

# POLITICIZING ‘THE VIRTUAL’

## Examining the Internet on the Intersections of Gender and Sexuality in Sri Lanka

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### Introduction

The internet has become an important space for the circulation of different forms of speech, from text to audio-visual content; and its proliferation has also generated numerous challenges. Today, various forms of harmful speech, from direct incitements to violence to forms of denigration, including those based on gender and sexuality circulate in the virtual landscape. This has had different and disproportionate implications for women and queer Sri Lankans.<sup>1</sup>

In this chapter, we review existing literature that traces how forms of violence that exist offline permeate into the realm of the virtual. We look at the ways in which majoritarian politics, patriarchy, and heteronormativity surface online and what this means for women and queer Sri Lankans. Additionally, we will also examine the ways in which women and queer Sri Lankans appear to be working on and through these platforms to resist these exclusionary power structures. In doing so, our intention is to highlight the complex ways in which the virtual is characterized by violence, inequality, and injustice (on the downside), as well as community, solidarity, resistance, pleasure, and joy (on the upside). More specifically, we do this, by considering the following questions: In what ways is access to the internet in Sri Lanka mediated by gender and sexuality? How does sexual gender-based violence circulate online and what forms of exclusion does it produce? How do women and queer Sri Lankans negotiate these challenges and use the internet as a space to resist and subvert dominant societal norms?

As there is limited scholarship written on the subject with a focus on Sri Lanka, we also use journalistic and policy accounts in our review. Existing writings largely focus on the Global North, although there are important interventions in India (see [Arora and Scheiber 2017](#); [Gupta 2020](#); [Bhandari and Kovacs 2021](#); [Roy and Deshbandhu 2021](#)). We also make the case for the need for similar studies in Sri Lanka.

### The Internet as a Site of Inequality

We start by examining anxieties, vilification, and violence faced by women and queer Sri Lankans in the digital world by summarizing key developments and debates about the internet, especially social media, as a site of violence. According to available data, over 50% of Sri Lanka’s population

uses the internet, is digitally literate, and uses different social media platforms with Facebook and Youtube being the most popular. Meanwhile, the number of sim cards in circulation within the island significantly exceeds the country's population (149.9%), largely due to many people possessing multiple cellular connections (TRCSL 2022). Within such a context, the mobile phone remains the primary device (78%) used to access the internet by Sri Lankans followed by personal computers (12%) (Galpaya, Zainudeen and Amarasinghe 2019). These figures have further risen in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic during which using digital platforms was often needed to access basic services.

Despite these developments, there is a stark 'digital divide' between the 52.6% of the population that has access to the internet and the 48.4% of the population that does not (Galpaya et al 2019; Data Portal 2022). This divide is mediated by, among other factors, class, location, language, gender, disability, age, sexuality as well as levels of education and digital literacy. People occupying multiple disadvantaged subjectivities face the brunt of these disparities in access. For instance, internet usage was lowest among rural elderly women with low levels of income and education (Galpaya et al 2019).

The cost, both of procuring and maintaining digital devices as well as accessing broadband internet, remains the primary factor in determining the degree of access (Galpaya et al 2019). The price of accessing one gigabyte of the internet is not affordable for 60% of Sri Lanka's population (ibid). Further, some Sri Lankans may have fully or partially controlled access to the internet via devices which may be owned by others, including parents, spouses, or places of work. Trans and gender non-conforming Sri Lankans may face additional barriers when procuring and accessing devices and services. For instance, due to stipulated documentary evidence of identity for purchasing new broadband or mobile connections, salespersons may refuse the sale of the same to those whose appearance and gender performance do not 'match' their appearance in their identity documents (Deshapriya et al 2017: 63).

Meanwhile, language, a historically complex political issue which has delineated existing social fault lines in Sri Lanka, is another factor which shapes access to online spaces. The country's Official Language Policy mandates that all state communication be made in Sinhala, Tamil, and English; yet there are significant gaps in the implementation of this policy. This also applies to official government communications made online, including public health messaging during the Covid-19 lockdowns. Further, English proficiency remains important to access and navigate the internet in Sri Lanka despite tools such as Unicode fonts and Google translator has improved levels of access. Some Sri Lankans have navigated these gaps in technology, by resorting to transliterating Sinhala (Singlish) and Tamil (Tanglish) using the English (Latin) script.

