
Struggling to Survive

Iraqi LGBT People's Accounts
of Violence and Rights Abuse



I G L H R C
INTERNATIONAL GAY AND LESBIAN
HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION



MADRE

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Terms used to describe LGBT individuals in Iraq

Sister	/Ukhut /	أخت
Old sister	/Baji /	باجي
Puppy.....	/Jarū/	جرّو
.....	/Teo/	طيّو
Faggot.....	/ Looti/	لوطي
Top	/Mujab /	موجب
Shemale	/Mukhanath/	مخنث
Bottom	/Salib /	سالب
Shame	/A'ar/	عار
Chick	/Farikh /	فرخ

Of these terms, only the terms sister /ukhut/ and old sister /baji/ are considered acceptable. That is because the LGBT community itself uses the term. The term sister refers to a gay guy, and the word big sister refers to an older gay guy who is older than 40 years old. The rest of the terms are considered insulting to various degrees. For example, the two terms puppy/jaru/ and chick /farikh/ are meant to compare gay people to small, vulnerable animals.

Terms such as top/mujab/, and bottom/salib/ insinuate the power dynamic that is created between people, in particular men, who perform particular roles during sexual intercourse. The common notion in society is that bottoms /salib/ are the gay men who try to look like women, and therefore are considered to be outcasts. To the contrary, tops/mujab/ are not even considered to be gay. Self-identified tops often talk proudly and publicly about their sexual practices even with other men.

While the expression /teo/ does not have a tangible meaning, it is an expression used to give the impression that the people who are referred to are weak and insignificant.

Despite our best efforts, we were not able to identify terminology that is commonly used in Iraq to refer to lesbians.

Terminology

Sexual Orientation: A person's capacity for profound emotional, affectional, and sexual attraction to, and intimate and sexual relations with, individuals of a different gender or the same gender or more than one gender.¹

Gender identity: A person's deeply felt internal and individual experience of gender, which may or may not correspond with the sex assigned at birth, including the personal sense of the body (which may involve, if freely chosen, modification of bodily appearance or function by medical, surgical or other means) and other expressions of gender, including dress, speech and mannerisms.²

LGBT: An acronym that represents lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender. This acronym frequently replaces the term gay, and is constantly developing as activists are adding new initials such as "Q" which represents queer, and "I" which represents intersex.

Transgender: A person whose gender identity and/or expression does not or is perceived to not match stereotypical gender norms associated with assigned gender at birth. A transgender person can be lesbian, gay, bisexual or have any other sexual orientation.

Brothels/Sex-working houses: A physical place where persons may go to engage in a sexual activity with other persons, usually in exchange for money or goods. Such places usually have a cover, especially in conservative societies, such as massage centers, or bars to hide the nature of their activities.

Heterosexual: A person with capacity for profound emotional, affectional, and sexual attraction to, and intimate and sexual relations with, persons of a different gender.

Homosexual: A person with capacity for profound emotional, affectional, and sexual attraction to, and intimate and sexual relations with, persons of the same gender. Is sometimes used as synonymous with "gay" or "LGBT"

Lesbian: A female-identified individual with capacity for profound emotional, affectional, and sexual attraction to, and intimate and sexual relations with other female-identified individuals.

Gay: A male-identified individual with capacity for profound emotional, affectional, and sexual attraction to, and intimate and sexual relations with other male-identified individuals.

Bisexual: A person with capacity for profound emotional, affectional, and sexual attraction to, and intimate and sexual relations with, persons who are either male- or female-identified.

Sex Worker: Female, male and transgender adults and young people (over 18 years of age) who receive money or goods in exchange for sexual services, either regularly or occasionally. Sex work may vary in the degree to which it is "formal" or organized. It is important to note that sex work is consensual sex between adults, which takes many forms, and varies between and within countries and communities.³

Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI): STIs are caused by more than 30 different bacteria, viruses and parasites and are spread predominantly by sexual contact, including vaginal, anal and oral sex⁴. Sometimes referred to as STDs, or sexually transmitted diseases, though not all STIs lead to disease.

Some STIs may be spread via skin-to-skin sexual contact. The organisms causing STIs can also be spread through non-sexual means such as blood products and tissue transfer. Many STIs—including chlamydia, gonorrhea, hepatitis B, HIV, HPV, HSV2 and syphilis—can also be transmitted from mother to child during pregnancy and childbirth⁵.

Eight of the more than 30 pathogens known to be transmitted through sexual contact have been linked to the greatest incidence of illness. Of these 8 infections, 4 are currently curable: syphilis, gonorrhea, chlamydia and trichomoniasis. The other four are viral infections and are incurable, but can be mitigated or modulated through treatment: hepatitis B, herpes, HIV, and HPV⁶.

