

HATE SPEECH

SPREADS LIKE
WILDFIRE

**SURVEY ANALYSIS ON HATE SPEECH
AGAINST THE LGBTQI++ COMMUNITY IN
THE MENA REGION**





**Dedicated to
Sarah Hegazi
and all those who were abducted by hate**





**TRIGGER
WARNING**

"The following report includes examples of digital hate speech experienced by the LGBTQI+ in the MENA region. This content is disturbing, so we encourage everyone to emotionally prepare themselves before proceeding. If you believe that the reading will be traumatizing to you, then you may choose to forgo it."

INTRODUCTION

In the past decade, an increasing number of national and international developments concerning the fundamental rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual and intersex (LGBTQI++) persons were attained. The criteria for non-discrimination and equality for LGBTQI++ persons have been enhanced and strengthened by the United Nations. Sexual orientation and gender identity have been increasingly recognized as a basis for discrimination in legislation. Today, the position of the LGBTQI++ persons on an international level is no longer a marginal issue, but rather a recognized concern of human rights.

Given the lack of accessible data on hate speech targeting the LGBTQI++ in the Middle East and North Africa region, ANKH, in collaboration with LGBT in Arabic, Bedayaa organization, Mesahat Foundation and Barat Al Soor Initiative launched an online survey on hate speech against the LGBTQI++ community. The survey was released on the 2nd of July 2020. 450 respondents participated in the survey providing us with a number of comparable data.

The results have strongly raised a number of concerns; more than two-thirds of the sample (77.3%) mentioned that they experienced hate speech and personal harassment on the basis of SOGIESC during the weeks prior to the survey. The majority of these individuals mentioned that the threat of violence occurred in part or in whole, either as members of the LGBTQI++ community or as supporters.

Thus, this report aims to identify, monitor and analyze the data on digital hate speech targeting LGBTQI++ persons and supporters in the MENA region. The report also includes a number of recommendations to combat the issue; within a framework that promotes and protects the right to freedom of expression. Furthermore, while the report is guided by the results of the survey, a lot of evidence shows how digital hate speech has intensified once more. The impact of hate waves and patterns on the LGBTQI++ community is significant, and in some cases, leads to death like in the case of the gay activist Sarah Hegazy. Hate speech is always an omen of immense atrocities. Hence, it is our role as human rights defenders to tackle the issue in this report.

Introductions on participating organizations



Bedayaa Organization

Bedayaa works on the rights of sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sexual characteristics in the Nile Valley Area (Egypt and Sudan). Bedayaa also focuses on the issues intersecting with gender, sexuality, body rights, psychological and sexual health, legal aid and emergency response, capacity building, documentation, media and advocacy.

ANKH Association

ANKH Association (Arab Network for Knowledge about Human Rights) was established in 2018 by a group of human rights defenders based in Egypt or moved to France due to the difficult conditions there. ANKH was established to assist and support the rights of minorities in the Euro-Mediterranean region. It focuses on topics such as human rights in the Arab world and Europe, migrants, LGBTQI++ persons, persons with HIV..etc

Mesahat Foundation

Mesahat was established on Sep 5th, 2015 to work on identifying and reducing security risks, eliminating the social obstacles faced by sexual and gender minorities in the Nile Valley Area (Egypt & Sudan), and creating appropriate means and tools for queer activists to carry on their work safely and contribute to building nourished and effective queer societies.



Barra Al Sour Initiative

Barra Al Sour is a queer feminist initiative that works to combat violence against queer and gender conforming women; merging their issues as one cause without discrimination to shed light on women's struggles and put an end to gender-based violence.



LGBT بالعربي

LGBT بالعربي seeks to publish reliable information on sexual orientations and gender identities supported by scientific resources, in addition to publishing global and regional LGBTQI++ news and activities in Arabic and English.

03| Report: Hate Speech Spreads Like Wildfire

This data provides policymakers with a deep analytical discourse to form effective laws and policies to combat discriminatory and violent hate speech, thus ensuring equal treatment across society. Therefore, ANKH, in collaboration with LGBT بالعربي, designed and implemented an online survey. The survey gathered responses from 450 LGBTQI++ Arabic speakers persons and community supporters. After the survey questions and answers were presented, this report was drafted based on the main results, providing recommendations with the consultation of organizations working on the ground.

The main objective is to ensure that the digital world, including social media, is a safe environment that respects, protects and fulfills the fundamental rights of LGBTQI++ persons. This report also provides an opportunity for corporations, organization, and policymakers to develop adequate policies to reduce digital hate speech. The report explains the nature of hate speech against LGBTQI++ persons and their supporters, and the impact on Arabic-speaking individuals in the MENA region.

WHY IS THIS REPORT IMPORTANT?

The report consists of four sections:

- **Section 1:** to summarize the methodology of the questionnaire and report.
- **Section 2:** to assess the extent and nature of hate speech against LGBTQI++ members and allies.
- **Section 3:** to monitor the effects of hate speech on LGBTQI++ members and allies.
- **Section 4:** to conclude with quotes from LGBTQI++ persons about hate, and a number of recommendation for policymakers and corporations working in the field.



Hate Speech

"Hate Speech" is the incitement and encouragement of hate, discrimination or enmity towards an individual, biased against a particular characteristic, such as their sexual orientation, gender identity or sexual identity.

TERMINOLOGIES AND REPORT METHODOLOGY

Hatred / Hostility:

The terms 'hatred' and 'hostility' refer to irrational and intense feelings which express contempt, humiliation and antagonism towards a specific group with an intention to publicly encourage hatred towards the target group. The term 'incitement' refers to a discourse relating to national, racial or religious groups that bring imminent danger of discrimination, hostility, or violence against persons belonging to these groups.

LGBTQI++ community:

The LGBTQI++ community are people who identify themselves as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transsexual, transgender, intersex, and queer people. The survey tackles online hate speech based on sexual orientation, gender identity and sexual characteristics. The report uses the term LGBTQI++ as an umbrella that encompasses all survey respondents. As the report requires analysis, it will also indicate different subgroups. Thus, it's necessary to acknowledge that the fundamental rights for the LGBTQI++ are affected by various factors. It should also be noted that LGBTQI++ experiences are not only determined on the basis of their sexual orientation, gender identity and sexual characteristics, but are also influenced their education level, socio-economic class, and many other factors.

Research Methodology

Given the lack of numerical statistics about online hate speech targeting LGBTQI++ people and allies in the MENA region, we have adopted a quantitative approach. For conducting the study, the survey had to contain a number of questions about the nature of hate speech, spread by whom, and the most aiding social media platforms. In addition to questions to monitor the impact of hate speech on individuals' psychological and emotional well being.

The survey used an online data collection tool, and was specifically directed to LGBTQI++ persons and allies. The advantage of using this type of research tool, compared to traditional paper-based surveys, is that it allows access to a larger sample, incurs lower costs and provides higher flexibility and greater efficiency (Evans & Mathur, 2005). Despite the benefits, online surveys are limited to internet users (Bryman, 2008). However, this was not a concerning factor in this study as the survey targets individuals who use the internet, and social media platforms to be specific.

04| Report: Hate Speech Spreads Like Wildfire

This section presents data on responses collected from persons who were subject to hate speech. The general conclusion drawn from the survey results shows that LGBTQI++ persons and allies face various forms of digital hate speech. A large number of respondents mentioned that they received different messages during the weeks preceding the survey in particular. Not only did this result in their exposure as LGBTQI++ to their families and communities, but also in the lack of mental well being and self-harm.