Sri Lanka was the first country in South Asia to introduce 4G mobile internet in 2012. President Gotabaya Rajapaksa said he plans to make Sri Lanka 'digitally inclusive' by 2024, including through the development of a high-speed optical transmission system and 5G mobile broadband internet (Vistas of Prosperity 2019). It is important to reflect on what it means for a country to be 'truly' digitally inclusive. Technological expansion needs to be coupled with equitable access to electricity and technology, along with other basic needs, to the most marginalized in our communities. There also need to be efforts to address the underlying forms of marginalization, including poverty, majoritarianism, patriarchy, and heteronormativity. Otherwise, the Sri Lankan case shows that technology, which is often touted as a leveller of existing inequalities, is also an amplifier of these same forms of marginalization, inequality, and injustice.

### **The Internet as a Site for Violence**

Feminist scholarship on technology and the internet has long argued that the online/offline binary is inadequate as online technologies are enmeshed within the inequalities, injustices, and violence pervading our (offline) world (Shaw 2014; Henry and Powell 2015). In recent years, harmful and dangerous speech on social media platforms, including online hate speech, disinformation as well as forms of harassment, have become a pervasive force within Sri Lankan online spaces. Sri Lanka has a history of online hate speech, especially anti-Muslim hate speech, that has led to violence on the ground (Samaratunge and Hattotuwa 2014). How this kind of speech has impacted the country's electoral politics, especially by stifling healthy debate, skewing public opinion on key issues, and generating mistrust between people and communities is well documented. For instance, Hashtag Generation has revealed that coordinated disinformation narratives emerging in online spaces (including from overseas) gained substantive traction among voters in the run-up to and during Sri Lanka's 2019 Presidential Election and 2020 Parliamentary Election (Hashtag Generation 2019, 2020). In Sri Lanka, as elsewhere in the world, much of this type of content is also profoundly gendered and sexualized.

Outspoken women, queer people, politicians, human rights defenders, journalists, and celebrities are disproportionately targeted by online sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). This represents a major threat to these groups' participation in public life. A study by Hashtag Generation (2022) analysed harmful comments received by 11 women in public life to understand how their participation in public life has put them at a greater risk of harmful speech on social media; found trolling, to be the most common form of harmful speech experienced by these women. In some situations, incessant torrents of abuse prompted some to withdraw from political life and have also deterred others from entering politics. Sri Lanka has some of the lowest rates for women's representation in political office in the world, and there are no openly queer politicians holding elected office (Wickramasinghe and Kodikara 2012).

Online and offline developments often inform, influence and bleed into each other. For example, in May 2021, viral SGBV content circulated online when a group including model Piumi Hansamali was sent in for mandatory quarantine for violating Covid19 quarantine regulations in May 2021 for hosting a birthday party at a luxury hotel in Colombo. An adept, savvy and strategic media user herself, she was extremely vocal about the events on her social media platforms and broadcasted her criticism on a Facebook live video. This video was widely circulated on social media and subsequently resulted in a barrage of sexist and misogynistic language, such as prostitute, porn star, being directed at Hansamali on social media (Hashtag Generation 2021). Research shows that such online conversations inspired by offline developments attract a large amount of attention from Sri Lankan internet users but generally do not last over two weeks (Hashtag Generation 2021).

The most frequent form of harmful speech women public figures faced was trolling, followed by misogynistic and sexist speech, indicating a range in intensity and intentionality of online hate. The harm that women politicians faced most extensively was discrediting comments which were made by men in many cases (Hashtag Generation 2022). The nature and the extent of violence faced by women and queer subjects may also depend on the social media platform in question. For instance, Perera and Wijetunga (2019) have contended that 'when compared to platforms, such as YouTube where gender ambiguity or femme-presentation is often met with heavy hostility, the hostility on TikTok was significantly less'. Despite these differences among platforms, according to the Sri Lanka Computer Emergency Readiness Team (SLCERT), the state institution responsible

for cyber security, there has been a 460% increase in the number of complaints related to cyber security breaches received in 2020 in comparison with the previous year (Wanniarachchi 2022).