1 International Commission of Jurists (ICJ), Yogyakarta Principles - Principles on the application of international human rights law in relation to sexual orientation and gender identity, March 2007, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/48244e602.html> [accessed 25 March 2014].

, http://www.yogyakartaprinciples.org/principles_en.htm

2 Ibid.

3 "Implementing Comprehensive HIV/STI Programmes with Sex Workers Practical Approaches from Collaborative Interventions," World Health Organization (2013), available at http://www.who.int/hiv/pub/sti/sex_worker_implementation/swit_intro.pdf?ua=1. [accessed 25 March 2014].

4 "Sexually Transmitted Infections: Fact Sheet 100," World Health Organization (November 2013) available at: <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs110/en/> [accessed 25 March 2014].

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.



INTRODUCTION

Since the U.S. invasion of Iraq in March 2003, many individuals perceived to be lesbian, gay bisexual or transgender (LGBT) have been targets of frequent violent, and sometimes deadly attacks by Islamic militias, vigilantes, and members of their own families or tribes. Even prior to the 2003 invasion, Iraqi LGBT people were a marginalized and invisible community living under Saddam Hussein's dictatorship without any legal protection or social status. Given pervasive negative stereotypes about homosexuality (and general lack of knowledge regarding transgender issues) in Iraq, the level of violence against LGBT people is not surprising. LGBT individuals are widely blamed by media outlets, religious leaders, and others who influence public opinion for the moral decay of society. In such public discourse, homosexuality is frequently equated with crimes such as rape or robbery. The perception of homosexuals as "perverts" and "criminals" is used to justify and legitimate acts of violence against the lives of those believed to be LGBT.

During the era of Baath Party rule in Iraq before the 2003 U.S. invasion, there was little information and public debate within Iraqi society on homosexuality. After the invasion, many Iraqis gained access to the Internet and Western media for the first time, which allowed them to learn about how other societies deal with topics such as homosexuality. Though in today's Iraq some men use the word "gay" to identify their sexual orientation, many Iraqis still refuse to discuss the taboo subject of homosexuality or to talk about the situation of "gays" in Iraq. Because of the increased visibility of the topic that came with the U.S. invasion of their country, in the minds of many Iraqis, including some Iraqi officials, the notion of homosexuality is itself linked to the invasion and to the subsequent social chaos that followed. The West is blamed for importing homosexual ideas and behaviors into the "pure," traditional Iraqi society. Many Iraqis claim that gay people never existed in Iraqi society before, and the phenomenon of homosexuality only appeared after societal exposure to the West. There is very little, if any, knowledge of transsexuality or transgenderism, and many simply see heterosexual trans individuals as gay, as most Iraqis assume anyone who does not conform to traditional gender norms or expression must be gay or lesbian.

Iraqi authorities generally do not investigate incidents of violence against LGBT individuals, and many incidents are never reported to the authorities at all. Some crimes are perpetrated in the name of protecting tribal or family honor, or vigilantes claim to implement Islamic laws. The popular perception of LGBT individuals as social outcasts, coupled with the influence and power of tribal leaders and religious militias who commit anti-LGBT violence, have made it next to impossible for LGBT individuals to seek justice. In some cases, police forces also take advantage of the vulnerability of LGBT individuals to further exploit and intimidate them.

The Iraqi LGBT Memoir Project is a collection of stories told by survivors of anti-LGBT violence in Iraq. The individuals in this booklet have decided to come out from the shadows and share their stories. They want to demonstrate that despite popular beliefs there are LGBT individuals in Iraq, and that many have been, and continue to be, subjected to violence and discrimination by their families, friends, co-workers, community members, and the Government because of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. Contributors to this collection of memoirs include three men who self-identify as gay, one woman who identifies as lesbian, and one transgender person. These individuals are not a threat to society, nor do they intend to undermine the fabric of Iraqi society or to violate religious laws. They are simply human beings that deserve to be treated with respect and dignity promised to all people.

The stories of these five LGBT individuals represent the voices of thousands of other Iraqi LGBT community members who face similar fears, challenges and dangers on a daily basis. Each personal story was written or told by the individuals themselves. All accounts are complemented by visual representations that hold significance to the authors, and further portray the breadth of their experience. These were selected or created by the authors themselves. We have conducted follow-up interviews with each individual to clarify their story and have added facts, dates and information about each author and their lived experience.

This project strives to shed light on the realities of Iraq's LGBT community members. This memoir not only exposes the daily struggles of the authors, but also importantly offers us a glimpse into their dreams, aspirations, and hopes for a better and brighter future. The stories highlight the ways that each individual must tackle unique and difficult circumstances that vary depending on a host of factors including their socio-economic background, their gender, and the general security environment. These stories tell us how the survivors of human rights violations and violence have found ways to triumph over adversity and develop solutions to confront and manage their realities.