Analysis:

Generally, the survey respondents were between the age groups 18-24 and 25-34 years old at 60.4%. 31.8% were 35-44 years old.

Diagram 1: Age groups

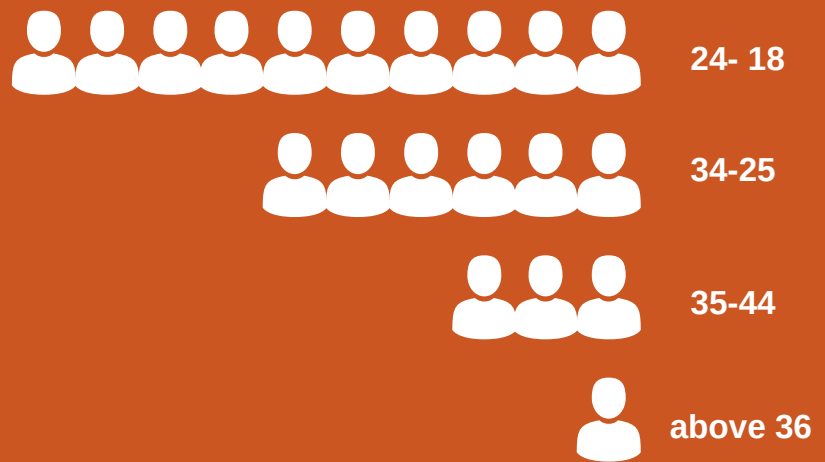


Figure 1

2: Sex

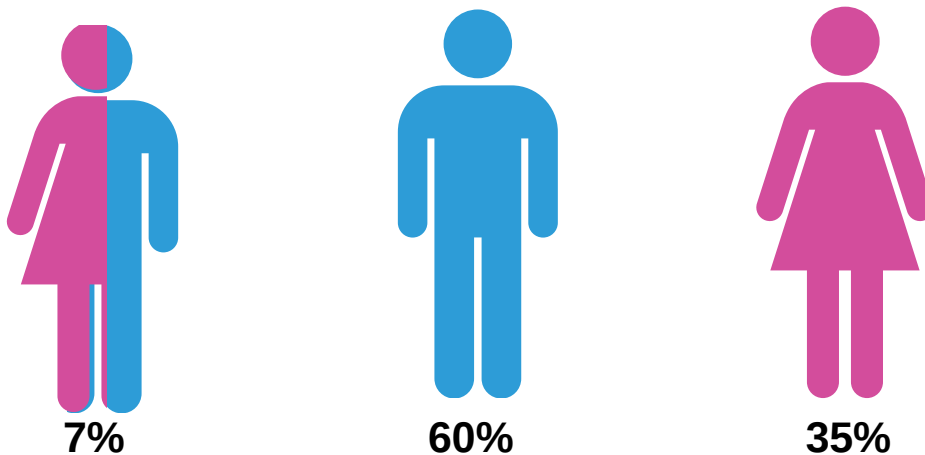


Figure 2

Analysis: The sample included 60% males and 35% females. 3% were unidentified, and 4% chose 'other.'

3: Sexual Orientations and Gender Identities

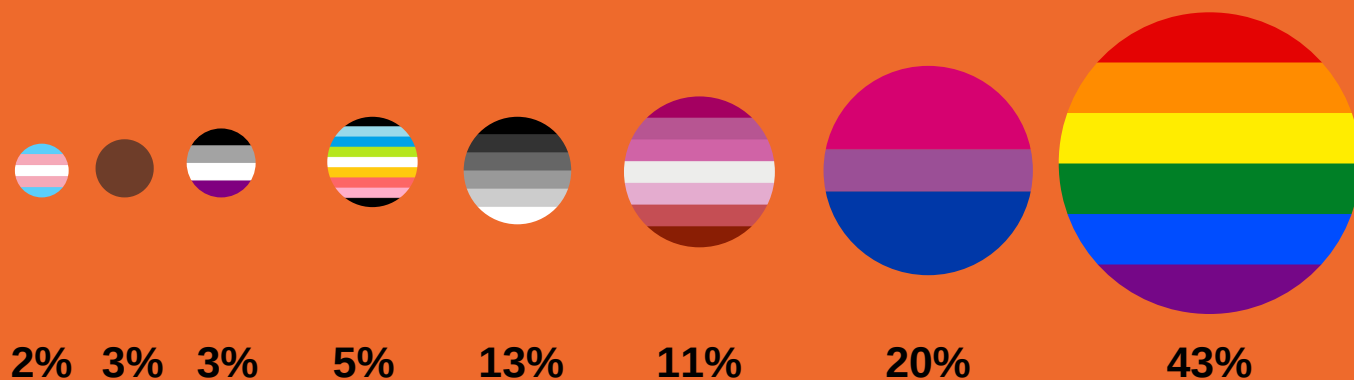


Figure 3

Analysis: 43% respondents identified as gay men, 11% as lesbian women, 20% as bisexual persons, 2% as transgender and transsexual individuals.

The remaining respondents were 3% asexual, 5% queer, 13% heterosexual, 3% unidentified and 0.3% 'other.'

Spreads like Wildfire

Respondents' Description of the received hate messages:

""There's something wrong with your hormones.. you're ill.. you haven't tried the right sensation or found the right person for you. You're a deviant, an infidel.." When they find out about my homosexuality, women think I am a sex addict, even a pedophile. And when they find out about my asexuality, they think I am cold or haven't found the right man, or it's just a phase and one day I'll get married, have sex with a man and will like it, and that my sexuality is nonsense. When they know I am both homosexual and asexual, I am accused of contradiction: "how can you be homosexual when homosexuals are obsessed with sex, but at the same time asexual?" That's besides men who will be outraged and obsessed by changing or "converting" me, telling me I have to try a threesome with them and their girlfriends. All these sexual proposals, offers, and unsolicited sexual videos and footages from men, in addition to the insults and verbal abuse. We are accused of being the reason behind the spread of mental and physical illness and diseases like HIV, because we exposed ourselves to rape and sexual harassment. And that we will be the reason why the human race will go extinct, and we are calling for debauchery and vice. The list goes on.."

"I got cursed over post comments on Facebook, and received to sexual offers and sexual harassment. Some made comments with my pictures attached, cursing me and my sexual orientation as if it was a stigma. I was kicked out of many Facebook groups, and was unfriended by a lot of friends."

The nature of hate speech



Although not all hate messages result into hate crimes, hate crimes rarely happen without prior stigmatizing and dehumanizing of targeted groups. Incidents of incitement to hate and violence are often fueled by religious or racial prejudice.

Only a few countries collect data on hate crimes; their causes, their victims/survivors in a way that enables policymakers to better protect the vulnerable populations.

