

Research Report On Exploring Online Safety Experiences among LGBTIQ+ Youth of Nepal



Lead Researcher

- Department of Gender Studies,
Tribhuvan University

Co-Researcher

- Voice for Voiceless
- QUEER Nepal

With the Support of

Terre des Hommes Netherlands, Nepal Office
and Women Youth Empowerment in Social
Service and Human Right (WYESHR)

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We also appreciate the insights and feedback from peer reviewers, government representatives, and civil society organisations who supported the development of this research.

This study is a collective endeavour towards promoting inclusive digital safety and the rights and dignity of all.

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Acronyms/ Abbreviations

BDS	Blue Diamond Society
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CSAM	Child Sexual Abuse Material
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DM	Direct Message
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
ILGA	International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association
ID	Identity Document
ISP	Internet Service Provider
KII	Key Informant Interview
LGBTIQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer and more
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OCSE	Online Child Sexual Exploitation
SCROL	Safety for Children and their Rights Online
SOGIESC	Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression, and Sex Characteristics
SUFASEC	Step Up the Fight Against Sexual Exploitation of Children
TdH NL	Terre des Hommes Netherlands
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
WYESHR	Women Youth Empowerment in Social Service and Human Rights

Table of Contents

1	Acknowledgements	2
2	Abbreviation	3
3	List of Tables	5
4	List of Figures	5
5	Executive Summary	6
6	Background	9
7	Objectives	11
8	Research Questions	12
9	Expected Outcome of the Research	13
10	Research Methodology	13
11	Study Result Presentation	21
	• Background Information of the Respondents	21
	• Understanding of Online Experiences	23
	• Abuse and Exploitation	30
	• Impact on Identity and Belonging	37
	• Impact on Self-esteem and Self-acceptance	38
	• Resource and Support	43
	• Awareness and Legal considerations	44
	• Recommendations by Respondents	45
12	Conclusions and Recommendations	46
13	References	50

Annexes

1	Survey Questionnaire
2	FGD Checklist
3	KII Checklist

List of Tables

• Table 1: Participant Demographics	23
• Table 2: Social Media Type	25
• Table 3: Primary Online Activities	26
• Table 4: Type of dating app used	28
• Table 5: Types of online abuse	32
• Table 6: Frequency of online abuse	34
• Table 7: Abuse in various platforms	38
• Table 8: Type of support	39
• Table 9: Influence on self-esteem	41
• Table 10: Challenges finding safe space	42
• Table 11: Safety concerns online	42
• Table 12: Engagement with identity content	43
• Table 13: Information and support	43
• Table 14: Recommendations	45

List of Figures

• Figure 1: Percentage of respondents who reported to have used internet to meet potential romantic partners	29
• Figure 2: Percentage of respondents who reported to have received online support	30
• Figure 3: Percentage distribution on awareness about the terms abuse and exploitation ..	31
• Figure 4: Percentage distribution of respondents by types of online abuse	33
• Figure 5: Percentage distribution of respondents by platforms where abuse occurred ----	34
• Figure 6: Percentage distribution of respondents by reporting and seeking help	36
• Figure 7: Percentage distribution of respondents by help seeking behavior	37
• Figure 8: Percentage distribution of respondents by online acceptance of identity	40

Executive Summary

This executive summary captures the core findings, methodology adopted and recommendations derived from the study. It aims to provide a comprehensive overview, highlighting significant trends, challenges, and opportunities identified during the research. The recommendations offer actionable steps to enhance the experiences and well-being of the respondents, paving the way for meaningful and impactful interventions.

Research Methodology

The research methodology involved several steps to ensure comprehensive and reliable findings. The Department of Gender Studies at the Tribhuvan University led the research efforts, which included a literature review, data collection, data analysis, and report writing. The Department also provided technical guidance to obtain ethical clearance, formulate the questionnaire, finalize the methodology, interpret and analyze data, and prepare the report. TdH NL and WYESHR coordinated data collection through Queer Nepal, Voice of Voiceless, and other networks working with and for the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, and Queer (LGBTIQ+) community.

Purposive sampling techniques were employed. One hundred LGBTIQ+ youth participated in the surveys and 12 Key informant interviews and 6 focus group discussions with LGBTIQ+ youth were conducted.





Key Findings

1

Demographic Insights: The study revealed that the population is predominantly young and unmarried highlighting the need for inclusive policies and tailored support to address the unique needs of LGBTIQ+ individuals in Nepal. It is crucial to understand the demographics of young and unmarried individuals particularly for designing effective interventions and ensuring that their specific requirements are met.

2

Role of Digital Media: Social media platforms play a crucial role in the respondents' digital lives, with dating apps gaining notable popularity. The average daily time spent on digital media is 6.75 hours, stressing the need for promoting healthy and balanced digital habits.

3

Online Activities and Content: Key online activities include connecting with friends and family, watching videos, streaming content, and exploring LGBTIQ+ content. The discomfort among respondents in sharing their gender identity online suggests the need for more inclusive and supportive environments on digital media platforms.

4

Dating Apps: Grindr, Blued, and Tinder are the most commonly used dating apps among respondents. A significant majority of respondents use the internet to meet potential romantic partners, emphasizing the need for safe practices and enhanced safety features on these platforms.

5

Online Abuse and Safety: Verbal harassment, sexting, doxing, and other forms of cyberbullying are prevalent. Majority of respondents experience online abuse regularly, and many do not feel supported in digital spaces while expressing their gender identity.

6

Awareness and Education: Most of the respondents are unaware of laws protecting LGBTIQ+ individuals in Nepal.

7

Identity and Self-Expression: Many respondents feel a discrepancy between their online and offline identities. While online interactions have provided positive feedback, enhancing self-esteem and self-acceptance, respondents continue to face social exclusion, discrimination and stigma in their offline lives.

8

Challenges: Key challenges in finding safe spaces online include lack of trust, fear of harassment, and privacy concerns. Many respondents do not report abuse, indicating potential issues with underreporting or hesitance to seek assistance.

**Let
Children
Flourish!**

Key Recommendations

1

Inclusive Policies:

Develop and implement inclusive policies and support systems tailored to the diverse needs of LGBTIQ+ individuals in Nepal.

2

Digital Literacy and Safety:

Enhance digital literacy programs and online safety initiatives to ensure secure navigation of social media platforms and dating applications.
3. Promote Digital Well-Being: Encourage healthy and balanced digital habits among users.

3

Promote Digital Well-Being: Encourage healthy and balanced digital habits among users.

4

Inclusive Online Content:

Develop diverse, inclusive, and educational online content to foster social connections, support identity exploration, and encourage creativity and skill development.

5

Supportive Environments:

Advocacy for more inclusive and supportive environments on digital media platforms to allow individuals to express their gender identity freely.

6

Safe Dating Practices:

Promote safe and inclusive practices on dating platforms through enhanced privacy features, inclusive language options, and support groups.

7

Robust Safety Measures:

Implement robust measures to prevent and address online abuse, including enhanced reporting mechanisms and support systems. Additionally, it is at the same time important to enforce stronger regulations of internet service providers (ISPs), gaming and other tech industries. Encourage a commitment by the private sector to use safety-by-design approaches to ensure the protection of all children and youth who use digital technologies.

8

Awareness Campaigns:

Launch awareness campaigns to foster supportive online environments and encourage reporting of online abuse.

10

Secure Online Environments:

Develop secure online environments that protect users' identities and privacy, enabling individuals to express their true selves without fear.

9

Educational Initiatives:

Integrate detailed education on abuse and exploitation into school curricula to raise awareness and ensure students are well-informed.

11

Legal Awareness:

Improve the dissemination of information regarding laws protecting LGBTIQ+ individuals, ensuring all community members are aware of their rights.

Background

Nepal has a number of progressive laws regarding LGBTIQ+ rights¹, especially when compared to the rest of South Asia (The Kathmandu Post, 22 Jan 2024). However, many members of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, and Queer (LGBTIQ+) community feel these laws do not go far enough. Sexual and gender minorities still face challenges in receiving equal treatment and societal acceptance in a predominantly conservative society. According to the Blue Diamond Society², an organization advocating for LGBTIQ+ rights, it is estimated that eight to ten percent of Nepal's population is non-binary. However, there is a lack of data because many LGBTIQ+ youth and gender-diverse children are reluctant to reveal their identities due to the stigma and rejection they may encounter.

Nepal has been recognized for its inclusive and egalitarian legal framework regarding gender and sexual minorities. Despite these legal protections, ground realities indicate persistent human rights violations based on sexual orientation and gender identity, hindering the nation's progress toward a just society.



The digital landscape has become an integral part of life for young individuals, including those identifying as LGBTIQ+. However, limited awareness of online safety makes them particularly vulnerable. During discussions with Voice for Voiceless, a youth-led organization in Nepal, it was shared that LGBTIQ+ youth and gender-diverse children feel safer exploring their sexual identities on social media than through face-to-face interactions. For many, social media offers a platform to connect with like-minded individuals and express their authentic identities, especially when offline environments are unwelcoming.

¹ Some of the rights provided to LGBTIQ+ individuals; Legal Recognition of Third Gender since 2007; same sex-marriage (temporary order to register the marriages); anti-discrimination protections; and citizenship rights.

Blue Diamond Society. (2019). Lived experiences of people from LGBTIQ+ community who were schooled in

² Kathmandu Valley and perception of teachers and non-teaching staffs. **Retrieved from**

Currently, TdH NL implements two key projects to address online sexual exploitation: Safety for Children and Their Rights Online (SCROL) and Step Up the Fight Against Sexual Exploitation of Children (SUFASEC) . These initiatives emphasize the importance of protecting children, regardless of their gender or background, from online exploitation. However, there is a significant knowledge gap regarding how LGBTIQ+ youth and gender-diverse children experience these issues.

In interventions under the SCROL and SUFASEC projects, LGBTIQ+ youth highlighted their reliance on online platforms for self-expression and community building. However, comprehensive data on the challenges faced by LGBTIQ+ youth and gender-diverse children in navigating online spaces remains scarce. Online platforms present both opportunities and risks. Studies, such as the June 2023 UN report³ on online emotional abuse, have shown that LGBTIQ+ individuals are vulnerable to technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV), including grooming, sextortion, and impersonation. While evidence exists, specific research on the experiences of LGBTIQ+ youth in Nepal is limited.

