

# The LGBTIQ+ community in Lebanon, documenting stories of torture & abuse.

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## About Proud Lebanon

Proud Lebanon is non-religious, non-political, non-partisan civil rights society that aims to promote sustainable social and economic development in Lebanon and the region and will be working to achieve protection, empowerment and equality for marginalized groups through community service activities. Proud Lebanon started its activities in August 2013 and is registered since April 2014 as a non-profit civil society.



## Mission

“Proud Lebanon” aims to build on the capacities of the survivors of discrimination. “Proud Lebanon” is dedicated to promote tolerance in Lebanon and the region, where people are effectively empowered and to ensure the well-being of individuals.

Throughout its work Proud Lebanon assessed the needs of the community as following:

- 1- Psycho-medical support
- 2- Legal Follow up and Advice
- 3- Socio-Economic assistance
- 4- Awareness raising on issues of concern
- 5- Capacity Building
- 6- Advocacy

In order to answer these needs, Proud Lebanon Initiative defined its objectives and undertook several activities to reach them:

**Overall Objective:** Improve the Well-being of marginalized individuals in Lebanon

- Specific Objective 1: Support vulnerable individuals in accepting their identity and overcoming discrimination and rejection (psycho-social support).
- Specific Objective 2: Guarantee the well-being of the community (medical).
- Specific Objective 3: Improve the protection framework for individuals in Lebanon (legal).
- Specific Objective 4: Empower marginalized individuals to become agents of change.
- Specific Objective 5: Empower the national Lebanese community and work on involving allies who share the same cause and morals.

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## Introduction

The preamble of the Lebanese constitution proclaims: "Lebanon is a sovereign, free, and independent country. It is a final homeland for all its citizens. It is unified in its territory, people, and institutions within the boundaries defined in this constitution and recognized internationally. Lebanon is Arab in its identity and in its affiliation. It is a founding and active member of the League of Arab States and abides by its pacts and covenants. Lebanon is also a founding and active member of the United Nations Organization and abides by its covenants and by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Government shall embody these principles in all fields and areas without exception."<sup>1</sup>

Article first of the universal declaration of Human Rights states that "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood". Proceeding with the second Article, "Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty."

Lebanon has also ratified the convention against torture and other inhuman and degrading punishments and, as clearly confirmed in the Lebanese constitution and the declaration of human rights, all human beings are born free and must be equal in rights. However the reality in Lebanon shows huge violations when it comes to the implementation of the covenants and international treaties and the rights consecrated by the latter.

In addition, Lebanon still prosecutes LGBTIQ+ people under the Article 534 of the Penal Code, which states that "*any carnal union against the order of nature shall be punished with imprisonment for up to one year.*" which makes it for this category of people, a daily struggle to obtain what is supposed to be basic human rights: Social justice, protection and respect.

Although the Lebanese Psychiatric Society stated twice (In 2013 and 2016)<sup>2</sup> that homosexuality is not a disorder and demanded to abolish this article. Unfortunately, until the actual date torture and abuse are still practiced towards LBGTIQ+ people for the sole reason of their sexual orientation or identity whether by public law enforcement officers or individuals.

Despite the steps adopted to prevent the use of torture, many torture and degrading treatment cases in Lebanon are still observed and documented, and this report shall present them from social, psychological and legal (especially Human rights Law) perspectives.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://goo.gl/Pp5TJN>

<sup>2</sup> <https://goo.gl/TDiSFR>

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## The legal perspective

### I- Legislation: From a wrong translation to legal persecution

Lebanon still prosecutes LGBTIQ+ relations under Article 534 of the Penal Code, which states: “any carnal union against the order of nature shall be punished with imprisonment for up to one year.”

Lebanon’s successive penal systems were inspired by different laws. The first system was inspired by Islamic Law until the issuance of the Ottoman Penal Code (1858), which derived from the French Penal Code (1810).

Over the years, Lebanese law has continued to be mainly inspired by the French legal framework (1810 Penal Code and its further amendments) and the existence of Article 534 in the current Lebanese Penal Code is to a certain extent incidental and anecdotal:

In the French Penal Code of 1810, the principle of non-criminalization of homosexuality was already adopted. However, on August 6, 1942, Maréchal Petain signed an order to amend the law with regard to homosexuality. Article 334 (paragraph 1) of the French Penal Code was set to criminalize direct relations between persons of the same sex involving a minor under the age of 21. This article does not punish homosexuality in general but same-sex intercourse with minors, and was set specially to criminalize sexual assaults perpetrated by German soldiers against French children during the Second World War.

Lebanese law was accordingly amended to remain in line with the French Penal Code but the article was mistranslated into Arabic: indeed, the part in the French article which specified that it was directed at criminalizing relations involving *minors only* was not reflected in the translation. Since then, and because of this wrong translation, Article 534 of the Lebanese Code has been used by the Judiciary to punish any same-sex relationships, even those between consenting adults.

Some quite recent rulings of Lebanese courts however constitute interesting precedents for the decriminalization of LGBTIQ+ relations:

✓ Judge Mounir Sleiman pronounced the first decision in Batroun in 2009, who stated: “consensual same-sex relations were not “unnatural,” and therefore couldn’t be subjected to legal penalty”.

✓ The second decision was pronounced in Jdeideh in 2014 by Judge Naji El Dahdah, who rejected a case against a transgender woman sued under article 534 - stating that “Gender identity is not only defined by the legal papers”;

✓ The third decision was pronounced in Jdeideh in 2016 by Judge el Kontar, stating that the interpretation of article 534 should be compatible with covenants and treaties ratified by Lebanon and incorporated in the Lebanese Constitution.

✓ The latest decision was pronounced in Jdeideh in 2017 by Judge Rabih Maalouf, who stated: “this article does not apply as long as homosexuality is exercised as a right and in a non-abusive manner, in other words, in respect for others”.

✓ The ruling recognizes that sexual orientation cannot be criminalized as such, being part of the sacrosanct right to privacy - in other words, reiterating the sacredness of personal freedom, as long as its fulfillment does not harm others.

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Even if the Judiciary system seems to progressively evolve towards a decriminalization of LGBTIQ+ relations, Article 534 remains extremely ambiguous and is still being used by security forces as ground for the arrest of LGBTIQ+ people on the sole basis of their gender identity or sexual orientation.

The discriminatory nature of Article 534 also constitutes a serious breach of Lebanon's international commitments in terms of human rights, notably the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on civil and political rights.

As long as Article 534 exists as such in the Lebanese Penal Code, it will continue to give room for violations perpetrated against LGBTIQ+ people who live in Lebanon in a quite hostile and conservative social environment.