4: Respondents exposed to hate speech and harassment based on SOGIESC

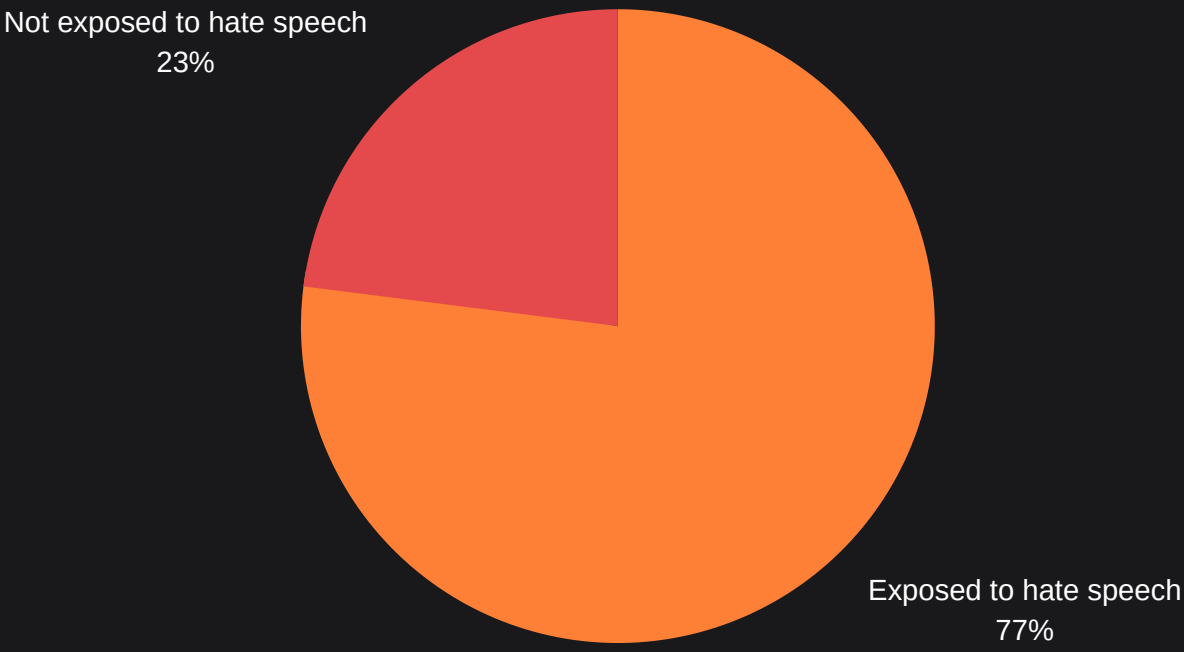


Figure (4)

Analysis: More than half of the respondents (77%) stated they were subjected to hate speech during the weeks leading up to the survey (Figure 4)

5 : Social media platform on which respondents were exposed to hate speech

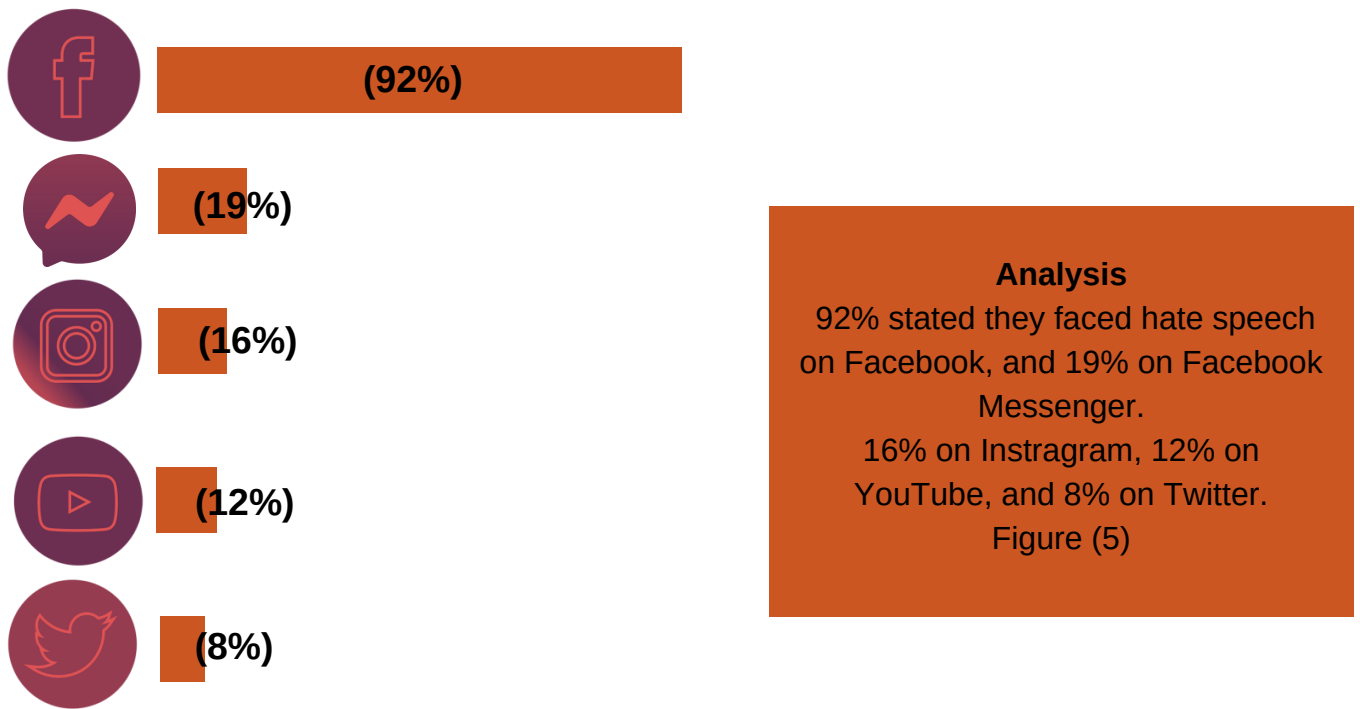
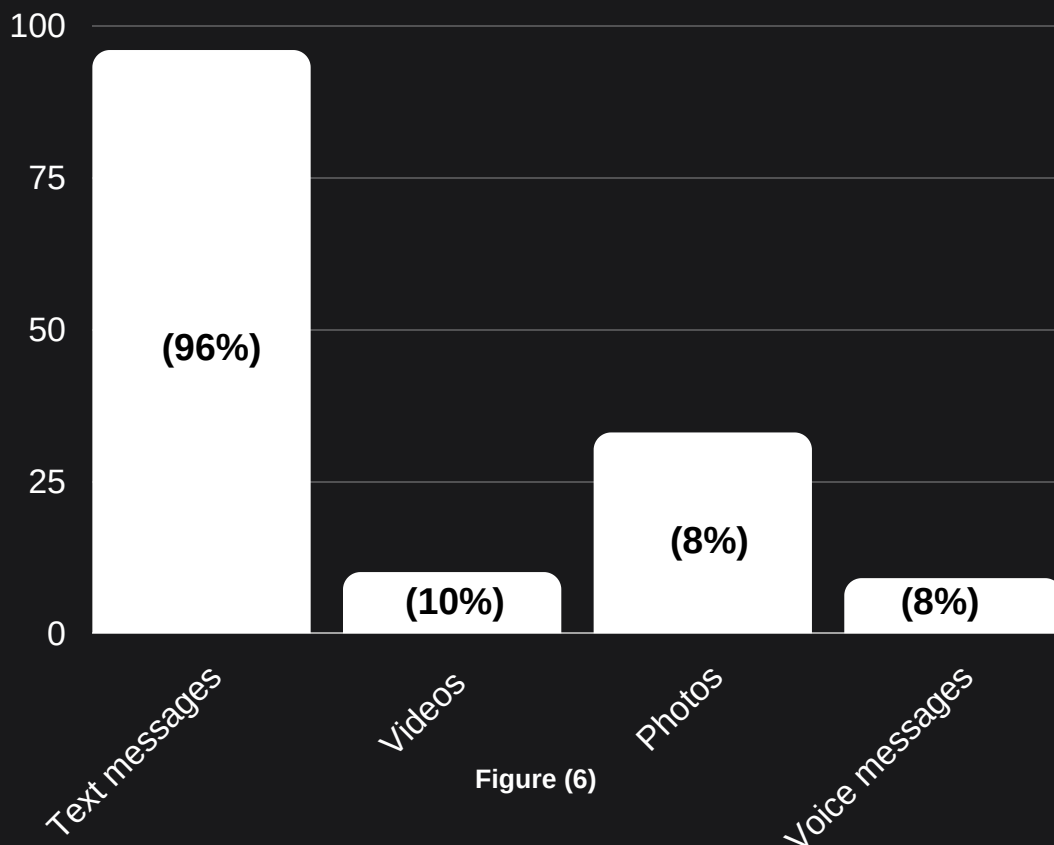