This research aims to address this gap by exploring the unique challenges faced by LGBTIQ+ youth and gender-diverse children concerning online safety. Additionally, it seeks to identify the services and support systems needed to ensure their safety in digital environments. The study was conducted jointly by TdH NL (Terre des Hommes Netherlands), WYESHR (Women Youth Empowerment in Social Service and Human Rights), and the Department of Gender Studies, Tribhuvan University. The Department of Gender Studies led the research, handling literature review, data compilation, ethical clearance, and report writing. WYESHR acted as a liaison between TdH NL and the Department of Gender Studies, while TdH NL provided financial resources for the project.

³UN Women. (2023). Evidence to action: Addressing violence against LGBTIQ+ people in Nepal. [Retrieved from](#)



objectives

This research aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the online experiences of LGBTIQ+ youth and gender-diverse children. It delved into their safety practices, the unique challenges they faced, their coping mechanisms and resilience, and the broader impact of their online interactions on their mental health and well-being.

The specific objectives of the research were:

- **To understand the online practices and behaviours of LGBTIQ+ youth and gender-diverse children.**

The research focused on a nuanced understanding of how LGBTIQ+ youth and gender-diverse children navigated their digital environments. This included their social media usage, self-expression, building online communities, digital literacy, exposure to harmful content and persons, and the impact of their online experiences.

- **To identify challenges and risks faced by LGBTIQ+ youth and gender-diverse children in digital spaces.**

The research aimed to uncover specific threats and difficulties that LGBTIQ+ youth and gender-diverse children encountered online. These challenges included exposure to cyberbullying, harassment, and discrimination related to their sexual orientation or gender identity, among others.

- **To examine coping mechanisms and resilience factors employed by LGBTIQ+ youth and gender-diverse children online.**

The research explored how LGBTIQ+ youth and gender-diverse children managed and responded to online challenges. It investigated the strategies they used to cope with negative experiences, such as seeking support from friends, online communities, or mental health resources. Additionally, it examined resilience factors that contributed to their ability to maintain a positive online presence despite facing adversity.

- **To understand their needs and rights to access and navigate online spaces safely.**

This included understanding what they expected from the government to ensure their online safety and how the government should uphold their safety and dignity both online and offline.

Research Questions

Main question:

The Department of Gender Studies, Tribhuvan University used an intersectional lens to explore the unique characteristics of children with diverse SOGIESC in Nepal and how these characteristics functioned as risk, protective, or empowering factors in the context of online sexual exploitation, linked to different ecological levels.

Sub-questions:

- How did youth from this group navigate the online world, and what were the perceived benefits and risks for this group?
- In relation to online sexual exploitation of children, what were the unique characteristics, risks, and protective factors?
- How did these different characteristics intersect and create either risk or protective factors in their specific contexts? What elements (e.g., social norms and related behaviours) increased risk in the specific context across ecological levels? Which elements (e.g., social norms and related behaviors) created protection in the specific context across ecological levels?
- What could children teach about how their group was empowered to stay safe from online sexual exploitation, and how could this empowerment be enhanced?
- What responsibilities did different duty bearers and stakeholders (including the private sector) have in ensuring their safety online?



Expected Outcome of the Research

- QUEER Nepal and Voice for Voiceless utilized the findings to reassess their strategies in supporting their target populations and to identify potential funding opportunities.
- The Government of Nepal gained a deeper understanding of the issue's scope and used this insight to adapt its policies, aiming to enhance the safety of LGBTIQ+ youth and gender-diverse children in the digital space.
- Terre des Hommes Netherlands leveraged the findings to seek funding opportunities for its partner organisations operating in Nepal.
- Furthermore, Terre des Hommes strengthened its SEC thematic programme, especially the SCROL and SUFASEC programmes. The findings from the research were used to raise awareness, promote behavioural change, and advocate for policymakers and the private sector. Additionally, the findings guided the country team in designing interventions with inclusivity in mind to address the issues of this socially excluded group of children in the country.
- The Department of Gender Studies, Tribhuvan University incorporated the findings into its academic research and curriculum.

Research Methodology

The Department of Gender Studies, Tribhuvan University explained the various steps undertaken during research methods and approaches to conduct the research. The research included a literature review, data collection, data analysis, and report writing. This also involved providing technical guidance to the research team for obtaining ethical clearance, formulating the questionnaire, finalising the methodology, interpreting and analysing data, and preparing the report. TdH NL and WYESHR were actively involved in coordinating data collection through Queer Nepal, Voice of Voiceless, and networks working with and for the LGBTIQ+ community.

WYESHR selected leaders of QUEER Nepal and Voice of Voiceless as co-researchers for the study. The decision to work with these esteemed organisations was based on their unique insights into the experiences of gender-diverse youth and gender-diverse children and their established trust with these children, youth, and families. Furthermore, they provided insights into the most appropriate methodology to use and how to navigate challenges related to social exclusion and stigma associated with gender diversity. WYESHR coordinated with QUEER Nepal and Voice of Voiceless throughout the data collection process and the entire research project.

Literature Review

The recognition and protection of LGBTIQ+ rights in Nepal have gained considerable attention in recent years. However, research on this issue remains limited, necessitating a thorough review of available data and reports from organizations working in this field.

Existing Data and Reports

The national study *Evidence for Action: Addressing Violence Against LGBTIQ+ People in Nepal*⁴ conducted by UN Women Nepal, in collaboration with M & C Saatchi World Services, Blue Diamond Society Nepal, and Viamo, revealed that over 81 percent of respondents had experienced at least one form of violence in their lifetime. This indicates the significant influence of a patriarchal, heteronormative system as the main driver of violence against LGBTIQ+ communities.

The *Nepal Policy Review Six – LGBTIQ+ Rights*⁵ by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) in 2022 highlights the ongoing challenges faced by the LGBTIQ+ community in Nepal, including violence, discrimination, and stigma. The report emphasizes the pressing need for improved legal protections and better representation of LGBTIQ+ individuals in political and social spheres.

In 2021, the *LGBTIQ+ Rights in Nepal Report*⁶ by ILGA Asia provided a comprehensive overview of the legal and political landscape for LGBTIQ+ rights in Nepal. It discusses the socio-cultural positionality of LGBTIQ+ individuals and the community's challenges, including the lack of implementation of constitutional rights and Supreme Court verdicts.

The 2015 report *Being LGBTIQ+ in Asia: Nepal Country Report*⁷ by UNDP, UNICEF, and USAID provided an overview of LGBTIQ+ rights in Nepal, examining the policy and legal environment, sociocultural context, political situation, and religious context related to LGBTIQ+ rights. It covered various thematic areas such as employment, education, healthcare, family affairs, media, and community and politics.

⁴ UN Women Nepal, M&C Saatchi World Services, Blue Diamond Society Nepal, & Viamo. (2023). Evidence to action: Addressing violence against LGBTIQ+ people in Nepal. United Nations. **Retrieved From** (February 27, 2025)

⁵ National Democratic Institute. (2022). Nepal Policy Review Six -LGBTIQ+ Rights. **Retrieved from**

⁶ ILGA Asia. (2021). Nepal Country Report. **Retrieved from**

⁷ UNDP, UNICEF, & USAID. (2015). Being LGBT in Asia: Nepal Country Report. United Nations Development Programme. **Retrieved from**

A 2019 study by Blue Diamond Society, "Lived Experiences of people from LGBTIQ+ community who were schooled in Kathmandu Valley and Perception of Teachers and Non-teaching staffs,"⁸ underlined the experiences of LGBTIQ+ individuals during their school years and the perceptions of teachers and non-teaching staff towards them. The report highlighted the discrimination and violence faced by LGBTIQ+ individuals in a non-conjugal environment during their school life, with teachers and school staff often lacking awareness and understanding of LGBTIQ+ issues. The study recommended activities to raise awareness and build capacity on LGBTIQ+ issues and inclusivity.

The 2015 Constitution of Nepal⁹ for the first time recognized and protected the rights of LGBTIQ+ persons, explicitly prohibiting discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity. It also guarantees the right to privacy, freedom of expression, and the right to live with dignity – all critical for the protection of LGBTIQ+ rights.

A 2018 shadow report by Blue Diamond Society, submitted to the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) for consideration at the 71st Pre-sessional Working Group, provided a comprehensive overview of the challenges faced by the LGBTIQ+ community in Nepal. The report highlighted issues such as negative stereotypes, violence, and discrimination in various aspects of life, including family rights, health, education, employment, and social benefits.

The 2012 study *Human Rights Violations among Sexual and Gender Minorities in Kathmandu, Nepal: A Qualitative Investigation*¹⁰ published in BMC International Health and Human Rights highlighted the range of human rights violations experienced by sexual and gender minorities in Nepal. Respondents reported experiencing violations at home, work, educational, health care settings, and public places. The study emphasized the lack of adequate legal protection and the common occurrence of physical and mental abuse and torture. Access to adequate legal protection and improvements in the family and healthcare environment were ranked as the most important priority areas.

These reports collectively illustrate the pervasive challenges and systemic violence faced by the LGBTIQ+ community in Nepal. They underscore the urgent need for comprehensive legal protections, awareness-raising activities, and inclusive policies to create a more equitable and supportive environment for all.

⁸Blue Diamond Society. (2019). Lived experiences of people from LGBTIQ+ community who were schooled in Kathmandu Valley and perception of teachers and non-teaching staffs. **Retrieved From**

⁹Government of Nepal. (2015). The Constitution of Nepal. **Retrieved from**

¹⁰Singh, S., Pant, S. B., Dhakal, S., Pokhrel, S., & Mullany, L. C. (2012). Human rights violations among sexual and gender minorities in Kathmandu, Nepal: A qualitative investigation. BMC International Health and Human Rights. **Retrieved from**

Followings are the key reports and information available in LGBTIQ+ community in Nepal:

Organizations working to promote and protect rights of LGBTIQ+ community regularly highlight the challenges and experiences of LGBTIQ+. For instance, the Blue Diamond Society, one of the leading LGBTIQ+ advocacy groups in Nepal, has published annual reports detailing the socio-economic and legal challenges faced by the community (Blue Diamond Society, 2020). Nepal has been hosting Pride Parades since 2010, celebrating the diversity and resilience of the LGBTIQ+ community. These events have helped raise awareness and promote acceptance.