While SGBV manifests in different forms online, the non-consensual dissemination of intimate content, popularly known as ‘leaks’, is one of the most widespread forms of online SGBV faced by Sri Lankan internet users. ‘Leaks’ may include the unauthorized dissemination of images, videos and screengrabs and audio recordings of private conversations. Previous research demonstrates that in Sri Lanka, there is an ecosystem of social media pages and groups created with the explicit intent of routinely collecting and sharing non-consensual intimate images, especially of women, and gender non-conforming people including minors (Hashtag Generation 2022). The dissemination of this type of content, or the threat of dissemination, is often made alongside intimidation and/or ‘blackmail’ of the subjects that are featured therein and/or their family and friends. The blackmailing comes with specific demands; for example, to grant or not grant a divorce to a spouse or demands for sex or more intimate content to be shared.

A survey by Women in Need (2022), a Sri Lankan NGO focused on responding to gender-based violence, revealed that nearly one in four Sri Lankans ‘knew of a friend who experienced online harassment of a sexual nature. Meanwhile, one in five Sri Lankans reported knowing of someone who had edited, doctored or photoshopped images that were subsequently shared on the internet’ (2022: 5). This underlines a violent normalization of the dissemination of this type of content in public spaces. Research also shows that while many internet users may not actively ‘share’ this type of content on their personal social media handles, many still ‘view’ them (Women in Need 2022: 5).

Deshan, a gay man interviewed for the study, *Disrupting the Binary, Experiences of LGBT Sri Lankans Online* (Deshapriya et al 2017: 46), shared an experience where he feared having his device repaired:

I have a tab where the screen broke recently. But I can’t give it to be repaired, because it has all the pictures of my vows’ ceremony with my partner. I am scared that the pictures will go public if I gave it to someone to repair.

Such fear of potential non-consensual dissemination of an intimate event where Deshan and his partner held a vows ceremony in the presence of their friends and family committing to be with each other is symptomatic of the daily negotiations queer Sri Lankans are forced to make. Partly this reflects how laws from the British Colonial period are often interpreted in ways that criminalize non-heteronormative sex and sex work. Sections 365 and 365A of the country’s Penal Code criminalize ‘gross indecency’ and ‘carnal intercourse against the order of nature’. These provisions have been interpreted to criminalize non-penovaginal sex. Meanwhile, the country’s Penal Code provisions on ‘cheating by personation ... or pretending to be another person’ are often used to prosecute and harass its transgender and non-binary residents. These laws and others, such as the Obscene Publications Ordinance, all have a bearing on access and security as many users may decide to reveal and conceal different aspects of their identity due to fear of reprisal and harassment. As Jayasinghe (2021: 5) says, ‘in a country like Sri Lanka, where queer identities are criminalized [...] the shadows the internet casts are darker, the elations found therein more intense’.

Women, and queer people, therefore, may be at a higher risk of facing control and regulation when accessing the internet (Deshapriya et al 2017; Women in Need 2020). For instance, in the Women in Need (WIN) study, of the 1533 people surveyed 52.9% of the women respondents said they shared the passwords of their devices with an intimate partner at least once, while 41.3% of men had done the same.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, 44.3% of women had shared the login details of their Facebook

account with their intimate partner, as opposed to 31.8% of men who had done the same ([Women in Need 2020](#): 6). While the decision to share access to their online accounts with an intimate partner, may appear a personal one, it is very likely that for many individuals, these decisions are mediated by unequal power relations that exist within intimate relationships, within family and kin.

Many cases of online SGBV reported were perpetrated by an intimate partner. An example cited in the WIN study notes the following:

Surani's husband had opened her facebook account and given her a smartphone, even though she hardly used it. Her husband eventually used Surani's Facebook account to spread false rumours about Surani having an affair with another man and living a 'free' life. It is ultimately posts, such as these circulated among her friends and colleagues that concern Surani who is a teacher by profession. She is concerned that these pictures and accusations might lead to her losing her job in a leading Provincial school. As a single mother of two young girl children, this was one of her greatest concerns. Because Surani's husband used her own Facebook account to spread these rumours, many of her friends also believed the content

*(Women in Need 2020: 35–36)*

This form of intimate violence, control, and surveillance are informed by patriarchal notions, such as 'sexual purity', 'familial reputation', 'respectability', and 'marriagability' ([de Alwis 2009](#); [Abeyasekera 2021](#)). Seen this way, it becomes apparent that dominant patriarchal and heteronormative frameworks are mediated and re-mediated via technologies, such as the smartphone and social media handles.