## II- LGBTIQ+ Rights' violations and discrimination

The LGBTIQ+ people in Lebanon are part of vulnerable communities, victims of unpunished discriminations from private individuals, or public institutions and public officers. Reasons of such treatment can be associated with the social stigma and prejudices about them which are the result of the Lebanese mentality (presupposing an illness, a contrariety to religious principles, or even a resemblance to “devil worshipers”<sup>3</sup>), supported and reinforced by article 534 of the Lebanese Penal Code which interpretation criminalizes them<sup>4</sup>. By its existence, such a legal text hardens the acceptance of this community and the democratization path of Lebanon because, prior to recognizing and admitting LGBTIQ+ rights of marriage, adoption and other civil rights equal to those recognized to other citizens (as what has happened in Europe, USA and many other countries), the first and most fundamental step would be to “decriminalize” them. The battle is then dual.

Aside from article 534 which by itself constitutes a discrimination towards a category of individuals, LGBTIQ+ people face *de facto* two types of discrimination: First, social harassment and inability to resort to law enforcement officers or courts to file complaints and ask for protection because it results to a denunciation of their sexual orientation or gender identity, and therefore their criminalization. And second, harassment by public law enforcement officers themselves, their discriminatory treatment towards LGBTIQ+ , and violation of basic human rights and basic legal principles related to investigative and criminal procedures. Examples are many.

A joint report prepared by *Helem* and *Arab Foundation for Freedoms and Equality (AFE)* points out that LGBTIQ+ can't refer to public bodies in case of arbitrary termination of employment or any form of discriminatory denial of services or rights, because of resulting harassments; and in cases that did refer to these bodies their complaint was not followed. In one case in 2013, two women in the

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<sup>3</sup> A comparison made by one of the founders of JAD (Jeunesse Anti Drogue) at a conference organized by this non-profit organization in collaboration with the Beirut Bar Association on February 1<sup>st</sup> 2017, themed around “Drug use- problems and solutions”. I am still trying to understand the pertinence of this statement and its relation to the conference theme, especially to solutions proposed to Drug Use.

<sup>4</sup> Article 534 of the Lebanese Penal Code punishes “*any sexual intercourse contrary to the order of nature*” with up to one year in prison.

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northern region of Lebanon were ordered by the police to refrain from residing in the city for indecency after they were being blackmailed to be outed by an anonymous individual.<sup>5</sup> In another case, a homosexual man, after inviting to his room a newly met person, was blackmailed for money by the latter who threatened to denounce his homosexuality to public authorities claiming to have a strong “wasta”<sup>6</sup>.

LGBTIQ+ s could then be easily dragged into helpless situations, robbed and blackmailed with the threat of denouncing their behavior, knowing that they wouldn’t file complaints because any investigation would “disclose” them.

Another report published by *Helem* highlights a case from 2009 in which a woman reported her son to the police for suspected “homosexuality” because he was “acting like a woman.” This was enough for the public prosecutor to arrest and interrogate the young man and force him to submit to an anal examination<sup>7</sup>. A similar case was outlined by Human Rights Watch: “*Walid, 24, told Human Rights Watch that his mother told the police to arrest him and detain him for a night at the police station in order to “scare” him out of being gay, a request he says the police complied with.*”<sup>8</sup>

These incidents reveal an illegal process of initiating investigations, interrogating and arresting people based only on their appearances and mannerisms, with no other tangible and material evidence of a “sexual intercourse”, which is itself criminalized by article 534, and not the appearance or look.

“Police often arrest individuals arbitrarily and without evidence on the grounds of what the police themselves describe to be “suspicious behavior.” Police may even arrest individuals on the grounds of specific appearances ascribed to members of these groups—for example, because someone “looks gay” or “looks suspicious””.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Joint Report by Helem and AFE, “*Universal Periodic Report on Homosexuality and Gender in Lebanon*”, Submission of Universal Periodic Review (UPR) on its 23rd Session to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, March 2015.

<sup>6</sup> Interviewed individuals by *Proud Lebanon*, 2016.

<sup>7</sup> Helem, “*Homosexual Relations in the Penal Codes: General Study Regarding the Laws in the Arab Countries with a Report on Lebanon and Tunisia*”, 2010, available on <http://www.helem.net/node/188>

<sup>8</sup> Human Rights Watch Report, “*It’s part of the job*”, *Ill-treatment and Torture of Vulnerable Groups in Lebanese Police Stations*, 2013, available on <https://www.hrw.org/report/2013/06/26/its-part-job/ill-treatment-and-torture-vulnerable-groups-lebanese-police-stations>

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

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As if one was to be interrogated or arrested on the sole basis that “he looks like he has committed a crime”.



Examples are many: two men arrested in a car in Dbayeh- no intercourse nor flirting being discovered *in flagrante*- and brought into interrogation and detention on the sole basis of being in a parked car at night<sup>10</sup>; a transgender arrested at Raouche at night while making conversation with a man after being approached and demanded ID by an officer who, noticing that the appearance does not correspond to the gender indicated on the identity card, and informed by the person herself that she was a transgender, considered it was enough to bring her to the Ramleh Bayda police station to initiate investigations, and have her undressed for an identity check, even though there is no text that criminalizes the difference of sex appearance with the gender mentioned on the ID<sup>11</sup>; A similar arbitrary interrogation was reported by two men arrested and investigated for hash use, when the

investigation took a turning point after the officers discovered on their phones a conversation between both of them calling each other “Habibi” (my love in Arabic), which was sufficient to initiate an investigation about their eventual homosexuality, accompanied with torture in order to get their confessions, in addition to names of homosexuals in Lebanon<sup>12</sup>.

The “*Hammam Al-Agha*” incident on August 9<sup>th</sup>, 2014 during which the Morals Protection Bureau of the Lebanese police raided the Turkish bathhouse in Beirut and arrested all the employees and the customers at the scene in addition to the owner reveals this illegal process of initiating investigations in addition to other legal infringements that will be treated.

“Investigations into the *Hammam al-Agha* case began with a routine investigation by the General Directorate of General Security (hereafter General Security) into the case of a foreigner who had lost his identification documents.

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<sup>10</sup>Interviewed individuals by Proud Lebanon, 2016.

<sup>11</sup>Sarah Wansa, “Detained Transgender in Lebanon: This is What Happened to Me”, Legal Agenda, 23/2/2016, available on <http://legal-agenda.com/en/article.php?id=3129>

<sup>12</sup>BecharaMaroun, « Liban: Détenu et battu pendant trois semaines pour homosexualité et un test de drogue... négatif », L’Orient le Jour, 2/7/2015



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The report mentions the following reasons for initiating investigations:

“[The foreigner’s] behavior, as well as his discourse, was found to be uneven. The [officer] heading the [security] branch was informed of this, and ordered us to take [the foreigner’s] statement and search the mobile phone in his possession. The phone was found to contain sexual videos of males amongst themselves, as well as exchanges of a sexual nature between [the foreigner] and others, about massages and sexual acts. We then proceeded to take [his] statement.”