The **2021 Census in Nepal**¹¹ marked a significant step forward for LGBTIQ+ inclusion. For the first time, the census included a gender-sensitive question, allowing respondents to indicate their sex as either 'male', 'female', or 'other'. This was a major improvement from the 2011 Census, which only had 'male' and 'female' options and resulted in an undercount of LGBTIQ+ individuals. The inclusion of the 'other' category was a result of extensive consultations between the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), LGBTIQ+ organizations, and other stakeholders. The census aimed to ensure that LGBTIQ+ individuals were properly counted and their data accurately represented in official statistics.

Research by organizations like Mitini Nepal¹² and Inclusive Forum Nepal¹³ highlights issues such as discrimination, lack of access to healthcare and education, and social stigmatization. These organizations have contributed valuable data through their research and advocacy efforts, providing insights into the lived experiences of LGBTIQ+ individuals in Nepal and shedding light on the unique challenges they face in various aspects of life, including employment, healthcare, and legal recognition.

¹¹Central Bureau of Statistics. (2021). National Population and Housing Census 2021 Results. **Retrieved from**

¹²Mitini Nepal. (2021). Research report on LGBTIQ+ rights in Nepal. Kathmandu: **Mitini Nepal.**

¹³Inclusive Forum Nepal. (2019). Challenges and opportunities for LGBTIQ+ rights in Nepal. Kathmandu: **Inclusive Forum Nepal.**

Legal-Policy Analysis

The Constitution of Nepal, 2015, under Article 18, guarantees the right to equality and prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. In a landmark decision in *Sunil Babu Pant and Others v. Government of Nepal* (2007), the Supreme Court directed the government to draft laws to protect the rights of LGBTIQ+ individuals and recognize their identity. This 2007 decision emphasized non-discrimination based on sex and gender as a right guaranteed to all citizens of Nepal, and this principle has been reaffirmed in subsequent court decisions, including *Rajani Shah v. National Women's Commission* (2013), *Suman Pant v. Ministry of Home Affairs et al.* (2017), and *Rukshana Kapali v. Government of Nepal et al.* (2021).

The Citizenship Act Amendment Bill 2022 allows individuals to acquire citizenship certificates that reveal their gender identity as prescribed in the certificates. However, the Bill does not specify whether an authorized doctor's recommendation or medical evidence of gender-affirming transition or surgical intervention is required.

In June 2023, a single judge bench of the Supreme Court issued an interim order directing the government to register same-sex marriages, marking a significant step towards the legal recognition of same-sex relationships. Following this, in April 2024, the National ID and Civil Registration Department issued a circular instructing local registration authorities to enter all same-sex marriages into a separate register. While this temporary registration does not grant same-sex couples the same legal rights as opposite-sex couples, it is a step towards greater recognition.

November 2023 saw Nepal's first same-sex marriage between a trans woman and a cisgender man, highlighting the ongoing struggle for equal rights and recognition for LGBTIQ+ individuals.

Despite these progressive legal provisions, the implementation of these policies remains a challenge. A detailed legal-policy analysis conducted by Human Rights Watch¹⁴ in 2018 revealed gaps in the enforcement of LGBTIQ+ rights and highlighted areas where further legal reforms are needed. The analysis emphasized the need for comprehensive anti-discrimination laws and the recognition of same-sex partnerships to ensure full legal protection for the LGBTIQ+ community.

¹⁴Human Rights Watch. (2018). Country profiles: Nepal. [Retrieved from](#)

The challenges highlighted by the literature review suggest the need for comprehensive measures to protect the rights and well-being of LGBTIQ+ individuals in Nepal, including public awareness exercises, legal protections, and supportive environments. While there has been progress in recognizing and protecting LGBTIQ+ rights in Nepal, significant challenges remain. The review of existing data and reports, coupled with primary data collection, underscores the need for comprehensive legal reforms and increased awareness to ensure the full realization of LGBTIQ+ rights. Continued efforts by government institutions, civil society organizations, and the LGBTIQ+ community are essential to address these challenges and promote equality and inclusion in Nepal.

Sampling

The study was conducted in the Bagmati Province of Nepal. Under the supervision of the Department of Gender Studies, Tribhuvan University, and WYESHR. Queer Nepal and Voice of Voiceless supported the research in reaching out to LGBTIQ+ youth for the survey. Purposive sampling techniques were used to identify the respondents. A total of 100 LGBTIQ+ youth respondents were sampled for semi-structured interviews to generate qualitative data. In addition, 30–40 participants were sampled for qualitative methods such as 12 Key Informant Interviews (KII), 4 Focus Group Discussions (FGD), and 6 case story collections.

Data Collection Methodologies

Prior to developing the research methodologies, the Department of Gender Studies, Tribhuvan University, and WYESHR designed child-centric activities in consultation with organisations working with children. Efforts were made to consult children's groups to design and co-create child-friendly research tools appropriate and sensitive to the unique characteristics of gender-diverse children.

● Interviews with Youths

Semi-structured interview schedules were used for data collection, capturing both quantitative and qualitative information. The tool was administered by youth representatives (as researchers) from Queer Nepal and Voice of Voiceless. The attempt was made to include children aged 13 to 19; however, several challenges were encountered, including obtaining parental consent, ensuring participants' availability, and maintaining their interest and engagement in the study. Consequently, the sample size (100) for this age group was limited, impacting the overall representativeness of the findings.

- Queer Nepal and Voice of Voiceless led the primary data collection. Interviews, lasting a maximum of one hour, were conducted either offline or online based on respondents' preferences. Positionality and background checks were conducted beforehand to ensure respondent privacy.

● **Focus Group Discussions**

Altogether 4 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with 6-8 participants from homogeneous SOGIESC groups were conducted among children and young people to discuss their online experiences, risks, challenges related to their gender identity, and barriers to seeking support. Queer Nepal and Voice of Voiceless conducted the FGDs, while the Department of Gender Studies, Tribhuvan University, and WYESHR monitored them.

Additional FGDs with parents of LGBTIQ+ youth and gender-diverse children were conducted to understand their needs for empowerment and how they could better support their children.

● **Key Informant Interviews**

For adult experts and service providers, 12 in-depth interviews were conducted. Key Informants included government officials, health practitioners, teachers, social workers, and representatives from CSOs supporting the LGBTIQ+ community. These interviews were conducted either online or offline, depending on respondents' preferences. Background checks and positionality assessments were conducted before the interviews.

● **Case Stories**

Six case stories of LGBTIQ+ youth and gender-diverse children were collected to document their online experiences. Sharing these stories was voluntary, and the aim was to provide qualitative evidence to support quantitative data, offering a narrative complement to statistical findings.

Data Analysis and Validation

The findings from the study were analyzed by the Department of Gender Studies, Tribhuvan University using descriptive statistics to summarize and interpret the data derived from the mixed methods. This provided a clear picture of trends and patterns among respondents. The quantitative analysis was complemented and supplemented by qualitative insights gathered mainly through key informant interviews and focus group discussions. These components were crucial in offering a deeper understanding of the issues identified in the survey, adding context and depth to the numerical data. By gathering and analyzing both quantitative and qualitative data, the study provided a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the research questions. The approach ensured that conclusions and recommendations drawn are robust and well-informed.

Ethical Considerations

The study was explained to all stakeholders at the outset, and their right to remain anonymous was respected. Informed written consent was obtained from all respondents, including service providers and beneficiaries. Confidentiality, anonymity, and a commitment to "do no harm" were prioritised, adhering to TdH NL's research guidelines and safeguarding policy. Ethical clearance from the National Child Right Council was obtained on 20 November 2024.

Safeguarding Measures

A safeguarding risk assessment was developed by TdH NL and WYESHR in consultation with all research partners, and a mitigation plan was put in place before the research began. Participants seeking support were referred to trained WYESHR staff or mental health services, following a referral protocol developed during the inception phase. The research team was trained on Trauma-Informed Care Approaches to equip them with the skills to handle both respondents' and their own emotional challenges during the research. Ethical Communication Policies of WYESHR and TdH NL were strictly followed while preparing the report.

Limitations

Some of the key limitations of the included:

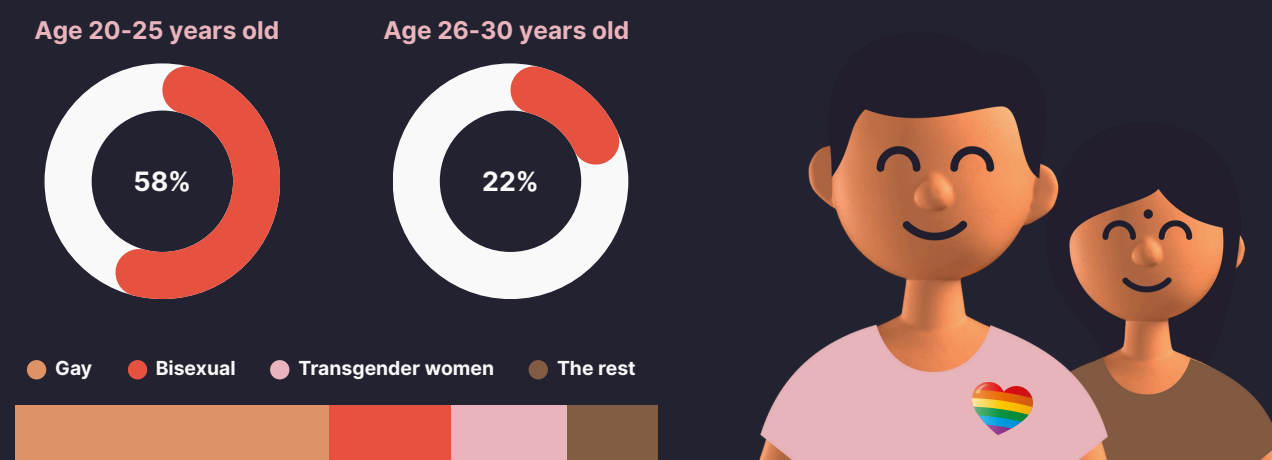
- The study faced sampling bias particularly due the purposive sampling technique, which may not represent the entire LGBTIQ+ individuals accurately. The sampling of 100 respondents for the survey to some extent limited the generalizability of the findings.
- The focus on youth and gender-diverse children excluded older LGBTIQ+ individuals who may also experience unique online challenges.
- The study was limited to Bagmati Province and therefore the findings may not be applicable to other regions of Nepal.
- Culture factors to some extent influenced respondents' willingness to share their experiences openly, particularly sensitive topics like gender identity and sexual orientation.
- The study focused on online experiences and therefore it is important to note that it may not have captured the full spectrum of challenges and coping mechanisms that LGBTIQ+ youth encountered in their offline lives.
- The research captured a snapshot in time and online behaviors. It is significant to highlight that digital landscapes can rapidly change, potentially limiting the study's relevance over time.
- Limited time for the study impacted to a certain extent the depth and breadth of data collection and analysis, affecting the robustness of the findings.