The International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission and MADRE would like to thank those who agreed to share their stories with us, as well as our partners and allies who made this project possible. Given the ongoing security concerns in Iraq we are not able to name all individuals and groups who generously lent their support to this project. We are wholeheartedly grateful for their dedication and commitment to the human rights of LGBT persons in Iraq. We hope this publication will empower Iraq's LGBT community members in their struggle for equality, dignity, and justice.

My name is Duaa, I was born in 1988, and I am a transgender woman from Baghdad, Iraq.

My difficult life started when I was one week old. Yes, one week. My dad and his family tortured my mom, so she decided to take me at that age, and run with the help of the neighbors.

While she was trying to escape, my grandmother caught her, and she took me from her. She kicked my mother out of the house. My mother went back to her family's house, and I stayed with my father's family with no official documents aside from my birth certificate.

My dad divorced my mom and married another woman. That woman's condition to marry my father was not to register me as her child. He agreed. I was left to live with my grandmother who is also originally from Baghdad. I was left with no documents. My grandfather passed away a few years before I was born.

My grandmother took care of me. She took care of my expenses. When it was time for me to enroll in school, she called my dad, and told him it was time for his kid to go to school, and for that to happen, we needed to have the necessary documents. He denied her request, and so she started contacting our relatives to convince them to accept registering me as their kid. My uncle's wife agreed to do that if we paid her 500,000 Iraqi dinars. My grandmother sold her gold, and paid my uncle's wife, and I got the Iraqi citizenship, but I kept living with my grandmother.

I enrolled in school. I spent my time at school wanting to hang out with girls, and liking to get closer to them. One of the girls' mother used to pity me, so she would send me clothes and sandwiches.

We were very poor. For each holiday, we would go to my aunt's house that had a very good financial status. My cousin was a gay guy, and he was 15 years older than me. He was 25 years old, married, and had a kid.

During one of our visits to my aunt's house, they sent me with my cousin to buy stuff from the market. My cousin had a previous agreement with a friend of his to meet us, and we did. We sat in an office close to Dejala River. Suddenly they started drinking and kissing each other. They asked me to sit closer, but I didn't want to. They insisted, and also asked me to drink. I drank one glass, and my cousin's friend started kissing me! I was very confused. I was just 10 years old. They left me, and went to a bed they had there. They started kissing each other, and asking me to join them. I didn't want to join them, but my cousin dragged me. They were naked, and they started forcing me into doing things. My cousin put his friend's penis in my mouth, and tried to force me into doing things I didn't want to do. So, I ran and my cousin came after me. He gave me some money, and I discovered that his friend had paid us to meet him.

Since then, whenever my aunt called to invite us to her house, I was too scared to go. I kept thinking that my cousin would take me to that place again.

On one of the family occasions in 2001, we had to go there because all of the family members were gathering. When we went my cousin tried to convince me to go with him again. He kept offering me money, and assuring me that nothing would happen if I didn't want it to. So I went with him.

We visited the same guy at the office. The moment we walked in, they dragged me and tied me to the bed. They started kissing me, ripping my clothes off, and touching me. When they were done with me, they had sex with each other. I was very scared, I couldn't even look at my cousin, I was afraid that he would tell our families. He told me to keep my mouth shut.

I stopped going there until the summer break when they sent me to live with my aunt. On one of the days when my aunt went to visit one of the neighbors, my cousin threatened me that he would tell everyone about what I did, and he raped me. That was the first time I had ever had sex with anyone. There was blood everywhere, I was in severe pain, and I was crying. I was in pain for days after that. I went back to my grandmother's house.

When I turned 18 in 2006, I fell in love with my aunt's driver. I was attracted to men, I was feminine, and I felt like a woman. This driver was my first love relationship. We were together for three and a half years. We never left each other's sides. But he was killed during a bombing in Baghdad on 2008.

My life became even sadder than it was before, especially when my grandmother, the only source of love, family feelings, the only

father and mother I knew, got sick later that year. I dropped out of school when I was in 8th grade to take care of her. I wanted to repay her for all the things she had done for me. She passed away a few months after that.

I moved in with my aunt, and then with her daughter. They treated me like a servant. They often insulted my mother whom I never met, and kept asking me to go and find her. So, I moved again, and went to live with my uncle from my dad's side who had a son. His son treated me like I was his brother. He died after he fell from a building in 2009.

I couldn't stand living at that house anymore, so I moved to live with one of my female cousins, who was working in a brothel. She forced me to work with her as a sex worker, especially as I didn't have any source of income. She was very kind to me. I used to pay her rent for one room and work with her. After six months of working, when I was 20 years old, I met someone who was very sweet with me. He asked me to move in with him. The day we were going towards his house, his family followed us and started hitting me. They tried to shoot me but he stopped them. They told him that either they kill me, or he leaves me, which he did, to protect me. So in 2009, he left me.