(...) The report did not mention what it was about the foreigner’s behavior or speech that indicated the possibility that a crime might have been committed. It was merely considered “uneven”, as if the investigators simply “didn’t like his look”.<sup>13</sup>

Moreover, the investigation itself with this foreigner, the statement and mobile phone search were launched without the prosecutor’s prior authorization, in violation of Articles 40 and 47 of the Lebanese Code of Criminal Procedure which require the judicial police to obtain a mandate from the Public Prosecution in order to search individuals and investigate crimes that are not discovered *in flagrante*.

Other numerous legal infringements were to happen during and after this raid, whether with:

First, the arrest warrants issued by the public prosecutor against all customers present on the scene, despite the fact that they were charged with crimes punishable by prison sentences of under a year, which is a violation of articles 46 and 107 of the Code of Criminal Procedure which require the occurrence of a misdemeanor *in flagrante* punishable by a prison sentence of over a year, in order to issue an arrest warrant, these two conditions not being fulfilled<sup>14</sup>;

Second, the detentions: “After being detained for periods of time ranging between four and ten days, all those arrested were released by the Single Criminal Judge in Beirut. With the exception of the owner, bail for their release was set at amounts ranging between LL 100,000 [US\$66] and LL300, 000 [US\$200]. The decision to impose bail on the arrested Lebanese customers, and to release four of them more than five days after their arrest, constitutes a violation of Article 113 of the Code of Criminal Procedure. The latter requires the automatic release of those arrested without bail five days after their arrest, if they are Lebanese and if the misdemeanor they are charged with is punishable by a prison sentence of under two years, and if they have no prior convictions.”<sup>15</sup>

Third, the confiscation and search of phones of arrested people, a common process adopted by law enforcement officers, but which “actually constitutes a violation of Law 140/1999 which prohibits any kind of wiretapping, surveillance, interception or disclosure of exchanges made through any

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<sup>13</sup>Ghida Frangieh, “The Hammam al-Agha Raid: Collective Prosecution in Violation of Individual Rights”

Legal Agenda, 18/9/2014, available on <http://legal-agenda.com/en/article.php?id=3029>

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

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means of communication (such as mobile phones or email), except by a written and justified court order issued by an investigating judge”<sup>16</sup>;

Fourth, the HIV tests conducted on arrested people. Besides the fact of these tests being completely irrelevant to investigations, they were conducted without the consent of those arrested and by a Morals Protection Bureau investigator, not by a physician, in violation of articles 32 and 42 of code of Criminal Procedure which requires the appointment of a physician to examine those arrested if they request it, and in violation of their privacy and of the confidentiality of information regarding their health; The “Hammam Al agha” investigations were accompanied and followed by torture, which is unfortunately very usual, even conventional, especially regarding vulnerable individuals. Reports by Human rights organizations have documented common torture techniques such the use of “*Falaqa*”(beating the victim with sticks, batons, or whips on the soles of the feet), “*al-farrouj*” (“the chicken”, under which the victim’s hands are tied behind their back while the soles of his feet are beaten), “*al-watwat*” (“the bat”, making the victim walk on all fours until she reaches the entrance of the room while kicking her from behind)<sup>17</sup>.



In cases of LGBTs, torture is practiced in order to - and not only - get confessions from the victims about their sexual orientation, who they are having sex with, and even how, a dual violation of the right of physical integrity and the right of privacy.

People arrested after the raid of “Hammam AL-Agha” reported that they were not interrogated on the first day of their arrest, or even on the second, but that the first two days were set aside for terrorizing them, in order to make them confess to “engaging in sodomy”.

The interrogations even focused on how they have sex, and on finding out who among them plays the “active” role and who plays the “passive” one<sup>18</sup>, information that are legally speaking useless

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Human Rights Watch Report, “*It’s part of the job*”, *Ill-treatment and Torture of Vulnerable Groups in Lebanese Police Stations*”, seen° 6.; Sarah Wansa, “*Torture at Every Stage: The Unofficial Narrative of the Hammam al-Agha Raid*”, Legal Agenda, 12/11/2014, available on <http://legal-agenda.com/en/article.php?id=3043>.

<sup>18</sup> Sarah Wansa, “*Torture at Every Stage: The Unofficial Narrative of the Hammam al-Agha Raid*”, *ibid.*

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and irrelevant for the proof or the qualification of the crime, since the only intercourse between homosexuals is sufficient for officers and courts to consider them criminals. The modalities and scenarios of this intercourse could have no legal pertinence or repercussions, which reflects this common and rooted abuse of power in public institutions and law-enforcement officers in Lebanon.

These practices are moreover condemned by article 401 of the Lebanese Penal Code, which punishes *“Anyone who inflicts violent practices not permitted by the law against another person with the intention to extract a confession of a crime or information related to it”*. And Even though Lebanese law prohibits the use of forced confessions to convict people of crimes, 30 former detainees told Human Rights Watch that courts used such confessions to convict them despite their having informed the court that the confessions were obtained by force.<sup>19</sup>

Another example of torture and degrading treatment is the use of anal examinations, which are still practiced despite having no medical value and being condemned by circulars of the Order of physicians and the Ministry of Justice.

Shady, a Syrian refugee reports his nightmare in Rehanieh military police station where he was tortured to confess of his homosexuality so he can be punished for being gay. *“Officers took him into a room and told him to undress. “I will insert this into your anus to determine how many times you’ve had sex,” Shadi said an officer told him.*



*He inserted the rod, causing Shadi to scream out in pain and beg the officer to stop.”*<sup>20</sup> Law-enforcement officers do not only arbitrarily practice this illegal and inhuman treatment, but judges in certain cases, order it.

In 2014, five men were arrested in the Msaytbeh neighborhood after the police had received a call informing them of “illegal activities” taking place in an apartment, not even a public place! The investigations were followed by a court order to conduct anal tests to “prove” their homosexuality<sup>21</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup>Human Rights Watch Report, “It’s part of the job”, Ill-treatment and Torture of Vulnerable Groups in Lebanese Police Stations”, seeno6.

<sup>20</sup> Human Rights watch, «Lebanon: Syrian Refugee’s account of Torture. Detained, Beaten, Abused on suspicion of being gay”, 21/12/2016, available on <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/12/21/lebanon-syrian-refugees-account-torture>

<sup>21</sup> Georges Azzi, “Lebanon’s LGBTIQ+ community is still suffering abuses”, 25/8/2014, available on <https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/reportsfeatures/561407-more-needs-to-be-done-to-protect-the-rights-of-lebanons-lgbt-community>

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Other recurrent humiliating treatments are the verbal and psychological violence and abuse, many- if not all LGBTIQ+ arrested reporting being harassed.