Study Results Presentation

Background Information of the respondents

Majority of the participants (58%) were aged between 20-25 years, followed by 22% of the participants who were between the ages of 26-30. While diverse experiences of individuals are acknowledged of these groups including those aged between 26-30 offered valuable insights into the evolving digital landscape and how different cohorts of young adults navigate online environments. Almost half of the participants identified as gay (49%), with bisexual (19%) and transgender women (18%) being the subsequent largest groups. The participants belonged to diverse ethnic groups, with Hill Chhetri (19%) being the largest followed by Newar (16%), Hill Brahmin (14%) and Hill Janajati (14%). Four out of five respondents were Hindu (80%) while 12% practiced Buddhism. Majority of the respondents were unmarried (92%). Bagmati was the native province of 40% of the study participants, and Koshi was of 20% of the respondents.

Almost all respondents had attained some formal education, with half of the respondents completing secondary education and almost one third 32% completing undergraduate level studies. This indicates that the respondents generally have a higher level of education compared to the general population of Nepal. The literacy rate in Nepal is approximately 77.4% (85.8% for males and 70.1% for females), the completion rates for secondary education stand around 46.2%¹⁵. On the contrary half (50%) of the study respondents had completed secondary education, which is slightly higher than the national average. Additionally, 32% of the respondents attained undergraduate degrees, a significantly higher proportion compared to the general population, where post-secondary education is not as commonly achieved. In terms of vital registration, all the respondents had a birth certificate, while 95% had citizenship and 53% had a national identity card.



¹⁵ MyRepublica. (n.d.). Nepal's literacy rate reaches 77.4 percent. [Retrieved from](#), February 28, 2025

Category	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Age		
<20	7	7%
21-25	58	58%
26-30	22	22%
31-35	8	8%
36-40	3	3%
>41	2	2%
Gender Identity		
Lesbian	2	2%
Gay	49	49%
Bi-sexual	19	19%
Transgender women	18	18%
Others (non-binary, intersex, genderqueer, etc.)	12	12%
Caste		
Hill Brahmin	14	14%
Hill Chhetri	19	19%
Terai Brahmin/Chhetri	8	8%
Hill Dalit	8	8%
Terai Dalit	2	2%
Newar	16	16%
Hill Janajati	14	14%
Terai Janajati	9	9%
Others	10	10%
Religion		
Hindu	80	80%
Buddhist	12	12%
Christian	3	3%
Muslim	2	2%
Others	3	3%

Marital Status		
Unmarried	92	92%
Married	6	6%
Divorced/ Separated	2	2%
Native province		
Koshi	20	20%
Madhesh	5	5%
Bagmati	40	40%
Gandaki	12	12%
Lumbini	14	14%
Karnali	3	3%
Sudurpaschim	6	6%
Education (multiple response question)		
Attended school	99	99%
Primary (upto grade 8)	7	7%
Secondary (upto +2)	50	50%
Bachelor's	32	32%
Identity document		
Birth certificate	100	100%
Nationality card (Citizenship)	95	95%
National Identity card	53	53%

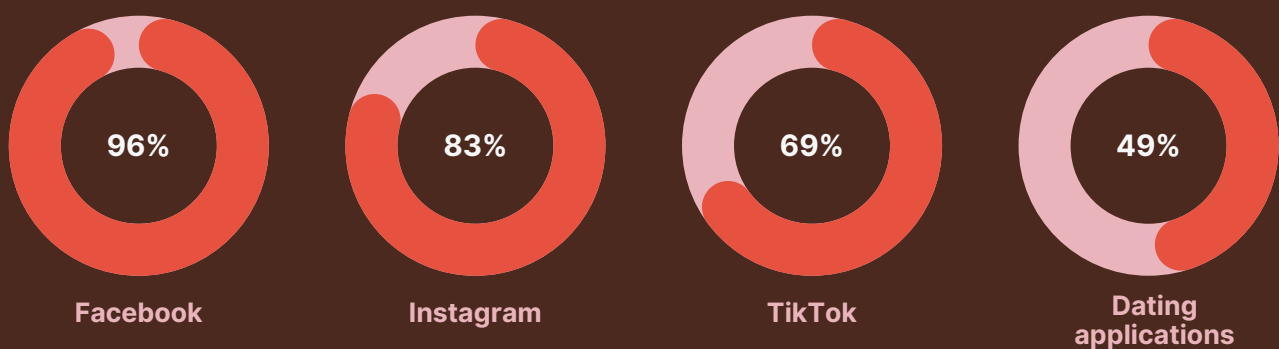
Table 1: Background information of respondents

Understanding of online experiences

This section of the survey explores the various ways in which individuals of the LGBTIQ+ communities engaged with and perceived the digital landscape. It aimed to gather insights into the activities and behaviors of respondents in the online world. Additionally, the section attempted to highlight the significance of different digital platforms in shaping identity and fostering connections within the community.

Digital Media Usage

Facebook was by far the most commonly used digital media platform with 96% of the respondents using it for various purposes. This to a large extent indicates that it remains a popular choice for connecting with people and at the same time engaging with various communities. This finding aligned well with previous studies undertaken across all age groups, showing that that showed that 91.09% of Nepalese use facebook¹⁶. The data from this research also suggested Instagram as the second popular platform, with 83% of respondents using it. It does to some extent indicate a strong preference for visual content sharing and interactive features. This was followed by TikTok (69%) reflecting its appeal for short video contents that engage users and snapchat (63%). One interesting finding from the research was that almost half of the respondents (49%) indicated the use of dating applications (49%) which are often known for its features to facilitate romantic and social connections. The trend was reflective of the growing popularity of dating applications in Nepal. This finding is in line with the observation reported in online news media platform such as Onlinekhabar¹⁷.



Most commonly used digital media platforms in Nepal

¹⁶Social Media Stats Nepal. (2024). StatCounter Global Stats. [Retrieved from](#), December 3, 2024

¹⁷Onlinekhabar. (2022). Dating apps in Nepal: Prospects and problems. OnlineKhabar English News. [Retrieved from](#)

Table 2: Frequency and Percentage distribution of respondents by digital media platform usages.

Category	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Social media type		
Facebook	96	96%
Instagram	83	83%
Twitter	31	31%
TikTok	69	69%
Snapchat	63	63%
Dating apps	49	49%

Note: The total does not add up to 100% as it is a multiple response question or simply put respondents could select more than one option.

The average (mean) time spent on Digital media daily was 6.8 hours, indicating quite a significant portion of daily time is devoted to related activities. Participants perceived social media not only as a way to pass time but also as a platform for exploring identity and fostering connections, according one key informant from the government agency:



“Social media provides them with a space to express their feelings, connect with new people, and embrace their own selves.

It can be a good platform for sharing experiences and finding support from like-minded individuals. Further, it does to a large extent allows for the exploration of diverse perspectives and cultures thereby fostering a sense of global community.”

~ KII, government agency

Along similar lines, a FGD participant stated that social media provides an important space for sharing feelings, forming new friendships and being authentic.

“

Social media lets us share our feelings, meet new friends, and be ourselves. It's a great place to talk about our experiences and get support from others who think like us. Plus, it helps us learn about different cultures and ideas, making us feel part of a global community.

~ FGD participant



Primary Online Activities

The most prevalent activity as indicated by the data was ‘connecting with friends and family’, with a significant 94% of respondents engaging in it. Watching videos and streaming content were also revealed as highly popular, with 85% of respondents participating. Exploring LGBTIQ+ content was another key activity revealed, with 74% of respondents indicating their engagement highlighting the importance of diverse and inclusive online contents, with videos sharing personal stories of LGBTIQ+ individuals, educational resources on LGBTIQ+ issues and supportive social media communities.

Educational pursuits and skill development were important to 56% of respondents, reflecting a growing trend of using online resources for learning. Additionally, 37% of respondents engage in creating expressions such as writing and digital art, while 35% participate in gaming and interactive entertainment. The findings to a large extent suggest that respondents value several online activities that ranged from educational and inclusive content to creative and entertainment-focused pursuits.

Category	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Primary online activities		
Connecting with friends and family	94	94%
Exploring LGBTIQ+ contents	74	74%
Watching videos / Streaming contents	85	85%
Gaming / Interactive entertainment	35	35%
Educational pursuits and skill development	56	56%
Creating expressions	37	37%

Table 3: Frequency and percentage distribution of respondents by primary online activities

Comfort sharing gender identity online

One important aspect that this research covered was the extent of comfort among the respondents in sharing gender identity online. This was important to consider as it helps to gain insights into the need for safer, more inclusive online environments. As a result, individuals can freely express their gender identity without fear or judgement or discrimination.

Nearly three-fifth of the respondents (57%) did not feel comfortable sharing their gender identity on digital media platforms. The finding emphasizes the urgency for digital media platforms to create more inclusive and supportive environments. Those respondents who felt comfortable sharing their gender identity mentioned reasons such as desire to be seen, to be visible and true to oneself. On the contrary, those respondents did not feel comfortable cited reasons such as fear of discrimination, privacy concerns, and uncertainty about the reactions of others.

