and awareness regarding CSGBV and reporting mechanisms. Notably, university students demonstrate a reasonable grasp of online reporting but struggle with understanding offline mechanisms, whereas the LGBTQ+ community faces distinctive risks due to the criminalization of homosexuality in Sri Lanka, hindering their willingness to report. In contrast, women in local government are more inclined to utilize local police resources, reflecting their affiliations, but still encounter hurdles such as public scrutiny. These commonalities underscore the need for enhanced legal safeguards, accessible legal support, and widespread awareness campaigns.



## CONCLUSION AND MOVING FORWARD

The findings from these consultative workshops yielded critical insights that shed light on the diverse and evolving landscape of social media usage, CSGBV experiences, and reporting practices among three distinct groups: university students, the LGBTQ+ community, and women in local government. The above discussed observations highlight several key takeaways that have profound implications for the field of CSGBV work in Sri Lanka:

- **Diverse and Evolving Social Media Usage:** The observations across these groups demonstrate the profound influence of digital communication on Sri Lankan society. While university students displayed adaptability and curiosity in exploring various social media platforms, the LGBTQ+ community emphasized the importance of tailored, safe online spaces. In contrast, women in local government exhibited a more cautious approach, reflecting concerns about reputational damage. These diverse patterns of social media usage underscore the need for targeted educational initiatives and digital literacy programs that cater to the specific needs and identities of each group.
- **Distinct CSGBV Experiences:** The study revealed that CSGBV is a pervasive issue in Sri Lanka, manifesting in various forms across the three groups. Online harassment, image-based sexual violence, and impersonation through fake IDs were prevalent concerns. Each group faced distinct challenges, from the normalization of gendered hate speech among university students to dating violence within the LGBTQ+ community and character assassination targeting women in local government. These findings underscore the importance of tailoring support mechanisms and interventions to address the unique challenges faced by each group.

- **Reporting Practices:** The reluctance to report CSGBV incidents to law enforcement, shared among all three groups, reflects a systemic problem rooted in a lack of trust in legal mechanisms and concerns about potential repercussions. A lack of awareness about reporting mechanisms and relevant laws further compounds this issue. In the case of the LGBTQ+ community, the criminalization of homosexuality further complicates reporting. To address these challenges, there is a critical need for accessible, LGBTQ+ friendly legal support, robust legal measures, and comprehensive awareness campaigns.

In light of these findings, it is imperative to enhance CSGBV response mechanisms in Sri Lanka through:

- Education and Digital Literacy: Initiatives to improve digital literacy, raise awareness about CSGBV, and provide guidance on reporting mechanisms must be prioritized. These efforts should be tailored to the specific needs and identities of each group.
- Tailored Support: Support services and interventions should be tailored to the unique experiences and challenges faced by key affected groups. This includes providing psychosocial support, youth-led support groups, and apps for reporting and support.
- Legal Safeguards: Robust legal measures, including LGBTQ+ friendly legal support and clear guidelines on what constitutes a violation on online platforms, are essential.
- Awareness Campaigns: Comprehensive awareness campaigns should address the societal stigma associated with reporting CSGBV and the importance of overcoming these barriers to create a safer online environment.

As these findings underscore the significant variation in online experiences and CSGBV challenges based on individuals' identities, to further our understanding, it is imperative that we extend our focus to additional key



affected groups, including journalists, activists, women from ethnic and religious minorities, and women with disabilities. Moreover, ongoing and research into the digital experiences and reporting practices of these key affected groups is crucial. Given the dynamic nature of the digital landscape and the rapid evolution of online interactions, continuous education and awareness are essential. As Sri Lanka continues its efforts to promote online safety, it is vital to stay informed about the evolving realities faced by these key affected groups to ensure effective and responsive interventions. Through this informed approach, Sri Lanka can move closer to creating a safer, more inclusive digital space for all, while empowering individuals to report and combat cyber sexual and gender-based violence.





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