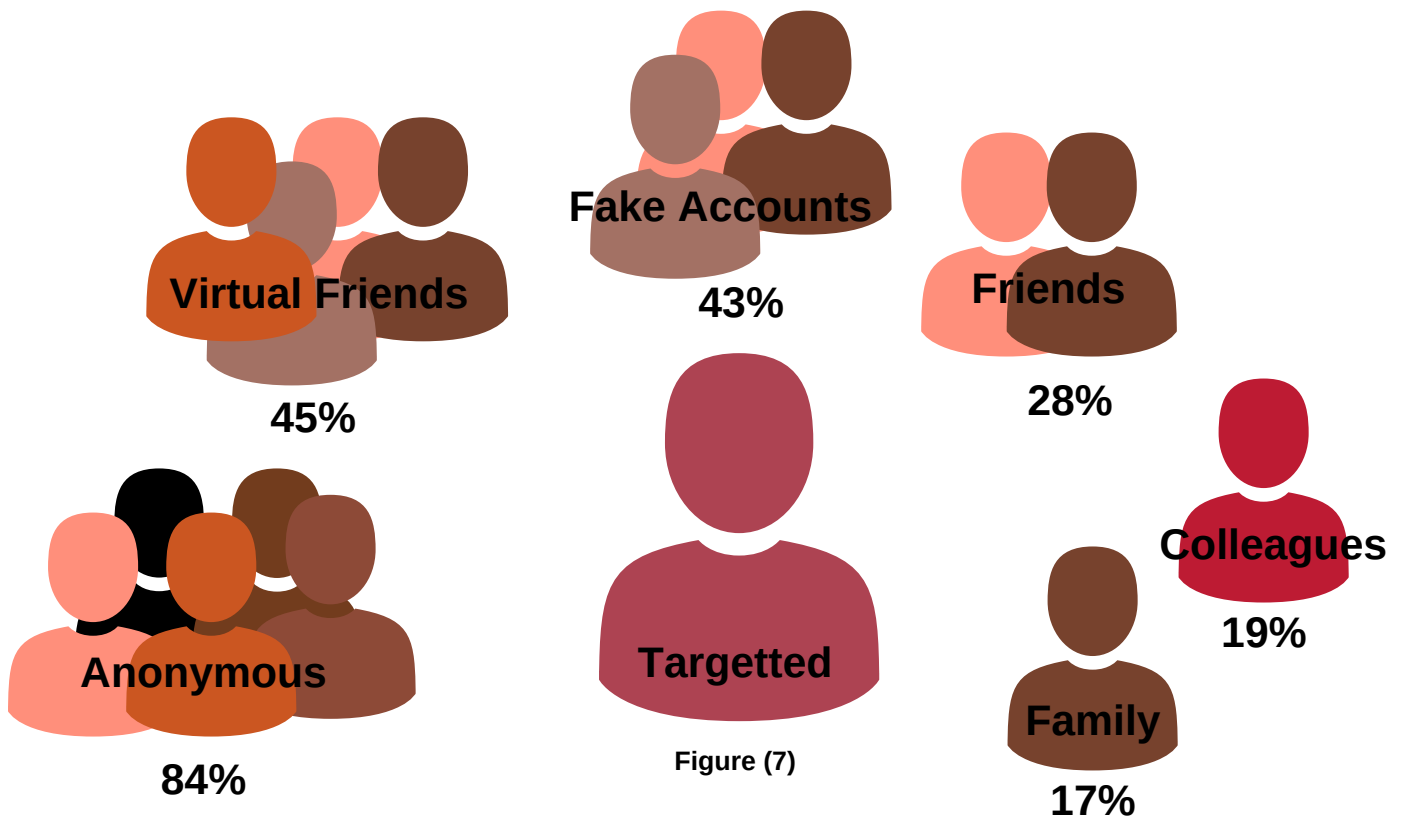
Figure (5)

6 : Nature of Hate Speech on Social Media



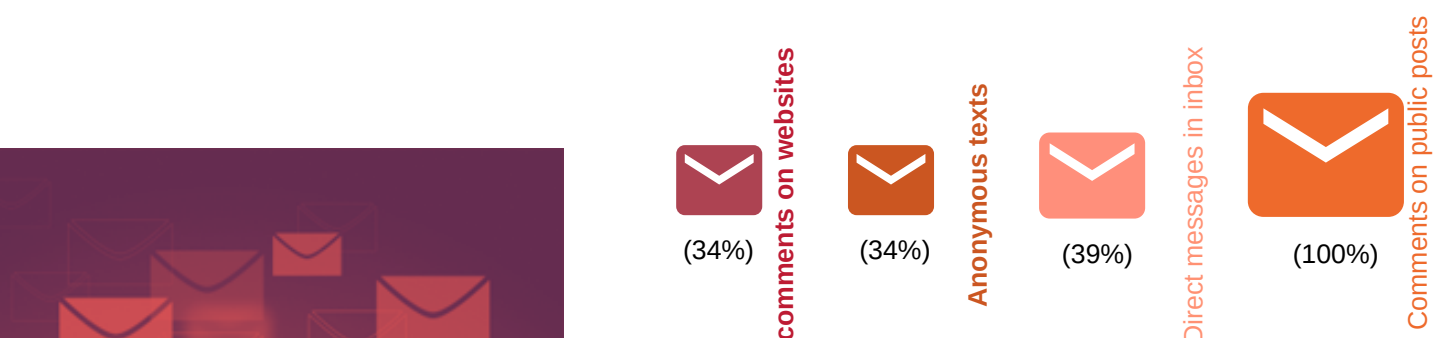
Analysis: 96% of hate speech was through text messages, 10% videos, 8% pictures, and 8% voice messages.

7 : Who are the perpetrators?



Analysis: 84% of the perpetrators were unknown to the target, 45% were from the target's friends list on the platform, 43% were from fake accounts, 28% from real life friends, 19% from co-workers and colleagues, and 17% were family members.

8 : How are the hate messages sent?



Analysis: 100% of the hate speech was sent in the form of comment replies to the targets' comments on public pages. 39% was sent via direct messages, 34% was sent via anonymous messages, and 34% was via comment replies on forums or news sites.

9 : What is the nature of the hate speech messages?