The statement below from a FGD participant suggests the importance of online visibility and community for individuals sharing their identities. Additionally, the statement below highlights the role of social media in creating connections thereby offering a sense of belongingness.

For many study participants, digital media platforms worked both for and against them. To put it another way, these platforms are complex in nature with both the potential to create meaningful connections and the capacity to make individuals exposed and vulnerable. This to a large extent suggests the need for balanced approaches to digital interactions, ensuring safe and supportive environments. According to one FGD participant:



“

“I share my identity online because I feel like there are other people like me out there, who can see my social media posts and they will not feel alone. It helps me to foster a sense of community and provide support to those who might be struggling with their own identities.”

~ FGD participant



“

Social media feels like a double-edged sword. It's where I found a supportive and understanding community, but it's also where I feel most vulnerable and exposes to judgement and criticism.

~ FGD participant

Use of dating apps

The question was asked to the respondents about the types of dating apps who mentioned using the same in the above section 'digital media platform usage'. The most commonly used dating app among the study participants was Grindr (91.3%), followed by Blued (73.8%) and Tinder (35%). Other apps such as TanTan, Bumble and Planet Romeo were used by some of the participants. The data indicates the dominance of certain platforms in facilitative connections and social interactions within the LGBTIQ+ community.

Table 4: Frequency and percentage distribution by type of dating app usage

Category	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Type of dating app		
Grindr	73	91.3%
Blued	59	73.8%
Bumble	15	18.8%
Tinder	28	35%
TanTan	12	15%
Others	5	6.3%

Note: The total does not add up to 100% as it is a multiple response question or simply put respondents could select more than one option.

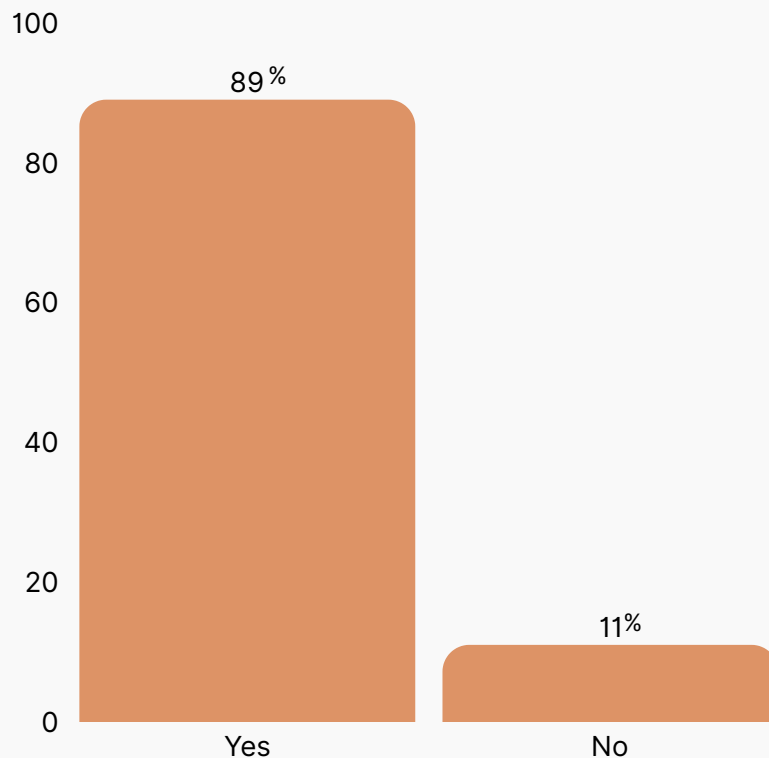


Figure 1: Percentage of respondents who reported to have used internet to meet potential romantic partners.

That being said, mixed experiences were reported by the respondents. Although some found meaningful relationships, there were respondents who noted that the primary desire of people they encountered revolved around sex. There are studies available that suggest that LGBTIQ+ individuals often experience objectification that adversely affects their social interactions and relationships (see Board on the Health of Select Populations, 2011). This is suggestive of the fact that online dating can come with challenges particularly for those seeking meaningful connections. One participant during the FGD mentioned:

Support

Only 57.6% of the respondents reported finding support from others when expressing their gender identity online. This suggests that there were still a significant proportion of individuals who do not feel supported in digital spaces. Additionally, the finding also demonstrates that there is a need for more inclusive and supportive online communities.

“

I have met many people, some of them were nice and respectful, while others were there just to fulfill their sexual urges, and also asking for unsafe sexual practices.

~ FGD participant



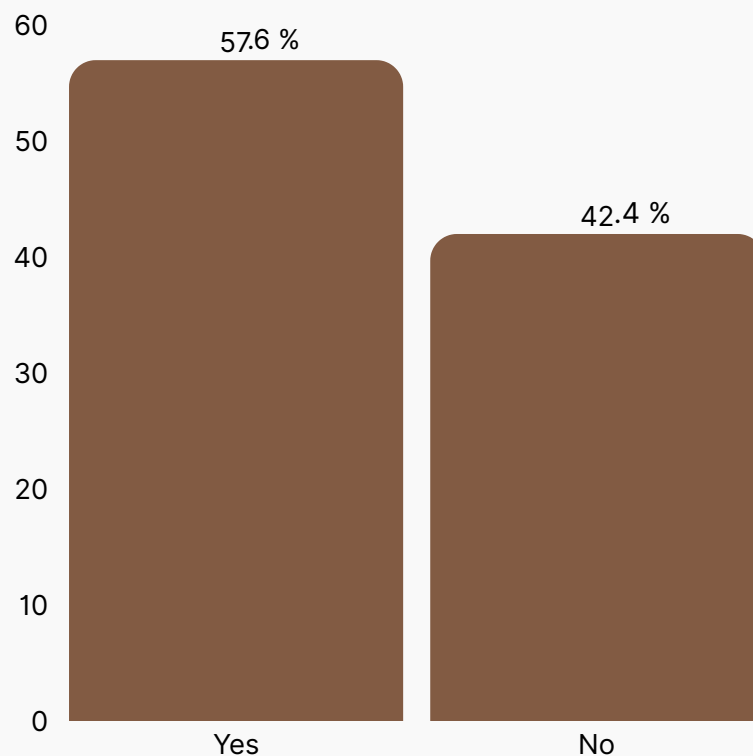


Figure 2: Percentage of respondents who reported to have received online support.

The most commonly stated kinds of support were emotional and motivational support. Almost 70% of the respondents felt that online platforms positively influenced their understanding and acceptance of their gender identity. This high proportion shows that these platforms can play a crucial role in fostering self-awareness and self-acceptance among individuals. One FGD participant stated that:

"I have been getting many information about gender and sexuality through an online medium which has helped me to understand and accept my identity better. Online platforms are handy in providing me space to express myself."

~ FGD participant

Another participant mentioned:

"...For me I can connect with others who have similar experiences in online communities. This has been vital for my journey of self-discovery."

~ FGD participant



Abuse and Exploitation

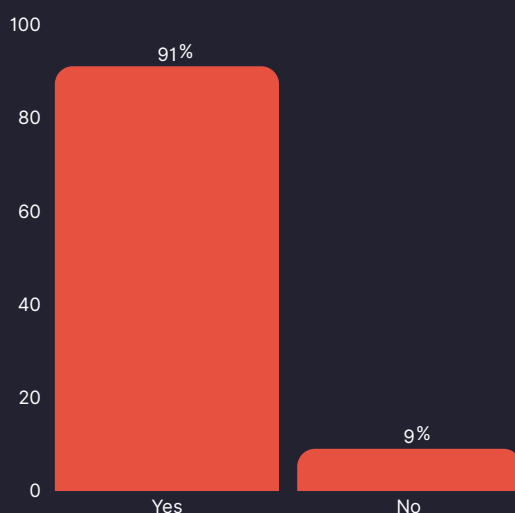


This section of the survey aimed to investigate the various forms of abuse and exploitation that individuals encountered in the digital space. It contains information into the respondents' experiences with online harassments, bullying and other harmful behaviors, as well as gauges the participants perception of safety and support within the online communities. It is important to gain insights into the abuses and exploitations as these can inform strategies to improve digital safety and support systems. This as a result can help create a safer and more inclusive online environment for all users.

Abuse

The majority of participants (91%) were aware about the terms abuse and exploitation. Among those who had knowledge, only 41% reported they had been imparted knowledge on abuse and exploitation in their school curriculum. The data indicates that there was a significant gap between awareness and formal education on the topics of abuse and exploitation. The gap highlights a potential need to integrate more comprehensive education on these issues particularly to ensure that students are not only aware but also well informed about abuse and exploitation.

Figure 3: Percentage distribution on awareness about the terms abuse and exploitation.



The most common type of abuse was verbal harassment (88.5%), with unwanted sexting (69.2%) and doxing¹⁸ (59%) subsequently following. Cyberbullying, discrimination, body shaming, blackmail and sextortion¹⁹ were also experienced by some of the participants. This is indicative of the fact that many different types of abuse are happening, with verbal harassment being the most frequent.

¹⁸The action or process of searching for and publishing private or identifying information about a particular individual on the internet, typically with malicious intent:

¹⁹A form of blackmail where someone threatens to reveal sexual images or information unless their demands are met, was also reported

Table 5: Percentage and Frequency distribution of respondents in terms of types of online abuse

Category	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Type of online abuse		
Verbal Harassment (Hate speech, threats)	69	88.5%
Cyberbullying	30	38.5%
Unwanted Sexting	54	69.2%
Doxing	46	59%
Discrimination or exclusion	26	33.3%
Others	4	5.40%

Dating apps was a common online space where participants experienced this type of abuse, as expressed by a number of FGD participants:

“

I only encounter negative interactions in the dating apps whenever I use it. Some people just send nudes without consent. It makes me feel unsafe and disrespected.

~ FGD participant



“

Sometimes I get explicit messages on social media by strangers and images without my consent. It makes me feel very uncomfortable and unsafe, so I blocked several accounts to protect myself.

~ FGD participant



“

Some used my personal information against me. They pretended to be supportive and understanding. This betrayal was very hurtful and made me wary of trusting others online.