After being dragged from Raouche to the station for being a transgender, the latter recounts being photographed by the supervising officer sending videos to his friends saying “we present to you this man...” being asked to perform oral sex, or forced to sleep tied to a chair in the interrogation room for three days because “If we put him with the men, they’ll impregnate him, and if we put him with the women, he’ll assault them.”<sup>22</sup>



One of the arrested people after the “Hammam Al-Agha raid” recalls one of the investigators saying while torturing him “I can tell from your touch that you’re a faggot”<sup>23</sup>

A more inhuman practice reported was the conscious deprivation of a homosexual during his nine-month detention from his nervous medications and HIV treatment!<sup>24</sup>

Other similar incidents covered by the media reveal more on these humiliating and demeaning practices against LGBTIQ+ individuals<sup>25</sup>, one of those flagrant ones being the Ghost incident in Dekwaneh, an arbitrary arrest by municipality officers of homosexuals and transsexuals at a Club, followed by a violent episode at the station during

which they were not only beaten, but also “forced to kiss” and to undress while pictures were taken and sent to journalists.<sup>26</sup>

These discrimination and legal infringements are certainly not only faced by LGBTIQ+ , in a country where corruption and human rights violations are commonly accepted, even banalised. Yet, the status of LGBTIQ+ under Lebanese law makes them more vulnerable to Social and public abuse; that is a precarious status triggered by article 534 of the Lebanese Penal Code.

The existence itself of article 534 is discriminatory and raises violations, whether by its vague formulation punishing “any sexual intercourse contrary to the order of nature” without defining and delimiting the order of nature, thus leaving elements of the crime imprecise and giving a large

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<sup>22</sup>Sarah Wansa, “Detained Transgender in Lebanon: This is What Happened to me”, see n°9.

<sup>23</sup>Sarah Wansa, “Torture at Every Stage: The Unofficial Narrative of the Hammam al-Agha Raid”, n°15.

<sup>24</sup>Interviewed individuals by Proud Lebanon, 2016.

<sup>25</sup> See for example the Ghost Incident in Dekwaneh: Karim Nammour “Dekwaneh Municipality declares the No Gay Land”, 31/5/2013, Legal Agenda, available in Arabic on: <http://legal-agenda.com/article.php?id=389&lang=ar>; And the cinema Plaza incident in Beirut: SimaKotecha, “Lebanon’s gay-friendly reputation challenged by abuses”, 25/11/2013, available on: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-25057067>

<sup>26</sup> See Joe Maalouf’s broadcast “EntaHorr”: Ghost Documentary on 1/5/2013

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margin of interpretation to the judges, which contradicts fundamental principles of criminal law such as the necessity of definition of the crime, and the strict interpretation by the judge; or whether by its violation of Human Rights and principles enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which is incorporated to the Lebanese constitution, in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, and other conventions and international treaties ratified by Lebanon, which have priority over article 534 and should be applied by jurisdictions, in accordance with the Lebanese principle of hierarchy of norms stated in article 2 of the Lebanese code of civil procedure:

*“The courts shall comply with the principle of the rules of hierarchy. In the event of conflict between the provisions of international treaties and those of ordinary law, the former shall take precedence over the latter.”*

According to all these principles, four Lebanese rulings have dismissed the application of article 534 concerning individuals accused of homosexuality <sup>27</sup>, and one ruling has recognized the right of transsexual people to change gender in public records.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Ruling by the Single Criminal Judge in Batroun, Mounir Sleiman, on 3/12/2009

<sup>28</sup> Ruling by Beirut’s civil court of Appeal, Judge Janet Hanna, on 3/9/2015

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## The psychosocial perspective

### III- Psychological perspective, LGBTIQ+ stories and interventions

It has been a well-established fact in the literature on sexual minorities that LGBTIQ+ individuals suffer from more psychological disorders than heterosexual individuals<sup>29</sup>. For example, Gilman et al. (2001) found that homosexual individuals were more likely to have anxiety, mood, substance use disorders, as well as higher risks of suicidal ideations, compared to heterosexual individuals. The research team also found that gay men and lesbian women were more likely to have an earlier age of onset and more co-morbidities.

Additionally, Stanford, Graaf, Bijl, and Schnabel (2001) investigated the lifetime and the 12-month prevalence of mood, anxiety, and substance use disorders. They found that in the previous 12 months, gay men were three times more likely to have mood and anxiety disorders compared to heterosexual men, whereas women were more likely to have substance use disorders compared to heterosexual women.

Lifetime prevalence was the same for the two groups except for mood disorders, where, compared to heterosexual women, homosexual women were more likely to suffer from them<sup>30</sup>. More recent studies continued to find higher rates of depression, generalized anxiety disorder, panic attacks, eating disorders, psychological distress, and alcohol dependency<sup>31</sup>, as well as higher rates of suicide risks.<sup>32</sup>

Historically, these discrepancies in mental health were explained by perceiving same-sex attractions as a sickness in itself.

However, by removing homosexuality as a psychiatric disorder from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders in 1973, scientists and researchers began to explain these discrepancies through the social stigma associated with the sexual minority status<sup>33</sup>. Meyer proposed the Minority Stress Model in 1995, which to this day has received consistent and growing empirical support. This model states that LGBTQI individuals are at higher risks of developing mental health disorders because of their exposure to chronic and unique stressors associated with their minority status.

These stressors are caused by the juxtaposition of the minority and dominant cultural values, and are divided into distal (prejudice, rejection, discrimination, violence) and proximal stressors

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<sup>29</sup> Kuyper & Fokkema, 2011

<sup>30</sup> Stanford et al., 2001

<sup>31</sup> (Cochran et al., 2007; Cochran & Mays, 2009

<sup>32</sup> Haas et al., 2011

<sup>33</sup> Kuyper & Fokkema, 2011

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(expectations of negative events, concealing sexual orientation and identity, and internalized homonegativity).

In this paper, we will focus on understanding the experiences of LGBTQI individuals with distal stressors and the consequences of these experiences on their psychological well-being, especially in the Lebanese culture.

It is not uncommon for LGBTQI individuals to experience discrimination, stigma, and prejudice across different settings. The likelihood of experiencing antigay prejudice related experiences increases with the visibility of the homosexual identity<sup>34</sup>.

Therefore, different subgroups within the community experience more or less discrimination and violence. The epidemic rates of prejudice related experiences in the LGBTQ community are alarming. Among a national random sample of 2,259 gay, lesbian, and bisexual adults living in California, 25% of gay and bisexual men, and 20% of lesbian and bisexual women reported being survivors of hate-related crimes, such as physical assault, sexual assault, vandalism, or robbery<sup>35</sup>. Moreover, Herek, Cogan, and Gillis (2002) found that 94% of homosexual individuals in their sample experienced verbal harassment not only by random strangers, but also by relatives, coworkers, and neighbors.

According to the minority stress hypothesis, the stress associated with being a victim of prejudice, discrimination, and victimization, because of sexual orientation, affects the psychological well-being of homosexual individuals<sup>36</sup>.

Herek, Gillis, and Cogan (1999) found that gay and lesbian individuals who were victimized because of their sexual minority status had higher scores on depression, anxiety, anger, and traumatic stress symptoms compared to those who were not victimized, or to those whose victimization was not based on their sexual orientation.