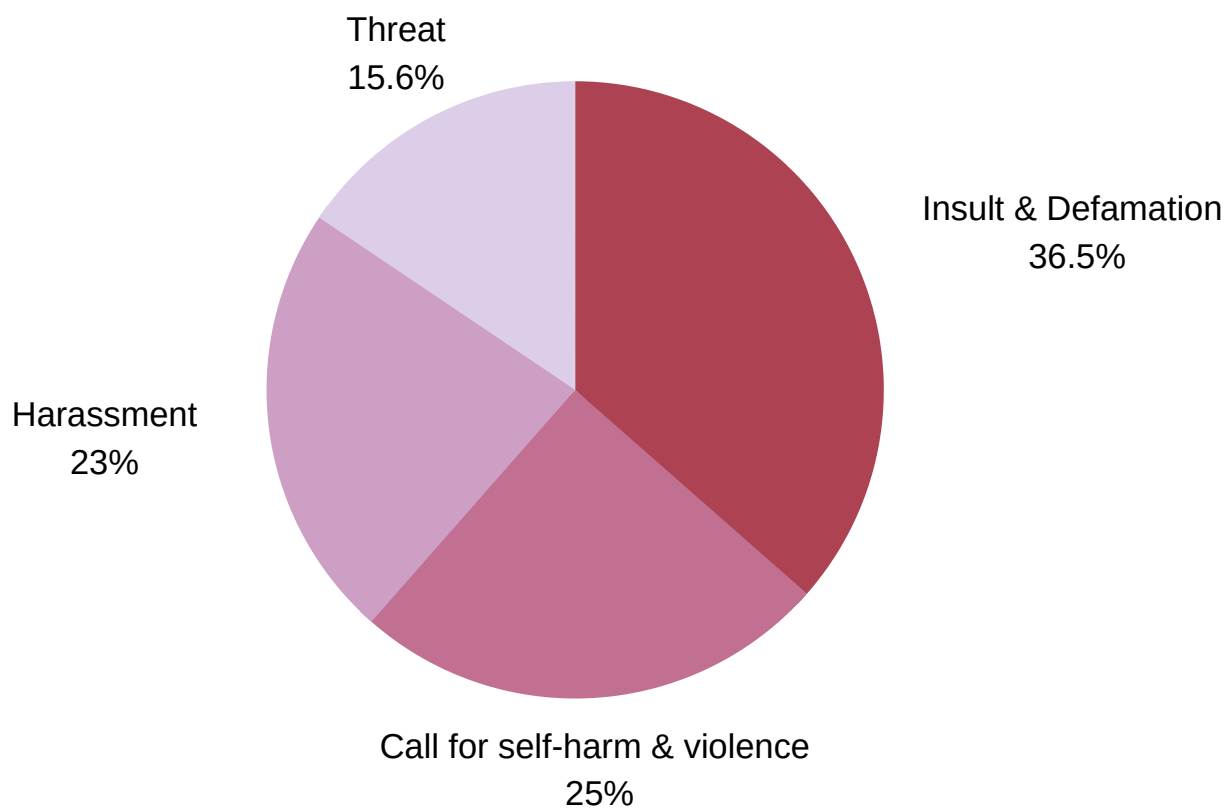


Figure (8)



Spreads like Wildfire

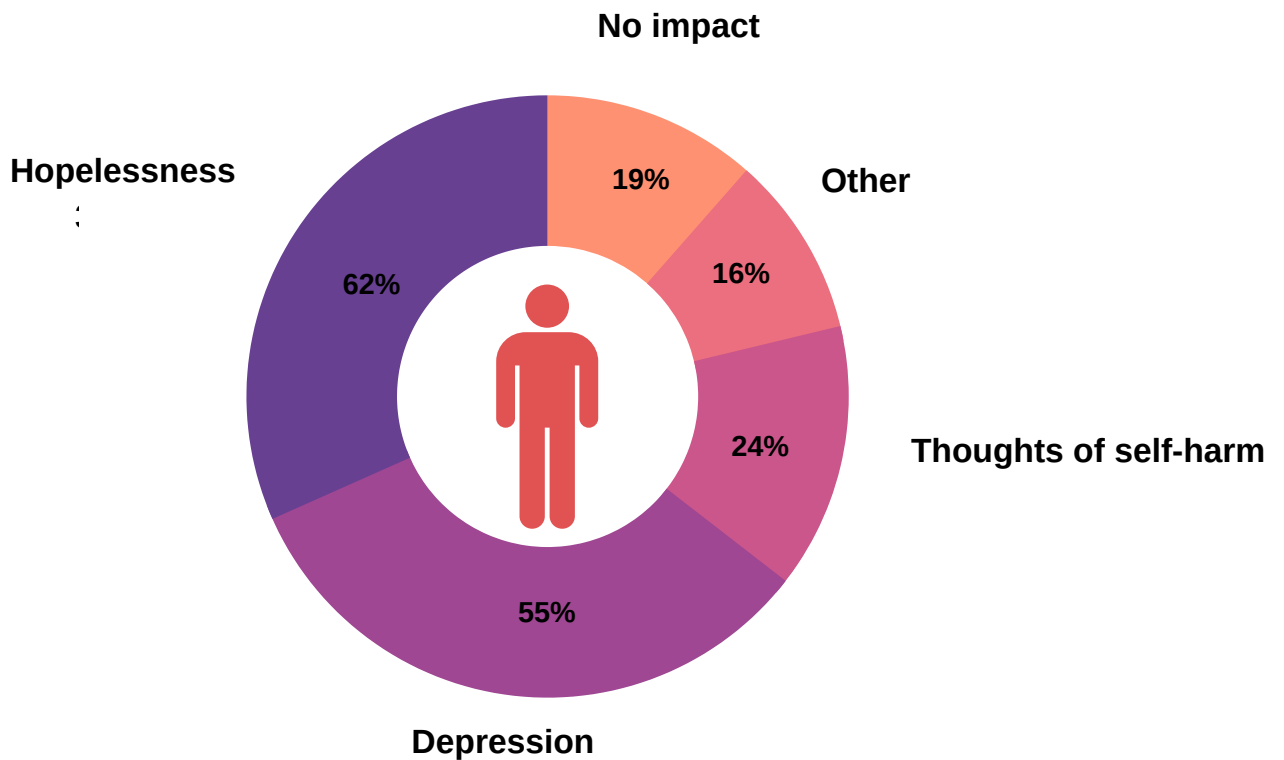
Respondents' description of the received hate messages:

"You are an infidel, deviant, perverted, sick atheist who deserves to be killed and burned."

Insults and bullying for being an LGBTQI++ ally.

They said I was sick, disgraced and filthy, that I am a threat to society and I should be killed.

Hate speech spreads like wildfire amid the COVID-19 crisis as individuals are forced to stay at home in isolation. Social distancing requires people not to mingle or physically socialize with others, and the internet has become their last resort for communication. Thus, the spread of digital hate speech has a grave impact on the recipients. 62% felt hopeless and 24% considered self-harm. (Figure 9)