~ FGD participant



One FGD participant mentioned how they were able to break their frequent encounters with the online abuse, and stated, above statement from the participant highlights the participant's journey from frequently experiencing online abuse to gaining strength and confidence by being open about their identity.

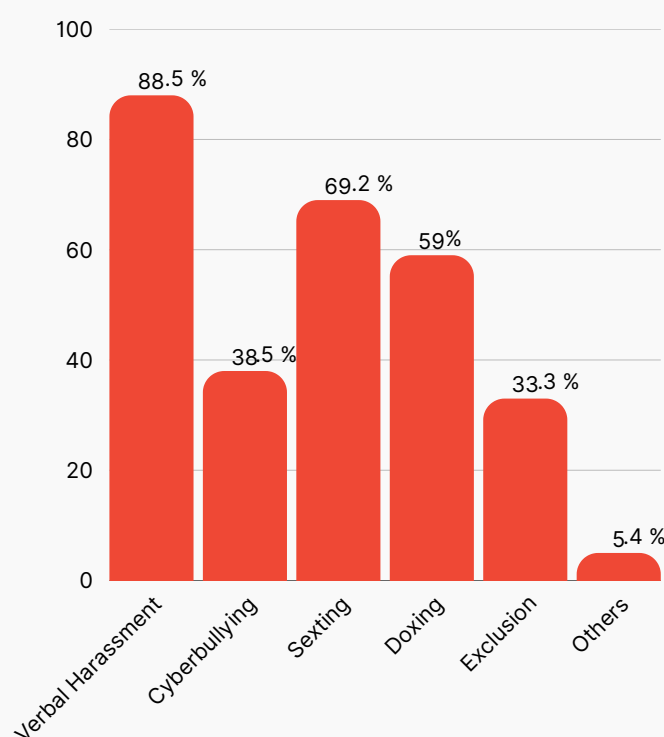


Figure 4: Percentage distribution of respondents by types of online abuse.

“

This used to happen to me before, but now that I am open, I am bolder and stronger. The more you hide, the more people discriminate against you. Being open has empowered me stand up against abuse and discrimination.

-FGD participant



Platforms where abuse occurred

Figure 5 below illustrates the distribution of respondents by abuse across various online platforms. The related finding indicates that dating apps as the platform where abuse is frequently experienced, with 48.4% reporting such encounters. Close behind, social media was reported as the platform where abuse is experienced, with 47.6%. Abuse on online forums or communities was less common (4%). The finding to a large extent highlighted the high prevalence of abuse on dating apps and social media, indicating that these platforms require targeted interventions.

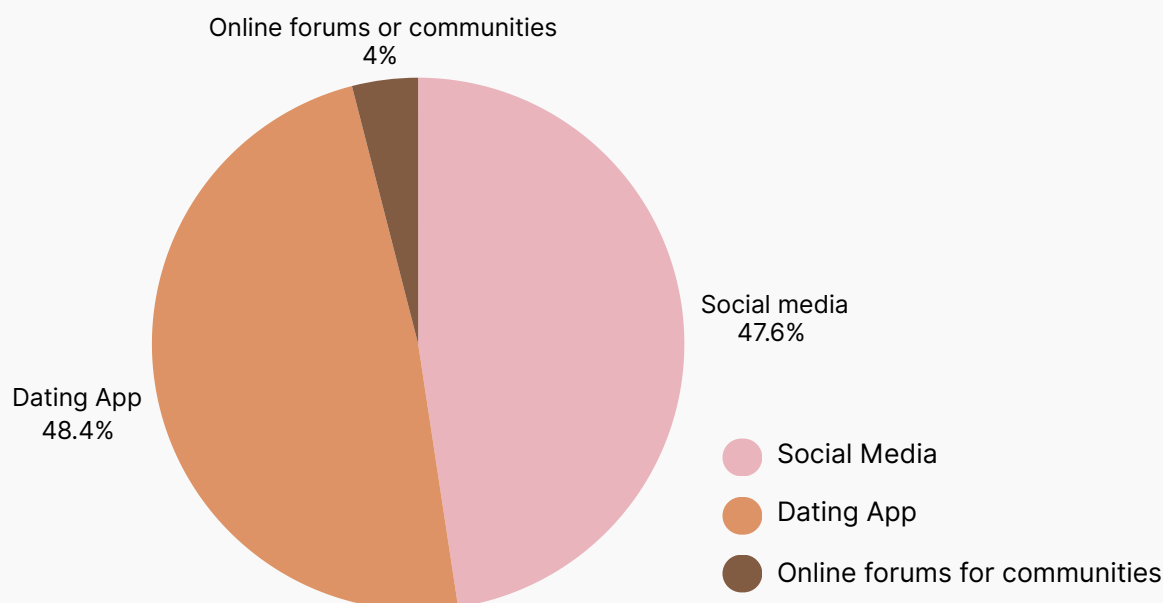


Figure 5: Percentage distribution of respondent's by platforms where abuse occurred.

Frequency of abusive encounters

When the respondents were asked about whether they have ever experienced negative encounters, 18.3% reported facing the same on a daily basis, while 22.6% on a weekly basis. Monthly encounters were reported by 10.8% and almost 40% stated they rarely encountered such abuse. The negative encompasses a broad range of experiences that included verbal harassment, unwanted sexting, doxing, cyberbullying, discrimination, body shaming, blackmail, and extortion. Furthermore, these encounters may be both general or sexual in nature. The finding suggests that a significant portion of respondents deal with online abuse on a regular basis.

Category	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Frequency of online abuse or negative encounter		
Daily	17	18.3%
Weekly	21	22.6%
Monthly	10	10.8%
Rarely	37	39.8%
Never	8	8.6%

Table 6: Percentage and frequency distribution of respondents by frequency of online abuse or negative encounter

During FGDs, participants shared their personal experiences and growth in dealing with online abuse. The following statements from the participants to a large extent suggest the evolving strategies and resilience of individuals in managing and tackling online abuse. Some have sought support from friends, family members, and community resources, while others relied on their own coping mechanisms. For instance, one FGD participant stated:

“

Before, it used to be a lot, but now I feel like I have matured and I know how to tackle those kinds of situations. I have learned to stay calm and think things through before reacting.

~ FGD participant

“

My friends were my biggest support, they helped me block and avoid the abusers.

~ FGD participant

However, there were also instances where participants coped by themselves, which aligns with findings that children and youth often face these challenges alone.

Similarly, another participant shared:

“

It used to happen in the early days, when I was not familiar with people's intentions. Over time, I learned to understand genuine interactions from those with hidden agendas. This has improved my experiences. Now, I feel more confident navigating online spaces and protecting myself from potential harm. These insights highlight both the need for accessible support systems and the resilience of individuals in navigating negative online experiences.

~ FGD participant

Reporting and seeking help

When asked whether they reported the abuse they experienced online, a significant majority of respondents (82.1%) did not report. The finding indicated there is a potential issue with underreporting or hesitation to seek assistance. Among those who reported the online abuse, they did so on the social media platform itself, cyber bureau of the police and/or queer organizations.

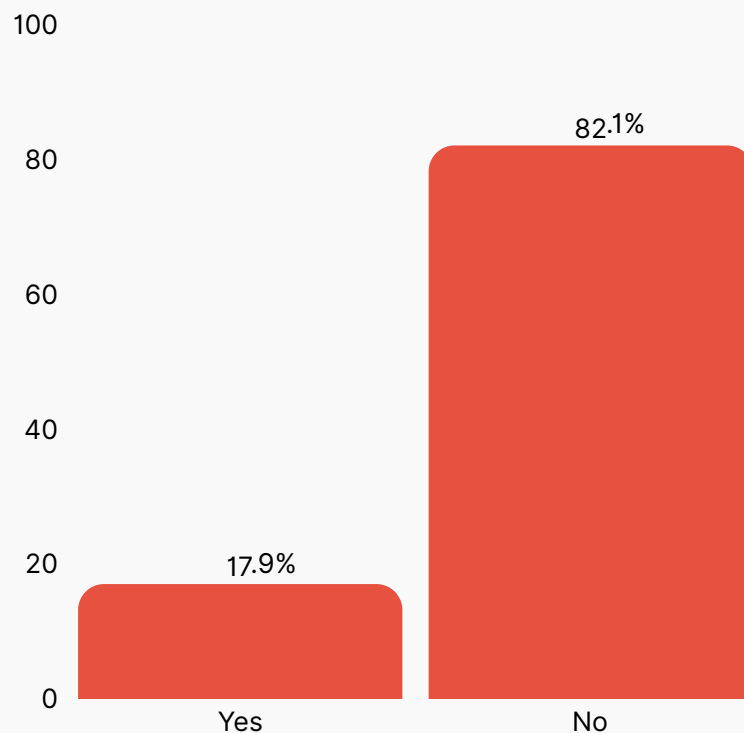


Figure 6: Percentage distribution of respondent's by reposting and seeking help.

Among those who did not report the abuse, a common theme was that they did not know how to report, feared their identity being leaked or even being harassed by the police force. One participant stated:

“

I was not much aware about the justice system and feared that my identity would be leaked. Further I was concerned about potential retaliation from the abuser.

~ FGD participant

Likewise, another participant mentioned:

“

I did not report because I was scared people were going to ask me too many questions. I felt overwhelmed by the thought of reliving the experience and facing judgement from others.

~ FGD participant

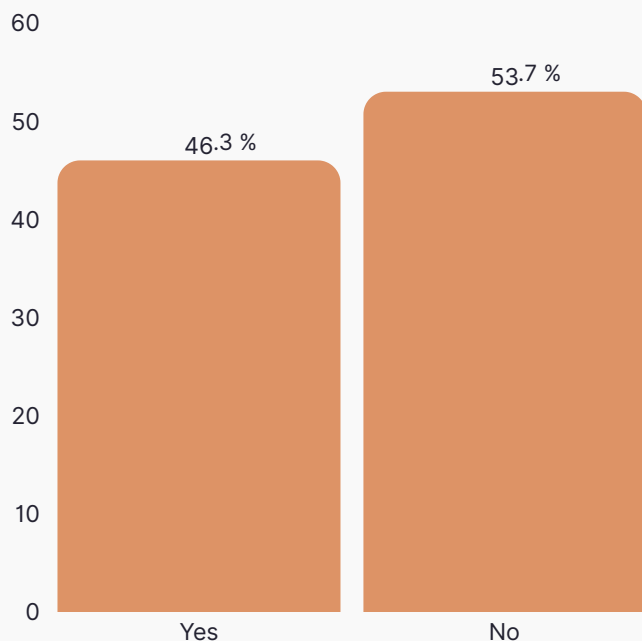


Figure 7 below shows the percentage distribution of respondents by help-seeking behavior after experiencing online abuses. A little over 46% of the respondents sought help while the rest did not. This suggests that over half of the respondents were not reaching out for assistance when they experienced abuse or negative encounters.