Additionally, Szymanski (2009) explored the effects of heterosexist events on psychological distress (anxiety, depression, obsessive compulsive, somatization, and interpersonal sensitivity) among a sample of 210 highly educated gay and bisexual men. They found that heterosexist events had a negative impact on psychological well-being, even when they occurred at a low rate. The main effect of heterosexism on psychological distress persisted even after including other variables, such as social support and self-esteem, which highlights the detrimental and the serious effects of heterosexism.

Furthermore, Garnets, Herek, and Levy<sup>37</sup> noted that victimization interferes with the perception of the world, and leads to self-devaluation. Consistently, Allport (1954) explained that stigmatized

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<sup>34</sup> Meyer, 1995

<sup>35</sup> Herek, Gillis, & Cogan, 1999

<sup>36</sup> Meyer, 2003

<sup>37</sup> 1990 as cited in Meyer, 2003

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individuals acquire traits due to victimization, such as self-hate, in-group aggression, shyness, and rebellion.

There is a lack of research on the life-challenges and the psychological well-being of LGBTQI individuals in the Middle East and North African Region due to the negative stigma associated with the social minority status and to the lack of visibility of this population. Nevertheless, a recent study by Mcoalition conducted with 250 men who have sex with men in five regional countries (Lebanon, Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia) revealed that participants experienced various forms of prejudice-related experiences, with a vast majority reporting maltreatment (being insulted or made fun of, being ignored, and treated with coldness).

Additionally, approximately 33% reported being physically insulted, and 28% reported experiencing discrimination at work. According to the authors, many of these incidents go unreported due to absence of protective laws or out of fear of being detained. Additionally, the report stated that the rate of depression among this sample was double the rate in the general population, with approximately 15% having suicidal ideations, and 9.6% having had an attempt.

In Lebanon, experiences of rape, verbal and physical abuse, job loss, eviction from houses, job discrimination, and blackmailing are very common among LGBTQI individuals. These incidents occur in various life settings, including families, work, and neighborhoods, as well as educational, legal, and medical systems.

More seriously, crimes and violations of human rights are often gone unreported. The majority of LGBTQI individuals who shared their stories with Proud Lebanon<sup>38</sup> reported experiencing, or knowing someone who experienced, robbery, vandalism, and actual life threat without reporting these incidents to officials.

The reason behind not reporting is fear of being detained for their sexual orientation or using the crime as a proof of their sexual orientation. This is a particularly dangerous issue, as the lack of proper protection of sexual minorities is allowing criminals to use gay applications and gay meeting areas to hunt victims. These criminals know for certain that the victim cannot seek protection in the political, legal, or even familial systems, and thus trust that their crimes will be covered.

For example, one participant reported that he was blackmailed into paying 500\$ per month for 6 months, after he was videotaped having sex with the blackmailer. Another participant reported that he met the offender on a dating application for gay men and spent time with him before inviting him home. Upon inviting him home, however, he was surprised by his sudden change in attitude, aggressiveness, threats, and demand for money. What these stories tell us is that the punitive legal

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<sup>38</sup> LGBTQI+ individuals living in Lebanon provided this information to Proud Lebanon. They consented (written consent is available upon request) to share their stories for the purpose of documenting them in this report. Identifying information and any information that can hint at the identity of the individuals is purposely removed to maintain anonymity and respect confidentiality.

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system, combined with the absence of any protection of sexual minorities causes a serious threat on the lives and well-being of LGBTQI individuals in Lebanon.

This is further reinforced by the lack of social and cultural tolerance of sexual minorities, which result in restricting their existence and interactions to underground systems, and thus placing them at continuous risk. Things get even more complicated in the case of LGBTQI refugees, whose mere existence is considered illegal and crimes against them are often not only unreported, but even justified.

#### **IV- Methods of rehabilitation**

It is important to propose a comprehensive intervention plan for LGBTQI survivors of violence and torture, especially those who live in conservative and oppressive cultures.

First, an intensive training on the social minority stress as well as the unique cultural and psychological challenges faced by LGBTQI individuals needs to be given to practitioners working with this population.

The lack of appropriate training and empirical knowledge of this population in Lebanon has not only been unhelpful, but also harmful and punitive.

Second, a thorough assessment of current and past experiences of violence and discrimination must be conducted. No psychotherapy work can be provided in the presence of ongoing trauma. Therefore, it is essential to ensure that the patient is in a safe place, where they are not currently being abused, nor worried about any potential abuse.

This can only be possible through collaborating with local and international governments and NGOs who can provide safety, shelters, and basic needs. It is important to understand the patient's presenting problem, conceptualizing it within the patient's context, and plan treatment accordingly. It is not uncommon for practitioners to attribute the patient's symptoms to sexual orientation and identity struggle when it is not always the case. In the presence of PTSD and anxiety symptoms, providing deep breathing, grounding, and relaxation techniques, in addition to exploring personal safety and self-care is essential, especially in the early stages of therapy.

Third, it is important to assess the patient's level of internalized homonegativity early on in therapy. This is important because, if undetected, it can be a serious obstacle in therapy, and in targeting other symptoms such as depression and anxiety.

Providing psychoeducation on sexual identity and orientation and the effects of traumatic experiences on one's psychological well-being is critical at this phase. This can help patients gain insight into their emotions and thoughts while normalizing and validating their experiences.

It is also important to address any misconceptions and false beliefs, especially those influenced by social rejection, such as "I brought nothing but shame to my family" "I am being punished for my sin," and "I am damaged." Challenging these cognitive biases and modifying core beliefs can be done

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through the commonly known interventions across the different schools of psychotherapy (e.g. CBT and psychodynamic).

Fourth, healthy coping mechanisms versus harmful negative mechanisms should be explored with the patient as part of building strength and resilience. This phase requires, in parallel to psychotherapy, introducing patients to the different forms of LGBTIQ+ community in Lebanon, including, but not limited to NGOs that provide psychosocial services and group interventions. It is also important to teach patients how to “readjust” to living in prejudiced communities, so that traumatizing experiences are reduced.

Fifth, LGBTIQ+ affirmative psychotherapy interventions should be introduced so that sexual orientation and identity are perceived positively, which enhances identity development, lifestyle, and personal growth.

Nevertheless, caution should be taken against attacking the patient’s cultural, religious, or familial backgrounds in the process of affirming their identity, as this may create dissonance in their experiences of themselves within their framework.

Caution should also be taken against imposing cultural values that are alien to the patient’s values and backgrounds, as this may lead the patient to feel not understood, or may even place the patient at danger, especially in the cases of LGBTQI refugees.

## **V- The socio-cultural stigma, taboo and censorship**

In the year 2015, an award-winning movie called "WASP", was denied showing in Beirut film festival by the Lebanese censorship bureau<sup>39</sup>.