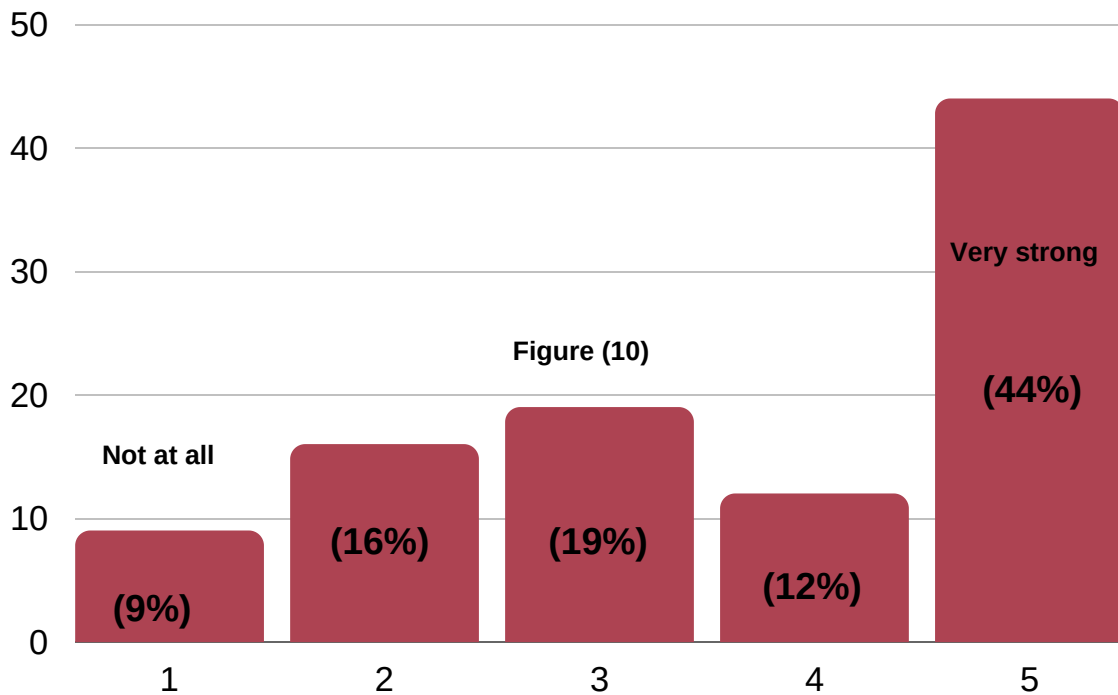


Spreads like Wildfire

Respondents' Description of the received hate messages:

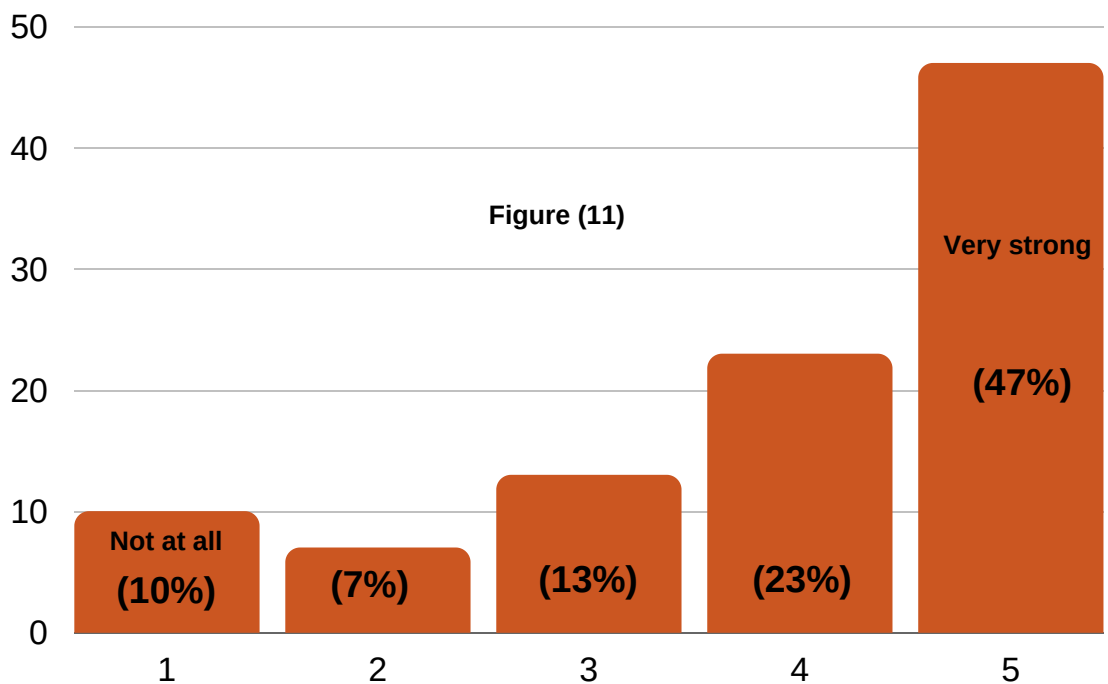
"I was told we were infidels and must be punished by cutting our hands and feet. But in fact, we are only seeking the freedom to practice something in private that has nothing to do with society or the state."

10: Feelings of withdrawal



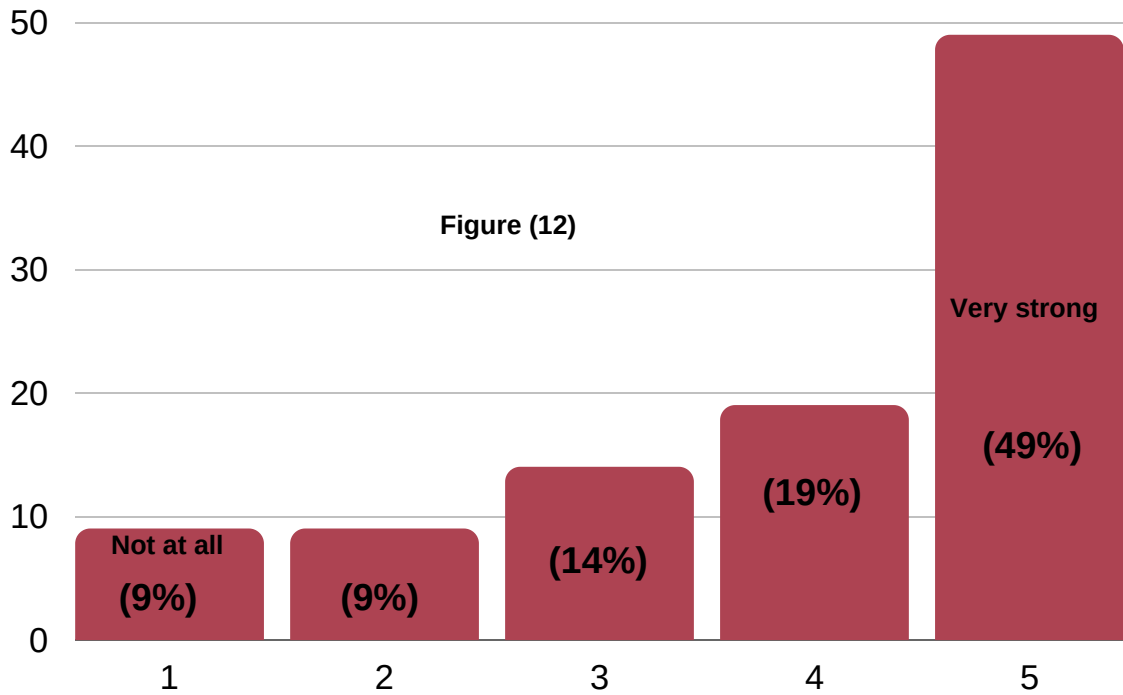
Analysis: 44% of the respondents expressed very strong feelings of withdrawal, 19% were moderately impacted and 9% felt no impact. (Figure 10)