Figure 7: Percentage distribution of respondent's by help seeking behaviour.

Many respondents faced challenges when seeking support due to concerns about their identity being exposed. This was particularly true for those who were not open about their identity often referred to as being 'closeted'. As one FGD participant stated:

“

It is very hard to seek support, especially when you are closeted. Every time I have sought support, I have feared about my identity. What if someone from my family or others knows about me?

~ FGD participant

The statement suggests to some extent the importance of creating safe and supportive environments where individuals can seek assistance without fear or judgement or exposure.

Among those who sought help, family or friends were the most common source of support (50%), followed by mental health support by specialised NGOs (40%) and online support groups (26.7%). Other sources of support included various organizations working for queer rights. As one participant stated:

The statement above from a FGD participant indicated to a large extent the importance of close personal relationships during difficult times. Likewise, quite a significant proportion of respondents reported seeking mental health support suggesting the need for accessible and effective mental health services.

“

I seek support from the LGBTIQ+ community and the people who work with those community.

~ FGD participant

Table 7: Percentage and frequency distribution of respondents by types of support sought

Category	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Type of support sought		
Family or friends	30	50%
Mental health support	24	40%
Online support groups	16	26.7%
Others	5	13.15%

Impact on Identity and Belonging

Quite a large proportion of the respondents (57%) believed that their online identity differed from their offline identity suggesting a discrepancy between how they present themselves online versus in real life. Among them, most of the participants were afraid of getting their identities leaked. However, the respondents mentioned that living a 'double life' could be both hectic and exhausting. As one respondent stated:

“

“I can be who I am, I can express my thoughts and feelings online and in dating apps, but offline I am more reserved and stand with the expectation of my family.

~ FGD participant

This statement above suggests the duality many individuals face, highlighting the freedom of self-expression online while conforming to family expectations offline. It emphasizes the need to engage with family members to address and challenge harmful norms. It is possible to create more supportive environments by promoting open dialogue and understanding within families. This will allow individuals to express their true selves both online and offline.

Likewise, another participant reported:

“

In this community, people are afraid of facing reality. They wear masks, that is, they show their real face in one way and show their fake faces online. I have even come across people using other people's photos in different gay apps.

~ FGD participant

Impact on self-esteem and self-acceptance

About two third of the study participants believed that online interactions provided positive feedback to influence their self-esteem and self-acceptance, while about half (48.4%) felt a sense of community and belonging. Access to identity resources (33.7%) and cultural reflection and awareness (24.2%) were also experienced by some of the respondents indicating that online platforms provided valuable support for personal and cultural identity development. As one respondent mentioned:

“

It inspires me and helps me enhance my portfolio, validate myself and helps me to remind that I am enough, capable and inspired just looking at myself.

~ FGD participant



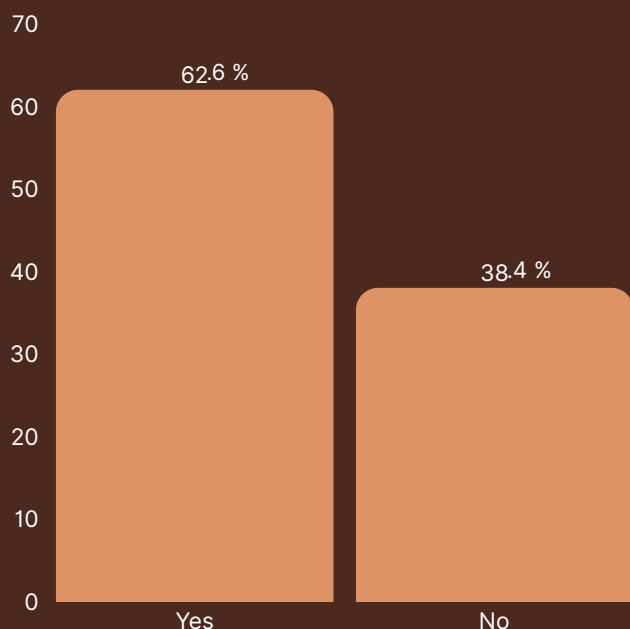
From a more concerning perspective, roughly 23% of the respondents mentioned experiences of cyberbullying, and 18.9% acknowledged engaging in self-comparison with others.

Table 8: Percentage and frequency distribution of respondents by ways online interactions influence self-esteem and self-acceptance.

Category	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Ways online interactions influence self-esteem and self-acceptance		
Positive feedback	63	66.3%
Sense of community and belonging	46	48.4%
Access to Identity Resources	32	33.7%
Comparison with others	18	18.9%
Experiences of cyberbullying	22	23.2%
Cultural Reflection and awareness	23	24.2%

Online acceptance of identity

Only 62.6% (N=62) of the respondents felt that the online community they participated in accepted their identity. However, the fact that over one-third of the respondents did not feel this way indicated that many of them still experienced exclusion or lack of support in digital spaces.



Participants stated the lack of knowledge and awareness in these online communities being the biggest reason for not understanding and accepting their gender identity. As one participant mentioned:

“

The online community needs to be more accepting towards feminine gay, transgender and queer people.

~ FGD participant

Figure 8: Percentage distribution of respondent's by online acceptance of identity.



Impact of abuse and exploitation

During the KII, various perspectives were shared on the impacts of abuse and exploitation. A government official discussed the psychological and social consequences while a social worker highlighted the emotional and legal challenges faced by victims of online abuse.

“

Hate speech and bullying lower their self-confidence and bring about feelings of rejection and discrimination, making them feel excluded from society. These harmful behaviors often lead to long-term psychological trauma and hinder their personal development.

~ KII, government representative



“

During my work, I have come across many cases involving threats of sharing intimate photos online and sexting. These situations can often result in severe emotional distress and legal complications for the victims.

~ KII, Social Worker



Additionally, children and youth also spoke about the impacts of abuse and exploitation, sharing their personal experiences. One FGD participant mentioned, ‘Hate speech and bullying make me feel worthless and scared to express myself.’ Another participant noted, ‘Receiving threats and explicit messages has caused me a lot of anxiety and stress.’ These testimonies illustrate that the effects of abuse and exploitation are deeply felt by children and youth, impacting their mental health and well-being.”

Challenges in finding safe spaces online

Key challenges in finding safe spaces online included lack of trust (73.2%), fear of harassment (70.1%) and privacy concerns (71.1%). Limited access to supportive groups and cultural stigma was also mentioned by almost half (48.5%) of the respondents. This finding to some extent indicated that creating safe online spaces was often hindered by various challenges.

Table 9: Percentage and frequency distribution of respondents by types of challenges in finding safe space online

Category	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Challenges finding safe space online		
Fear of harassment and bullying	68	70.1%
Lack of trust in online communities	71	73.2%
Limited access to supportive groups	47	48.5%
Cultural and social stigmas	47	48.5%
Privacy concerns	69	71.1%

More than two third (68%) of the respondents believed that anonymity of users online made the space feel unsafe for them. Likewise, 54.6% believed that public visibility of posts and 51.5% believed that lack of moderation was the reason they felt unsafe in online media.

Table 10: Percentage and frequency distribution by features that make a space feel unsafe

Category	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Features that makes a space feel unsafe		
Lack of moderation	68	51.5%
Anonymity of users	66	68%
Public visibility of posts	53	54.6%
Inconsistent community guidelines	39	40.2%

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Table 11: Percentage and frequency distribution of respondents by types of challenges in finding safe space online

Category	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Challenges finding safe space online		
Fear of harassment and bullying	68	70.1%
Lack of trust in online communities	71	73.2%
Limited access to supportive groups	47	48.5%
Cultural and social stigmas	47	48.5%
Privacy concerns	69	71.1%

More than two third (68%) of the respondents believed that anonymity of users online made the space feel unsafe for them. Likewise, 54.6% believed that public visibility of posts and 51.5% believed that lack of moderation was the reason they felt unsafe in online media.

Table 12: Percentage and frequency distribution by features that make a space feel unsafe

Category	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Features that makes a space feel unsafe		
Lack of moderation	50	51.5%
Anonymity of users	66	68%
Public visibility of posts	53	54.6%
Inconsistent community guidelines	39	40.2%

Engagement with identity content online

A little over half (52%) of the respondents mentioned engaging with content related to their identity on social media on a daily basis, while 15% rarely did so. Among those who engaged with content in social media, the feeling of being represented and understood made them engage more. Additionally, some participants reported that a willingness to learn more about their gender identities drove them to seek out and engage with these contents. As one participant mentioned:

“

Being aware myself, I engage in contents that make me happy and feel represented. This engagement often helps me connect with others who share similar experiences...this also helps to foster a sense of belonging.

~ FGD participant

Table 13: Percentage and frequency distribution of respondents by engagement with content related to identity on social media

Category	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Engagement with content related to identity on social media		
Daily	52	52%
Weekly	21	21%
Monthly	8	8%
Rarely	15	15%
Never	4	4%

Majority of the respondents (90%) had made friends online who shared similar experiences or identities. The friends who shared similar experiences or identities made the respondents feel included, confident and supported. Most of the participants reported very positive experiences regarding the friends online who shared similar experiences. Examples from the FGD:



A little under half % (N=42) of the participants mentioned that public figures play a role in shaping their understanding of their identity.

Among those who stated that influencers did play a part, most of the participants stated names of pioneers in the field of gender identity in Nepal as being their source of inspiration. Some participants also mentioned famous personalities in social media platforms such as TikTok as being their role models. As one participant stated:

“

I follow 'Sunil Babu Pant' who has helped me to understand my identity through his works in films and movies... Anjali Lama, Sital Pinky Gurung, Bhumika Shrestha have also helped me understand myself.