Reasons of this censorship were first related to the plot -a story about two gay men that decided to go on a romantic vacation together, later on one of them finds himself unexpectedly attracted to a woman- the direct cause behind the decision of the bureau; and second related to what may have been "provocative" to the bureau: the whole idea of the fluidity of the sexuality.

However, the media and the art scene have been challenging social norms. Examples are many.

Popular TV host Paula Yacoubian <sup>40</sup> has defended gay rights in Lebanon in several tweets, interviews and in a promotional video with Proud Lebanon, same goes for the well known journalists Joumana

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<sup>39</sup> Among several tasks, the Lebanese censorship bureau also monitors the media by ensuring that they do not touch with their content, or contravene public order, or undermine a public institution, and community components to the Lebanese society.

<sup>40</sup> <https://goo.gl/gqR93B>



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Haddad<sup>41</sup>, Dima Sadek<sup>42</sup> and Pierre Abi Saab<sup>43</sup>, in addition to a lot of artists (singers and actors/actresses) such as, Maya Diad, Carole Semaha, (etc).

Mashrou' Leila, a famous Lebanese rock band, has discussed homosexuality in Lebanon in its songs, however, when in 2015 the band wanted to perform in the Zouk Festival, a lot of resistance and homophobia were published on social media in order to stop the band from performing there. At that time, the band got huge support from LGBTIQ+ and Human Rights activists and their fans.

Ironically, Wajdi and Majdi, two gay figures from a comedy TV show called La Youmal, have popularized the image of the LGBTIQ+ community in Lebanon in a VERY bad way, yet the program was never banned.

According to a documentary prepared in 2015<sup>44</sup>, the terminologies used by MTV Lebanon, either in the News section or in "La Youmal" & "Hayda Haki" programs to refer to LGBTIQ+ issues are mostly pejoratives. Even in a recent article published on MTV Lebanon Facebook page about Homosexuality, the approach is still not politically correct<sup>45</sup> and still very judgmental. According to the same documentary, LBCI remains the most active Lebanese channel that advocates for Human Rights including LGBTIQ+ rights, and the most powerful opening of the prime time news once was "It is the republic of shame" to defend LGBTIQ+ rights against rectal examinations, also known as the examinations of shame.<sup>46</sup>

The LGBTIQ+ related stigma seems to be very deep-rooted in our society; Part of it comes from the fact that people don't really know what it is, or they have wrong information about it. As for the rest, it derives from religious convictions and is strongly related to the patriarchy rigid system. It has always been a challenging matter to talk openly about sexuality in the Arab countries, so consider it as even much harder to discuss "difference". Even when it comes to what is considered a source of protection, when it comes to LGBTIQ+ the armed authorities and some political armed groups<sup>47</sup> torture and abuse LGBTIQ+ persons for the simple fact of their sexual orientation or identity.

These discriminations and stigmas are also a result of our education system. For example, Kids at school in some of what is supposed to be their educational activities are asked to remove what is different in a given picture because it doesn't belong with the rest of the majority. Future generations are therefore raised on noticing and "removing" any difference which is problematic regarding the concept of respect which should be introduced to kids from an early age.

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<sup>41</sup> <https://goo.gl/ff0bc5>

<sup>42</sup> <https://goo.gl/iQ00gJ>

<sup>43</sup> <https://goo.gl/EScYMC>

<sup>44</sup> <https://goo.gl/8Q2KkA> (Prepared by Human Rights Activist Miriam Attallah)

<sup>45</sup> <https://goo.gl/4Q8yia>

<sup>46</sup> <https://goo.gl/HWcE6G>

<sup>47</sup> People interviewed by Proud Lebanon stated details related to these parties.

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This example is one of many proving that the system is promoting discrimination and stigma by implying that the minority must be oppressed or/and removed for the sake of the majority.

Even researchers aren't sure what "causes" homosexuality, and they certainly reject any theories that posit a simple origin, such as a "gay gene". It's my opinion that sexual desires, like all our desires, shift and re-orient throughout our lives, and that as they do, they often suggest to us new identities. The subject remains very debatable and on constant and continuous controversy.

Moreover, two main concepts that are heard everywhere when talking about LGBTIQ+ related issues, and so many times, these concepts are confused or even used as synonyms: Acceptance and Tolerance. The notion of acceptance of LGBTIQ+ people implies notions of freedom and equality, meaning: there are no fundamental differences between heterosexuals and homosexuals, which would allow them to live as they wish, like everyone else. The notion of tolerance obviously retains the idea of freedom, but also introduces the idea of difference: the difference in sexual orientation is sufficiently important to justify a different look on the subject, or an unequal treatment. When starting by highlighting the difference between Heterosexual and LGBTIQ+ persons, here lays all the ideas behind discrimination, inequality and injustice.

Therefore, the most politically correct concept to be used must be RESPECT.

A "socially mature" community is a community that respects LGBTIQ+ persons, not tolerates only, not accepts only, because even in accepting, there is a little implying that someone is a reference, and the other is not. However, it is easier in theories than in practice indeed, and it seems in the Arab societies receiving the tolerance and acceptance is already hard to get, thus the "illusion" that tolerance and acceptance are sufficient by their own, or even sometimes just in order to have them, it is considered a luxury.

Other stigmas related to LGBTIQ+ people are the immediate association of this category of people to two other: People living with HIV and Refugees:

According to a recently published report<sup>48</sup> about HIV in Lebanon, 27.5% of the large population of MSM<sup>49</sup>, which putting this category into an epidemic and alarming situation.

The National Aids Program (NAP), which is affiliated with the Lebanese Ministry of Health and supported by the World health Organization, is making advanced efforts regarding raising awareness on this issue, training on HIV testing, keeping track and documentation on people making the tests, issuing regular reports, offering protection for HIV people if they face discrimination in the medical fields, and providing the HIV medicine for everyone for free.

However, the stigma revolving around HIV makes it even harder on people living with HIV to adapt and integrate in their communities; People are still getting fired from their work, their families and relationships after finding out they are HIV positive.

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<sup>48</sup> <https://goo.gl/OtTtDB>

<sup>49</sup> Men having Sex with other Men

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As for the refugees LGBTIQ+ the situation is even more dramatic, due to several reasons such as suffering from a double stigma (being LGBTIQ+ and a refugee at the same time) from the host community, reduced sources of support since the projects are mainly focusing on families, and adding to all that, they are usually separated from their families so they find themselves left with no support at all, which make their day to day life way more tragic<sup>50</sup>.