11 : Feelings of loneliness



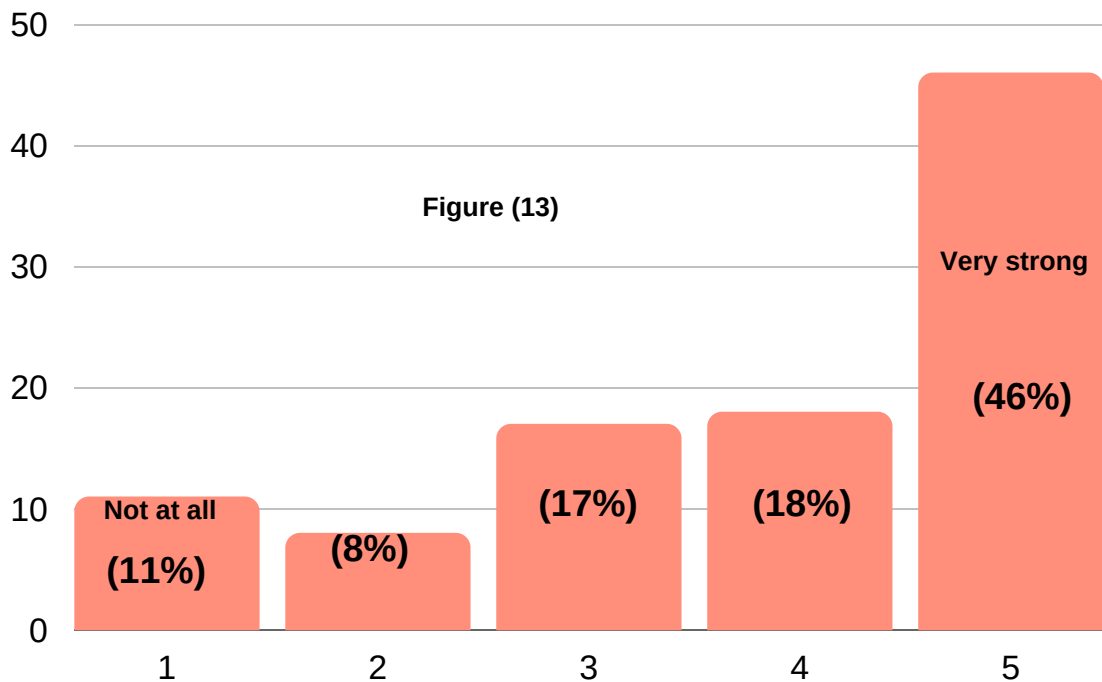
Analysis: 47% of the respondents expressed extreme feelings of loneliness, while 10% reported experiencing no loneliness at all. (Figure 11)

12: Hopelessness



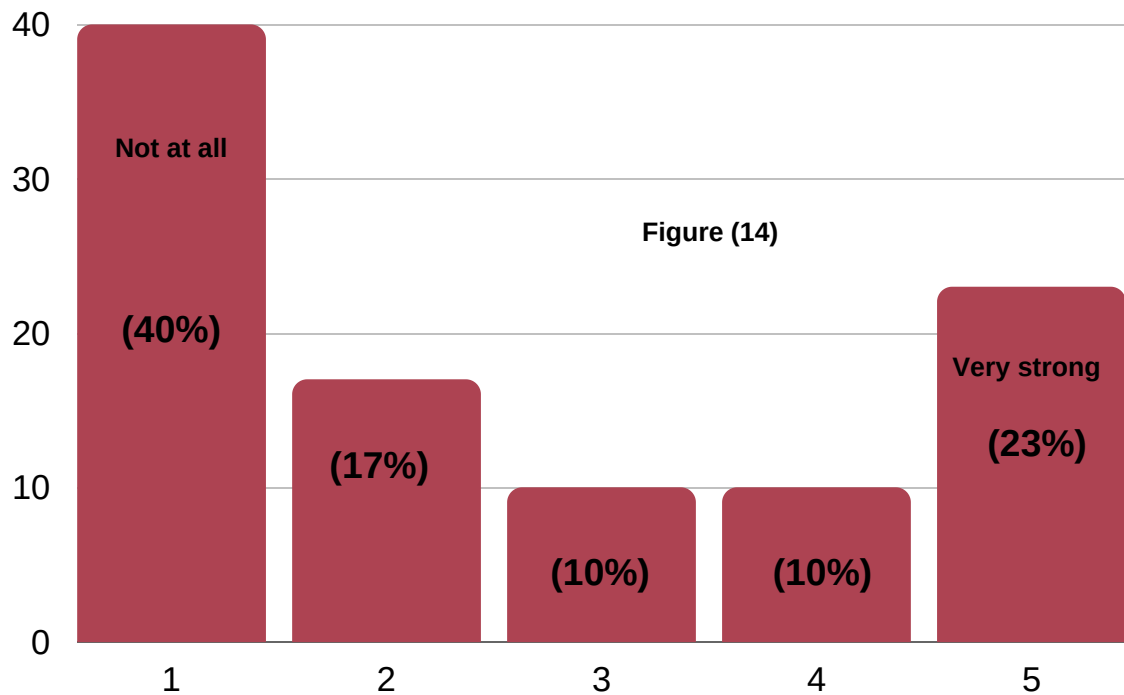
Analysis: 49% of the respondents expressed extreme despair, 14% reported moderate feelings of hopelessness, and 9% reported not experiencing hopelessness at all. (Figure 12)

13 : Feelings of depression



Analysis: 46% expressed severe feelings of depression due to the online spread of hate speech. 17% mentioned moderate feelings of depression, and 11% reported they did not feel depressed at all.

14: Self-harm thoughts



Analysis: 23% of the survey participants expressed strong desire for self-harm as a result of hate speech. 10.9% experienced moderate self-harm desire. 40% reported not having any self-harm thoughts.