~ FGD participant

Resource and Support

Over 60% of the respondents utilized online resources or communities that offered support for LGBTIQ+ individuals. The most common platform for respondents to seek support was social media groups (55.8%), followed by support organizations (45.3%) and online forums (44.2%).

Among the most frequently stated organizations which provided support for respondents included Blue Diamond Society (BDS), Cruiseaids, Sathsath and Our Equal Access. A government official in similar lines stated:

“

Organizations such as the Blue Diamond Society (BDS) provide critical services, resources, and advocacy to address the needs and rights of the community.

~ KII government representative

Table 14: Percentage and frequency distribution by information and support sought

Category	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Information and support sought		
Online forums	42	44.2%
Social media groups	53	55.8%
Blogs and websites	30	31.6%
Support organizations	43	45.3%

More than half (55.1%) of the participants felt that there was no adequate support available to them online regarding their identities. Some participants reported that the support materials that were available online, were primarily based in English. This meant that people who were not fluent or familiar with the English language could not get proper support. Many participants also felt that the government should make more resources available in online mediums.

As stated by one respondent:

“

The contents need to be in Nepali or other native languages so that we can be understood and use it better... In Nepal, LGBTIQ+ movie or dramas are very limited, and be very hard to find online as well. So, they're needed in current scenarios.

~ FGD participant

Awareness and Legal considerations

Almost half of the respondents (48%) were not aware of any laws of protections for LGBTIQ+ individuals in Nepal. The gap in knowledge about the laws to a large extent suggests the need for better dissemination of information. Among those who knew about the laws, many of the participants stated the article 12, 18 and 42 in the constitution of Nepal as the clauses that supported the LGBTIQ+ community. Legality of same sex marriage and right to have citizenship being a third gender were also frequently mentioned. Awareness is crucial to learn how to use online platforms in a constructive way.

“

It is essential to educate them about safe online practices and how to identify trustworthy individuals. Further, teaching them to recognize and report suspicious activities can further enhance online safety.

~ KII, cyber bureau official

Recommendations by Respondents

An overwhelming majority of the participants 92% believed that the government should take actions to improve the online safety of LGBTIQ+ individuals. This finding indicates a significant consensus among the participants in relation to the need for government interventions in enhancing online safety. Increasing awareness related to the community, implementing privacy protections and creating safe spaces online were some of the suggestions given by the participants.

While participants expressed the need for government action, the level of trust in government varied. Some expressed confidence in the government's action whereas others were skeptical about the commitment of governmental measures. This to a large extent reveals a mixed level of trust and highlights the importance of transparent and inclusive policymaking to address these concerns effectively.

Table 12: Percentage and frequency distribution of respondents by recommendations for the government agencies

Category	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Recommendations		
Create safe spaces online	86	86%
Enhance resource accessibility	76	76%
Mental health support	81	81%
Implement privacy protections	86	86%

Conclusions & Recommendations

This section attempts to outline some of the key conclusions derived from this study based on which recommendations are proposed. It is largely aimed at providing a comprehensive overview that highlights the significant trends, challenges and opportunities identified during the research. These insights are addressed by the recommendations offering actionable steps to enhance the experiences and well-being of the respondents. This is to ensure that the conclusions not only encapsulate the core outcomes of the study but also pave the way for meaningful and impactful interventions.

- The demographic analysis of the study participants revealed a youthful, predominantly unmarried population with diverse sexual orientations and ethnic backgrounds. This diversity indicates the need for inclusive policies and support systems that are tailored to the needs of LGBTIQ+ individuals in Nepal. This diverse nature of the participants underscores the importance of addressing the specific challenges and requirements of different sub-groups within the LGBTIQ+ community.
- The study indicated the huge role that social media platforms are playing in the digital lives of the respondents with dating apps gaining notable popularity. Hence, it is suggested to enhance digital literacy programs and online safety initiatives to ensure that individuals can navigate social media platforms and dating applications securely. This will foster safer and more engaging online communities for diverse age groups in Nepal.
- The significant average daily time of 6.755 hours spent on digital media indicated the urgency to promote digital well-being by encouraging healthy and balanced digital habits.
- Connecting with friends and family was revealed as the most prevalent online activity. Other key activities included watching videos and streaming content, exploring LGBTIQ+ content and educational pursuits. It could thus be useful to develop and promote diverse, inclusive and educational online content. These initiatives will foster social connections, support identity exploration, and encourage creativity and skill development among users.
- The study revealed a huge discomfort among respondents in sharing their gender online. Therefore, it is recommended to lobby for more inclusive and supportive environments on the digital media platforms. This allows individuals to express their gender identity freely without fear or discrimination.

- Grindr, Blued and Tinder emerged as most commonly used dating apps among the study participants. Thus it is advised to develop and support initiatives that can promote safe inclusive practices on these dating platforms. These could include enhanced privacy features, inclusive language options, support groups and forums etc.
- The finding suggested that a vast majority of respondents are using the internet to meet potential romantic partners. It is thus crucial to enhance safety features on dating platforms such as strong verification processes, transparent policies, user feedback and regular audits and updates etc. To this end, NGOs including WYESHR can lobby for these initiatives by engaging with the platform developers and public awareness campaigns.
- The analysis showed that a significant proportion of individuals did not feel supported in digital space while expressing their gender identity. Targeted awareness campaigns therefore could be crucial in fostering more supportive online environment.
- There was a significant gap between awareness and formal education regarding the terms 'abuse' and 'exploitation'. Integrating detailed education on these topics into the school curriculum could be important in not only raising awareness but also ensuring students are well-informed about these critical issues.
- Verbal harassment was the most common type of abuse experienced by participants, followed by sexting and doxing. Other forms of abuse included cyberbullying, discrimination, body shaming, blackmail, and extortion. Furthermore, the study participants reported other types of exploitation and abuse mainly including grooming, producing and sharing of sexual abuse materials (CSAM), sextortion, AI-generated CSAM, and livestreaming abuse. It is therefore suggested that comprehensive policies and support systems be implemented to address the wide range of online abuses. For implementation purposes, the priority should be given to creating safer online environments and providing resources for individuals affected by these abuses.
- The finding suggests that a significant portion of respondents deal with online abuse regularly. This warrants the implementation of robust measures to prevent and address online abuse, including enhanced reporting mechanisms and support systems. Additionally, it is recommended to provide training to law enforcement agencies on handling cases of online abuses effectively and sensitively.

- It is suggested to educate parents and caregivers on recognizing signs of online abuses and a process on supporting their children effectively. Additionally, teachers and community teachers to be trained to foster safe online practices and provide guidance on cyber security.
 - The finding of the study highlighted high prevalence of abuse on dating apps and social media. This emphasized the need for targeted safety measures and support systems which could be achieved through a number of activities including (but not limited to): i. identifying risks and threat; ii. regular monitoring; and ii. collaboration with law enforcement agencies.
 - A significant majority of respondents did not report the abuse they experienced online, indicating a potential issue with underreporting or hesitance to seek assistance. It is therefore crucial to enhance reporting mechanisms and support services across all platforms, including social media and dedicated organizations, to encourage and facilitate the reporting of online abuse
- Conclusion
- The study finding suggested that a significant number of individuals are dealing with abuse or negative encounters without seeking support. This calls for enhanced awareness about available support services and encourage help-seeking behavior among individuals experiencing online abuse. These activities will ensure individuals know how and where to seek assistance effectively.
 - A significant proportion of respondents believed their online identity differed from their offline identity, indicating a discrepancy between how they present themselves online versus in real life. It could be useful developing and promoting secure online environments that protect users' identities and privacy, enabling individuals to express their true selves without fear of exposure or judgment. It is at the same time crucial to provide resources and support for managing the challenges of maintaining different identities online and offline.
 - About two-thirds of the study participants believed that online interactions provided positive feedback, enhancing their self-esteem and self-acceptance. It is thus advised to promote positive and supportive online environments by providing resources (mental health support, anti-cyberbullying initiatives, social media campaigns etc.) that enhance self-esteem and community building while implementing strict measures to reduce cyberbullying and harmful comparisons.

- Over one-third of the respondents experienced exclusion or lack of support in digital spaces. Therefore, it is suggested to enhance the inclusivity of online communities by implementing policies and features that support and affirm diverse identities, ensuring all users feel accepted and valued.
- Key challenges in finding safe spaces online included lack of trust, fear of harassment and privacy concerns. Developing robust safety measures and community guidelines can be important to build trust, reduce harassment, and address privacy concerns on online platforms. Additionally, increase access to supportive groups and work to reduce cultural stigma to create more inclusive and safe digital spaces.
- A little over half of the respondents mentioned engaging with content related to their identity on social media daily, while some rarely did so. Therefore, it is suggested to provide resources and content that support identity exploration and learning about gender identities.
- The majority of respondents had made friends online who shared similar experiences or identities. These connections made them feel included, confident, and supported, with most participants reporting very positive experiences regarding these friendships. It can be useful to develop online communities that support individuals with shared experiences or identities, fostering inclusive and positive environments where users can build supportive friendships.
- Only some participants mentioned that public figures play a role in shaping their understanding of their identity. Influencers, particularly pioneers in the field of gender identity in Nepal and famous personalities on social media platforms like TikTok, serve as sources of inspiration for these individuals. It can be helpful to encourage public figures and influencers to actively support and engage with LGBTIQ+ communities, using their platforms to promote understanding and acceptance of diverse identities.
- Almost half of the respondents were not aware of any laws protecting LGBTIQ+ individuals in Nepal, indicating a significant gap in the dissemination of information. The legality of same-sex marriage and the right to have citizenship as a third gender were also frequently noted. Awareness is crucial for constructive use of online platforms. It is thus suggested to improve the dissemination of information regarding laws protecting LGBTIQ+ individuals, ensuring that all community members are aware of their rights. Educational initiatives should focus on raising awareness and understanding of these legal protections.

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For further information contact :
Budhathoki Neeta
Project Officer - Nepal
Terre des Hommes Netherlands
b.neeta@tdh.nl

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