## **VI - Practical recommendations towards Equality and Respect for All**

### **1) Legal Recommendations**

- Repeal laws criminalizing homosexuality and transgender persons, specifically the Article 534; it must be banned in Lebanon, or at least it must be stated that it has nothing to do with homosexuality and transexuality.
- Protect LGBTIQ+ persons from homophobic and transphobic violence: A lot of LGBTIQ+ get assaulted every day on the streets and don't even dare to contact the armed authorities because they already know it is going to be even worse and the police instead of protecting them, it is highly assumed that they treat them in a degrading and humiliating way.
- Prevent torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment: armed authorities must be prevented from using such treatment on LGBTIQ+ persons.
- Prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity: despite the poor indications that Lebanon is a free country, LGBTIQ+ face violations of their basic rights every day, just because they are LGBTIQ+ .
- Create a reporting mechanism for violations against LGBTIQ+ persons.
- Monitor and document the violations on LGBTIQ+ persons in order to assure accountability.
- Safeguard freedom of expression: no LGBTIQ+ related content must be banned in movies, or any other artistic scenes.
- Safeguard and allow association and peaceful assembly for all LGBTIQ+ people.

### **2) The Social Work**

- LGBTIQ+ organizations must be given permission to work freely in Lebanon as explicitly a LGBTIQ+ organization: Mainly all LBGTIQ+ working organizations in Lebanon are working under the umbrella of Human Rights and use vague terminologies to refer to LGBTIQ+ issues, such as “vulnerable groups”, “Minorities” etc.
- Media must be more addressed by the human rights and LGBTIQ+ organizations to work together on terminologies used on air and ethics while hosting LGBTIQ+ persons and tackling the related issues.
- Organizations must build on the LGBTIQ+ persons' capacities in order to empower them more so they know their rights and where to seek help and support when needed.
- More workshops and trainings need to done with the armed authorities (General security, Internal Security Force and Lebanese Army) on Human Rights in general, and talk more about LGBTIQ+ related issues with them, because misinformation and discrimination can be a main reason behind the homophobic and transphobic attitudes.

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<sup>50</sup> <https://goo.gl/GOPMrn>

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- Engage more in public advocacy, and always try to find channels of communications with the government.
  - Support other partners working on LGBTIQ+ related issues -locally and internationally- in order to join efforts and to strengthen the cause.
  - Create networks and partnerships with Human Rights local and international organizations.

The LGBTIQ+ community is therefore one of the most oppressed "minorities". Thus, the journey of an LGBTIQ+ person in Lebanon remains one of a fighter. This begins at school where they are often stigmatized and bullied for their "assumed" attitude, at work, key positions from which they are often dismissed, and even from their own family who rejects them once they are aware of whom they are.

It is a shame and a human tragedy to criminalize "Love" and abuse, bully, torture persons based on their sexual orientation and gender. Love and sexuality must not be forbidden by any legal law, or by any social discrimination. In Proud Lebanon's advocacy videos released in 2015 and 2016, lots of celebrities, public figures, and Human rights activists highlighted the fact that "you don't have to be gay to defend gay rights"; however, it is kind of a daily struggle to advocate for what is supposed to be a basic human right: Equality and respect. Therefore, the fight goes on...

Social justice must prevail, maybe not this year or the coming one, but we believe that the continuous fights and the baby-steps (yet courageous and supportive) we carry out, must one day have an impact on our society on the long term: "the journey of the 1000 miles, begins with a single step" and we Proud Lebanon have done some many so far and we will continue to the last pulse, to the last breath, to the last abuse to the last survivor.

To conclude this document, sincere yet tragic quotes said by the LGBTIQ+ persons interviewed are left here to your careful attention:

"They forced me to hand them my phone"

"My friend had gay porn on his phone so they concluded he was surely gay"

"My boyfriend and I were first arrested by an armed forced in Beirut, then they hand us to the Lebanese police after humiliating us in front of everyone"

"They closed my eyes with a ribbon, and I didn't know where they were taking me".

"I asked repeatedly, but they refused to tell me why I was detained"

"I wasn't aware where I was taken to and why".

"I was slapped aggressively on my face"

"Do you suck? The policeman asked me"

"Do they enter a penis in your ass?"

"Why? Are there no girls around you so you sleep with another man?"

"I was called faggot in private and in front of other prisoners"

"Why can't I live in this country like a Human being?"

"After this incident, I am depressed all the time, even when I go out, I always look around me and I am scared!"

"I cry like a baby every night"

"I am a man, a real man but I happen to love another man"

"I am not better than anyone, nor worse... I just want to be equal"

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## Robin Hammond – Where Love is Illegal

Proud Lebanon assisted in 2014 Robin Hammond to interview and document a number of LGBTIQ+ individuals and here are some of the stories.



*Figure 1 A posed portrait of 29-year-old Wolfheart (not his real name) from Beirut, Lebanon.*

In July 2011 he was arrested: “I was in a cruising area in Beirut. I was with my partner, in my car, driving around, meeting new people of course. I started chatting with someone in a car coming in the opposite direction. We were talking when a green car with tinted windows stopped behind us. The car in which the person I was talking to drove off quickly. Before I knew it I had the barrel of a Kalashnikov against my head and I was ordered out of the car. My partner tried to escape, but he was caught. One of them was wearing a military uniform. They shouted at me to put my hands behind my back, they handcuffed me to my partner and blindfolded us. We were taken up to the police office and they starting searching us. We had to take off our pants and drop our underpants.

We were made to squat to see if we were hiding anything. One of the three officers in the room took out his mobile phone and started to take pictures while the others would take turns making fun of us, making signs behind us, and the other would slap us. They took my partner to another room. Then I started hearing my partner screaming next door. They were torturing him. I felt sad, we had been together for six years, and it was horrible to think of him in that situation. They found gay porn (on my phone). When they found that I started to feel scared. They didn’t stop insulting us. They would ask us questions like “do you like to get fucked?” If we didn’t answer they would slap us.” For three days they were tortured and questioned.

They were then taken from the military department to the police department. They were placed in a small airless room. “I felt like I was suffocating there.” They stayed in there for 12 days. They were then sent to the police office specialized in investigating moral issues. “We were there for 18 days sharing a small cell with, at one time, 22 others.” The interrogation continued. “They asked us many questions about my sexuality. They continued to beat my partner. I could sometimes hear him screaming.” After 18 days they were taken to court. There they waited seven days for trial, “we were being charged with homosexuality.” They were given a prison sentence of 45 days and a fine of US\$200.

“I was very happy to leave prison. But I was unhappy because the news had reached my partners family and they were really unhappy. We had to break up.” “Six months later I drove through the same area and saw the same guys doing the same thing, holding a gun to the head of some people in a car and arresting them. I felt angry; I would like to see their children subjected to this treatment! I felt angry but powerless and that at

“The crime was that I am homosexual, and the punishment was forty days in jail losing my job, and losing my partner. I learned to survive, and to be pickier where to find friends. I learned to consider my safety first.”