Spreads like Wildfire

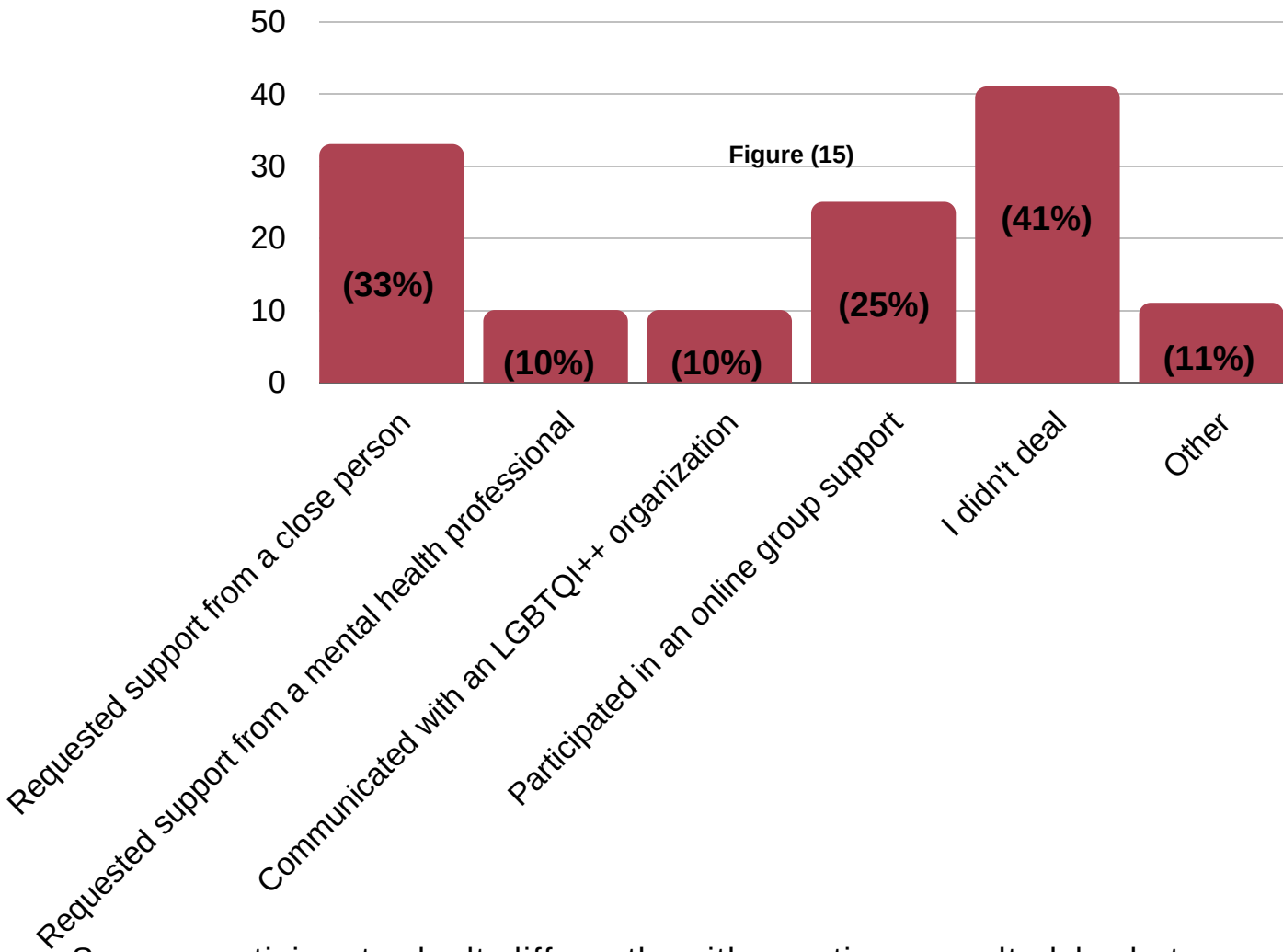
Respondents' Description of the received hate messages:

The content contained mockery of LGBTQI++ persons, calls for their death and incitement of violence against them.

The messages threatened to beat and kill LGBTQI++ community members. There were many clear and direct invitations to organize and target specific places in order to assault and even kill LGBTQI++ people if necessary.

"There was a discussion on LGBTQI++ freedom of expression. I was told if I wanted this kind of freedom I'd have to live somewhere else, and if I didn't leave, I'd have to bear the consequences of not adhering to societal norms.

15 :How respondents dealt with these feelings?



Survey participants dealt differently with emotions resulted by hate speech. 41% didn't take particular actions to deal with emotions. 33% requested support from a close person to them. 25% took part in online group support. 10% reached out to LGBTQI++ organizations, another 10% requested assistance from a mental health professional. 11% responded in other forms of actions.

Spreads like Wildfire

Respondents' Description of the received hate messages:

"Insults, humiliation, threats of rape, footage of the pride flag on fire, threats and calls to throw LGBTQI++ persons off buildings or mountain tops, prayers for our death, demands to isolate us from society. All because they think we lack moral principals and values; the claim that all LGBTQI++ are rapists, harassers, should be imprisoned, forced to marry, and should seek mental health treatment."

This section reviews testimonies and messages written by the respondents in an open space to express their feelings towards hate speech. This section also concludes the report with recommendations to combat hate speech.

04



Participant (1) Female; Bisexual; 18-24 Age Group

"I cried my eyes out while filling this survey. The messages and comments left me in great depression. I often resort to silence or support from a friend. Attending an online session is what made me feel better. I cannot seek support from a mental health professional due to a past negative experience."

Participant (2) Male; Gay; 18-24 Age Group

"I recently reported many posts and comments to the Facebook administration. All I received as response from Facebook was that those posts did not violate community standards"



Participant (3) Male; Gay; 35-44 Age Group



"I attempted suicide a week after the death of Sarah Hegazy because of all the offensive posts and hateful language. Reporting resulted in nothing and it left me with feelings of despair. They don't want us to live in peace, or even die in peace. Facebook is as responsible for the impacts."

Participant (4) Female; Lesbian; 18-24 Age Group



"Thank you for being there. Thanks to you, we don't feel alone. It feels good that someone is speaking on our behalf, or at least believes in our cause. Someday the world is going to be a better place. If not a better place for us, then at least for the next generations."

Participant (5) Male; Gay; 18-24 Age Group

"I wish from the bottom of my heart that this issue will be taken seriously by Facebook so we are no longer exposed to all this hatred and emotional harm."



Participant 6 Female; Lesbian; 18-24 Age Group



"I love my family and the people I grew up with.. but because of their homophobia, I never came out. I feel rejected, lonely and I can't be myself. Being away from them will psychologically harm me, but I do my best to run away as much as possible. How painful is that!"

Participant 7 Male; Gay; 18-24 Age Group

"I was stabbed in the back by the Islamic society and state when I was raped by pedophilic monsters at the age of seven. And here they are stabbing me and my people from the LGBTQI++ community with insults, slander and discrimination against what we cannot control or change about ourselves. The world is a horrible place and I only want to mercifully die. I fear pain and only God only knows how much pain I am in now."



Participant 8 Male; Heterosexual; 18-24 Age Group



"I hope that the Arab society accepts you the way you are, and stops threatening you just because of your sexual orientations."



Recommendations

We, the organizations working on this report, consider countries and social media corporations obligated to introduce a variety of protective measures to deal with hate speech against LGBTQI++ people. In this section, we set out a selection of recommendations on appropriate responses to reduce the occurrence of hateful discourses to co with international human rights standards on the right to freedom of expression and information.

These recommendations are anchored in the belief that the solution to hate speech and intolerance towards sexual and gender minorities cannot be achieved through suppression of others' freedom of expression, but through public discussions.

The action to counter hate speech must include the following aspects:

- Acknowledging the fundamental significance of freedom of expression, tolerance and respect for the equal dignity of all human beings,
- Identifying situations that lead to the use of hate speech and taking suitable measures to put an end to it,
- Ensuring the participation and commitment of individuals in the field.

• To social media companies:

1- Working to prevent the spread of unscientific myths related to homosexuality, such as "conversion therapy" for homosexuals.

2- Acknowledging that homosexuality is not an ideology, but an essential element in the individual identity. Thus, any discourse inciting hatred against the LGBTQI++ community is targeting individuals, and is used to practice more oppression and violence. For example, posts accusing LGBTQI people of Masonry or Satan-worshipping can lead to more threat and physical violence or threats against these individuals.

3- Working to amend its internal policies in line with international standards to combat hate speech, while ensuring freedom of opinion and expression and combating discrimination.

4- Training employees in the MENA region to analyze hate speech against LGBTQI++ people.

5- Supporting alternative and positive discourse and counter-narratives of hate speech by individuals, initiatives, and organizations working in the field, to support LGBTQ++ people in the MENA.

• To the UN human rights mechanisms:

We call on the UN human rights mechanisms – specifically the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the independent experts – to protect against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity and to take swift action to stop the ongoing practices in order to achieve peace and security for the LGBTQI community.

• To the MENA region governments:

1- Adopting domestic legislation in accordance with Article 20 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to prohibit any "advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence."

2- Adhering to the Rabat Plan of Action on prohibiting of advocacy of national, ethnic or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence, when implementing or revising its domestic legal framework on hate speech.