Regulation and surveillance enforced within relationships, families, and communities can be read as existing on the same continuum as regulations enforced by the state and large social media conglomerates that profit from these viral interactions. In Sri Lanka, in May 2019, there were at least three internet shutdowns in the aftermath of the Easter Sunday attacks and the anti-Muslim violence that followed, including a nationwide block that lasted nine days ([Freedom House 2022](#)). Identity theft, especially in the form of 'fake profiles' on social media platforms, is also common. Contradictorily, attempts to respond to fake profiles also negatively affected transgender and gender non-conforming people whose Facebook profile names may not match the names identified in their official documents, such as National Identity Cards or utility bills. Despite these barriers, queer people prefer to utilize 'fake profiles' to meet and interact with other queer people and potential intimate or romantic partners. For example, Rajesh, interviewed in [Deshapriya et al \(2017\)](#), mentioned how he maintains two profiles – one for his family and another for other queer folks.

Along with the normalization of online SGBV, there is also a culture of 'victim-blaming' that correspondingly arises. The survey by WIN found that 34.2% agreed with the statement that 'both the person who sent the picture as well as the person who shared the picture is to blame', although this was gendered: 43.8% of men agreed as opposed to 34.2% of women (WIN 2020: 38). The results show how patriarchal attitudes manifest across gender differences. The results of the WIN Study are in line with the findings of previous research on gender inequitable attitudes ([de Mel et al 2013](#)). In one study, more than 2/3rd of the female respondents affirmed that 'in any rape case, one would have to question whether the victim is promiscuous or has a bad reputation'.

The normalization of online SGBV has also impacted the ways in which social media users interact with each other in online spaces. Studies have found for instance that men (55.6%) are more likely to accept 'friend requests' from a stranger on social media compared to women (17%), send more friend requests to strangers (51.7%) than women (8.9%), and share more personal information with people they meet online (29.2%) than women (19.7%) ([Women in Need 2020](#)).

Women and queer people also appear to take various steps to ensure their safety online, including moving between online platforms when the threat to safety is detected, limiting access, or completely restricting family members and relatives from personal profiles, limiting engagement in public conversations related to sexuality and disengaging or not commenting on posts of family members with opposing views (Deshapriya et al 2017: 50).

Along with the normalization of online SGBV as well as the widespread prevalence of victim-blaming and onus put on those at risk, there is also a culture of impunity enjoyed by the perpetrators of this type of violence. One study titled which surveyed 103 Sri Lankans found that 90% of the respondents who faced online SGBV reported the content to the social media platform but did not seek any form of legal redress (Perera and Ibrahim 2021). While legal provisions in the Penal Code and other laws, including the Computer Crimes Act, may be relied on to act against perpetrators, the lack of awareness surrounding these issues, including among law enforcement officials, coupled with a general mistrust in the legal system plus long delays in court proceedings have disincentivized many people from seeking legal action.

Recently, due to advocacy by civil society organizations and global outrage and condemnation, especially in relation to anti-Muslim violence, social media intermediaries, such as Facebook, have taken some action by recruiting more local content moderators and improving automated detection (Wanniarachchi 2022). However, these steps appear to be largely focused on ethnoreligious harmful speech, while moderating gendered and sexualized content does not receive the same level of urgency. This is perhaps because gender and sexuality-based violence often does not erupt in a single moment in the same way that an ethnoreligious riot does and often does not receive the same level of global media coverage and condemnation. Improvements in the enforcement of Community Standards by Social Media intermediaries have also compelled those disseminating SGBV content to seek alternative channels, such as instant messaging services, including Whatsapp.

However, it is important to acknowledge that it is often not possible to distinguish ethnoreligious dangerous speech from gendered and sexualized dangerous speech. As many Sri Lankan feminist scholars have shown, ethnonationalism in Sri Lanka, as is elsewhere, is inherently a gendered project (see de Mel 2001; de Alwis 2004). It is therefore unsurprising that ethnoreligious dangerous speech is often gendered and sexualized. Contemporaneously gendered and sexualized dangerous speech can also circulate based on ethnoreligious grounds. For instance, in March 2021 anti-Muslim conversations, which emerged when the government announced that it intends to ban full-face veils in public places, were simultaneously ethnonationalist and gendered, with Muslim women, the niqab, and hijab often being referred to in derogatory terms.