*Figure 2 A posed portrait of 33-year-old Gad (not his real name) from Homs, Syria.*

Gad arrived in Lebanon in July 2014. "I left Homs because my neighborhood was under attack, it was bombed many times. I moved to Lebanon to try to find a job. I found work at the hammam giving massage". Hammams are known as places where gay men go for sex. "I was obliged to work like this so I can assist my parents in Syria. It also provided me a place to stay and not pay rent. I used to work for two months, go back to Homs for a short time, then come back again." One evening in August 2014 we were raided by the police." A policeman came in undercover, asking for a 'massage extra' meaning sex. The receptionist refused. 20 soldiers and police entered. "They took all those who worked in the massage rooms, and started beating those of us from Syria. Everyone inside, staff and clients, were arrested, 27 of us, and taken to the Hbeish, the morality police. 11 of them were Syrian, the rest Lebanese. "They punched and kicked me. They put a black cloth bags over my head.

They continued to punch and kick me. I would never know where it was coming from. They were doing the same to the others.

Sometimes we were alone in a room; sometimes there were two or three of us.

We could hear each other being tortured. This went on for three days. They would beat us with water tubes" Gad was interrogated over the three days. The policemen demanded to know about the operation of the Hammam. They tried to get him to 'out' others working with him. "They beat me a lot. If they asked a question and it wasn't what they wanted to hear they would start beating me again." "I refused to give names." Gad says that once you say what they want they will make you sign confession and document that implicates others.

At night though the questions stopped, but the torture continued. Gad feels it was just a form of cruel entertainment for the policemen. Two of the police used to taunt him in conversation with each other: "they would say things like 'he has big lips, he must suck in the Hammam.' And 'do you think he fucks or gets fucked?' He could hear screaming from the other rooms. He thinks they made you listen to make you feel more afraid. One policeman, while beating him said to Gad: "My brother died in Syria, so I will take revenge on you." After three days the eleven Syrians, four Lebanese and one Iraqi were taken to Zahle Prison. On arrival the police from the morality police said to the prison guards of Zahle "we've brought the gays for you!" Then the Zahle prison guards announced to the prisoners "We got you the rabbits!" Meaning those that have lots of sex, as a gift. As Gad and the other new inmates walked down the hallway of the prison over 70 inmates beat them. As Gad walked down the hallway two men took him aside, took him to another level of the prison, he was taken into a cell and beaten by two men. Then one went to the door, the other took him to the bathroom, beat him "he took out his dick and forced me to suck him. Once he was finished he sent him in the other guy. After he was finished the third came in and tried to sodomize him. At this point Gad started to cry and begged him to stop "I'll kiss your hand, God bless your parents, please stop." The other inmate angrily replied, "I'm horny and I want to come" he beat Gad and then forced him to suck his penis. Gad cried all the time while in prison. The 'boss' of his cell demanded two hundred US dollars a week to keep Gad safe. One of his old clients paid. After four days in prison a humanitarian organization provided them with lawyers. After 28 days they were released. In March 2015 they will appear in court charged with "Homosexuality" under article 534 of the Lebanese Penal code, which prohibits having sexual relations that "contradict the laws of nature" and is punishable

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by up to a year in prison. “There are a lot of things that I can’t forget, like the raping in the jail.” Since his release he hasn’t been able to find a job and has difficulty finding a place to live. He survives off donations and support from NGOs.

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*Figure 3 A posed portrait of Diva (not her real name), a 24-year-old transgender Palestinian woman born in a Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon (to Palestinian parents).*

“All my life, all of society have treated me in an in-human way. It got worse as I got older especially at work and in University.” “When I was small my parents saw me playing with a Barbie doll with a girl. They beat me. There are taboos – boys shouldn’t play with girls. My father said I was like a donkey, a dog. “You’re a disgrace,” he said. Diva knew she was a girl though. “When I was 6 or 7 years old, when my family was away, I used to sit in front of the mirror and put make up on like my mum. Sometimes my family caught me - they would insult me and beat me.” From a young age she was the victim of sexual abuse. “My uncle raped me when I was 11 and told me not to tell anyone about this. He raped me three times. I felt destroyed. He was stronger and forced me to do this against my will. I got depressed. It lasted for a long time. It was a very horrible period of my life. He used to tell me it was normal and give me money and told me not to tell anyone. I used to scream and tell him to go away. I couldn’t tell anyone about it because no one would believe me because he was this religious person.” Her immediate family did not accept her at all: “My brother has always been ashamed of me. He still is. Many times through my life he beat me and insulted me. Five or six times, with the support of my father, he tried to kill me. My brother tried to stab me but he never was able to. Several times he beat me with a thick piece of wood. Once my father tried to strangle me but I managed to escape and run away.” “I used to go to school with bruises on my face. Teachers would ask me what had happened. I would cry and not say anything. I was afraid.” Students at the school would make fun of her, insulting her with offensive terms for females. They would spit at her too. Sexual abuse happened in the school as well. “There was a boy in the school, he was 18, he raped me when I was 15. I was afraid to tell anyone about that. He threatened to tell my family about what happened.” But it wasn’t just students who were cruel to her. She suffered discrimination throughout her schooling from her teachers as well. At her high school graduation the Director of the school asked her to not attend. “She didn’t say why, but she didn’t have to.” Diva went to nursing school. She thought it would be the one profession that would accept her. She was wrong. “I had studied nursing for one year but when we were to start the internship, which we must do to graduate, my instructor told me ‘you should change yourself, and change your look if you want to do the internship’ I said ‘I can’t change myself. My behavior and my look is not related to my knowledge and my education.’ She then called my parents and told them that they need to change me, and that I should go through spiritual therapy and I cannot do the internship because my look and my style would damage the reputation of the university.” Without the internship Diva could not qualify as a nurse. “I was very down when I realized I would not be able to be a nurse, I got depressed. But then I thought, ‘no, I’m not going to give up, I’m going to show her that I will be

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successful. I will graduate and find a job to show that there are people who can accept me' – not like her." "I've been looking for a job for five years, but when they see me for the interview, they often cancel it. Once when I went to apply for a job at a hospital, there was a big group of people handing in their CV's, they took everyone's, but refused to take mine. At another hospital I went for an interview, they said to me "You're coming to apply here? We can't receive people like you here! We don't even know your gender!" I turned around and left. I felt so humiliated and oppressed." At the end of 2014 her father came to her mother's house and attacked Diva. "It was morning, I was still in bed, my father burst into my room, he started shouting at me 'you have damaged our dignity and our honor!' as he said these words he raised a broom which he had in his hand and beat me with it. I started screaming and all the neighbors came. He threw down the broom and left my room, but he came back immediately with a knife.

The neighbors were shouting 'kill her and make humanity relieved from her, we don't need these kinds of people in our neighborhood!' I tried to escape. I thought that someone would help me but they were all against me. Somehow, I don't know how, I managed to get my clothes and escape. I stayed away from the house until my mother called me and told me my father had left the house." "This is the tradition. I know he will keep trying and if he doesn't do it with his own hand one of the family members will. He still sends me threatening messages." Diva still lives with her mother; she feels she has no other choice. "I'm waiting for my father to come back after me, but it might not be him, I'm afraid of all the people where I live... but I was born this way and I will die this way!"