As new online platforms emerge or as old platforms add new features in their attempts to 'stay relevant', new avenues also emerge for the circulation of harmful and dangerous speech online. Online abuse can elicit feelings of fear, shame, and guilt and can do real and lasting damage to the targets' mental, emotional, and physical health and well-being (Association for Progressive Communications 2017: 4). In the long term, online abuse and violence also work together to buttress forms of inequality and injustice that gendered and sexualized subjects have 'always' faced in Sri Lanka.

### **The Internet as a Site of Resistance**

The previous section discussed how social media has emerged as a site of violence for women and queer Sri Lankans. Yet, this is only a partial analysis of social media's impact on the lives of these groups. Women and queer Sri Lankans are not only victims/survivors of violence, but also use these same spaces to resist, challenge, and contest exclusionary articulations of power, including patriarchy, heteronormativity, and majoritarianism. Thus, in this section, we direct our analytical

gaze at the ways in which the internet, especially social media, has been reclaimed by women and queer Sri Lankans as a site of resistance, pleasure, and joy.

We begin with the #MeToo Movement. #MeToo was a campaign that activist Tarana Burke began in 2006 to support women of colour from underprivileged communities who experienced rape or sexual assault. It gained viral momentum globally in 2017 following a tweet made by actress Alyssa Milano calling women who have experienced sexual harassment and/or sexual assault to use the hashtag on their social media platforms (Amarasuriya 2021). This led to conversations on sexual violence receiving 'viral' attention among internet users, especially in, but not limited to, the West. Four years later, a tweet by a Sri Lankan woman journalist sparked conversations on sexual violence faced by Sri Lankan women in the workplace, especially in newsrooms and media institutions (Srinivasan 2021). Her tweet on being subjected to sexual harassment by a male colleague at her workplace induced more women to talk about their own experiences of sexual harassment on social media, especially Twitter (Al Jazeera 2021). These online events stirred offline discussions as well, among policymakers, the media, and civil society.

In response, a statement was issued by the then Government Spokesperson and Minister of Mass Media Keheliya Rambukwella who instructed the Government Information Department to launch an investigation into the reports and to take measures to ensure that women journalists were safe in the newsrooms (de Visser 2021). Further, some digital media organizations, such as Roar Global, and civil society organizations, such as Hashtag Generation, voiced the need for accountability and introspection within media and civil society spaces. In a context where survivors of sexual violence may not receive redress from law enforcement in their workplaces, the internet generated space to bring attention to not only individual experiences of harassment but also the cultures of impunity and patronage that protect harassers.

Additionally, Sri Lankan feminist and queer activists also use social media to join global campaigns on different issues to make transnational connections on experiences of injustice and express solidarity across borders. '16 Days of Activism Against Gender Based Violence' is an example of a global campaign that has piqued interest in Sri Lanka bringing together more institutional actors.<sup>3</sup> Such campaigns bring together grassroots feminist and queer organizations, International Organizations, NGOs, the Government, and the private sector together to raise awareness on SGBV. Advocacy initiatives taken by these actors as part of this campaign have also involved online spaces that utilized poster campaigns, livestreaming (offline) events, webinars, and online discussions. Similarly, 'Take back the Tech' 2022 is another global campaign, initiated by The Association for Progressive Communications – Women's Rights Programme, which specifically focuses on online violence and offers information and tools for those targeted to stay safe online. Research also shows that the internet is used by sexual rights activists for the purposes of 'outreach, community-building, advocacy, and sexual expression of women and queer experiences of pleasure and desire' (Valle 2021: 630).

For queer Sri Lankans, the internet has become a space to learn, meet others like them, express themselves, find a sense of community and access livelihood opportunities (Perera and Ibrahim 2021). It has also provided a space which is used to subvert gender roles and expectations through, among other things, dress, and dance (Perera and Wijetunga 2019). For instance, over 50% of the respondents of the study by Perera and Ibrahim (2021) agreed that 'access to the internet has changed their understanding of gender and sexuality and their perceptions of those of different genders and sexuality' (2021: 10). Furthermore, existing research on the online engagements of lesbian and bisexual women in Sri Lanka shows that online platforms can serve as 'information tools', 'social networking tools', and 'advocacy tools' (WMC 2017: 87). An older gay man who had grown up in a time before the internet, interviewed by the study *Disrupting the Binary Code*:

Experiences of LGBT Sri Lankans Online, said he was ‘completely unaware of homosexuality as a phenomenon’, recalling how he had believed for a long time that his same-sex sexual attraction was unique and that he was the ‘only person in the world’ to be going through the experience. It was only after he stumbled across the entry for ‘homosexuality’ in an encyclopaedia ... that he came to appreciate the ‘commonness’ of his nature (Deshapriya et al 2017: 30).

Today, many queer Sri Lankans who can access the internet are more likely to be aware of global and Sri Lankan discourse on LGBTIQ+ rights. An important caveat here is that not all information available online is reliable or accurate, raising important questions on the importance of digital, media, and information literacy.

In Sri Lanka, public spaces where even heterosexual partners can be intimate with each other are often policed. In such a context, queer Sri Lankans have extremely limited safe spaces to meet others like them, especially with the threat of arrest, exposure, and intimidation looming. Many of the spaces that do exist, such as tolerant hotels, also often tend to be classed and may not be accessible to a vast majority of queer people. Countless such spaces may also only be accessible to able-bodied persons.<sup>4</sup> ‘Cruising locations’ are spaces where queer people, especially gay and bisexual men, meet others like them. However, encounters at such spaces have been described as generally ‘hurried, spontaneous, anonymous, with the main (if not the only) purpose of the encounter being the performance of a sexual act’ leaving little room for the formation of longer-term relationships and friendships (Deshapriya et al 2017: 46). While there are also many ‘community gatherings’ organized by NGOs and other organizations, many queer people may not be able or may choose not to attend these for various reasons. Within such a context, the internet, especially social media as well as dating and ‘hook-up’ applications, have provided spaces to find potential intimate partners and engage in forms of technology facilitate forms of intimacy, such as sexting, sharing erotic images, videos with each other, and so on.

Older queer organizers and activists say that they had to largely rely on snail mail and telephone calls to contact potential participants for their events. These are also largely unsafe options as a family member or housemate could open a letter or pick up a call (Deshapriya et al 2017: 48). Today, queer organizations use social media to disseminate informational content on various issues including human rights and sexual health. Further, in a context where representations of intimacy and desire in the mainstream press are largely heteronormative and cis-normative and the few representations that exist, exist only as further harmful stereotypes about these communities, the internet allows queer people to access information about queer news, history, art, politics, healthcare, and so on and engage in forms of self-representation. Furthermore, women and queer people are also able to strategically use various inbuilt features of social media applications such as privacy settings, unfriending, blocking, reporting breaches to the respective platforms, as well as deactivating or deleting their accounts to ensure their safety, security and as Butler (2022) says ‘the liveability of life’.

## **Conclusion**

Through this brief analysis of existing studies and literature, we have attempted to explore the ways in which women and queer people in Sri Lanka work on, with and through the internet. What the analysis demonstrates is that women and queer Sri Lankans are not just mere victims/survivors in distress on the internet. While the internet has reproduced various forms of violence, inequality, and injustice that these subjects also experience offline, this is only half of the story. The reality is a much more complex and ambivalent one where these subjects also use the internet to learn, meet like-minded others, organize themselves around issues that affect them and that they care about,



express themselves, expose perpetrators of violence and of course, share laughter, pleasure, and joy with one another.

It is clear then that gender and sexuality have a significant, yet largely under-documented and under-investigated importance to technology broadly and the internet more specifically. Future research could also examine, among other things, the gendered and sexualized dimensions of platform design and infrastructure, algorithms, surveillance, the extraction and commodification of data, monopolistic forms of corporate platform ownership and the use of dating and 'hook-up' applications among other developments.

### Notes

- 1 The term queer has been used as a slur, a theoretical foundation, an identity marker as well as a call to action. In Sri Lanka, the term queer has not received widespread traction, largely because variations of the acronym LGBTIQ+ have been used by NGOs and other policy and human rights actors. We use 'queer' to refer to those with non-normative sexualities and genders to push back on the more dominant LGBTIQ+. However, as we do this, we remain reflexive of the limitations of the term queer itself, especially in relation to questions of translation, activism, and movement building in Sri Lanka and beyond.
- 2 The sample included nearly equal numbers of men and women (772 women and 761 men).
- 3 The 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence is an international campaign originating from the first Women's Global Leadership Institute 1991 that has since been active between November 25, the International Day Against Violence Against Women, and December 10, International Human Rights Day ("From Awareness to Accountability | Global 16 Days Campaign", 2022).
- 4 In this study we do not focus on the lived realities of Sri Lankans with disabilities, although there is an important need for further research into this area.

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