I became very sad since then. I started smoking, I continued living with my cousin and working with her, going to nightclubs and brothels. Such houses are illegal in Iraq, but the government tends to act like they don't exist, when in fact, they exist in all the Iraqi cities, except for the northern region where it's punishable by the law. The militias attack these houses every once in a while.

Through my work, I met a pimp who treated me very well and was very kind to me. She asked me to move in with her because my family members were not treating me well. She was my support system and a very good friend to me. The atmosphere was very risky. The army and local militias kept coming into the house and insulted us and tried to abuse us. I decided to go and live with my uncle, my father's brother, who agreed to take me in if I started working with him as a mechanic. I stayed there for a few months. During that time, he made comments about the way I behaved and tried to "turn me into a real man." Then, I moved again and this time went to live with another pimp, Sulaimania, who I'd met before. I went for a few months, and that's when I received a call from my lover who had been forced to leave me. He said that we could be together again, and that he would take care of all of my expenses.

I went back to Baghdad. Now I'm living with my partner. He's very sweet to me. He treats me as his wife. I feel like a woman, but the problem is that my ID, my official documents, don't reflect the true me. I'm not a man; I don't feel like a man. I'm a woman, with feminine desires, looks, and feelings. I barely go out because I can't risk people seeing me, judging me, and harassing me for the way I look. My only source of comfort and love is my lover and my cat.



© DUA

This cat is one of the sources of Duaa's support system, and source of love. her cat



© flicker

I wish one day, I can change my body and become a real woman. I want to look like "Lamees," a character played by the Turkish actress "Tuba Buyukustun." She is very beautiful.

Tuba Buyukustun is the Turkish actress that Duaa aspire to resemble when she goes through the sex-change surgery.

My name is H. A. N and I'm a lesbian from Basra, a very conservative city in the south of Iraq on the Arabic Gulf. I was born May 5, 1987. Since I was three years old, I felt different. I felt like I'm a man and I always wanted to play with boys.

My first relationship was with a girl from my high school. I was 15 years old and we were very close to each other. I was more like the man in the relationship. I was the one who protected and defended her when other girls were harassing her, or were bullying us. She was the first person that I loved in my life and the first person that I had sex with. We usually met in our houses pretending that we were studying but in fact, we were spending time together. We rarely had sex because we were afraid of the society and our families that consider people like us as sinners.

After three years we spent together, my family found out about the relationship, and I had to run from the house. I turned to a friend I had in Baghdad. It was 2005, and I was 18 years old. I had to leave school when I was in 9th grade; I was staying with a female friend who knew about my sexual orientation. My family kept looking for me. They went to my girlfriend's house and told her family that we were romantically involved. My girlfriend's family locked her in the house, and after the tribe knew about her, the men in the family slaughtered her. She was only 17 years old. I have not heard about any reaction from the police.



*Basra:
the most hated city
by H.A.N*

When I found out about that, I hated Basra with all my heart. I decided to disown my family and completely forget about them. I stayed in Baghdad with my friend, and we worked in the Sheraton Hotel. In the meantime, I had several relationships because I discovered that the society is not a good place to have real relationships that last for a lifetime.

After the situation got worse in Basra in 2006 because of the sectarian violence, my family had to flee and came to live in Baghdad looking for me. My mom wanted me to live with her. She accepted me for who I am. She accepted my orientation. She even started treating me as a man. I moved back in with my family.

I changed my work and started working in a nightclub as a waiter. A nightclub in Iraq is basically men drinking alcohol, watching women dancing to Iraqi music, and giving them money. I met a girl there who was coming to the nightclub regularly. We started having feelings towards each other and fell in love in late 2007. After a while of being together, the people I worked with found out about it. I started feeling that working there was a big risk for us, especially since my work starts at night and ends at dawn. Also, because Mahdi army members used to come to this club occasionally, they also knew about us. But I had to keep working there because I couldn't find another job.



*An example of
Iraqi nightclubs
where H.A.N
worked*



*A picture of blood
that reminds
H.A.N of her
tragic abduction
experience*

In 2008, one night when I was about to enter the club, the Mahdi army kidnapped me. They took me to a place that was covered with blood, and there were some gay men and two other lesbians. They started torturing us; they burned my left thigh, and beat us without any mercy. Then they slaughtered a gay guy in front of our eyes.

After a week of being there, they released us making us sign a paper stating that we would not have sex that is not approved by Islam.

I left my job. I found a job in a coffee shop close to our neighborhood and remained in touch with my girlfriend. I need her love and our intimacy. We are truly in love until this very moment. We wish that one day we could live together freely, without living in fear. We're trying now to find an opportunity to get out of the country and continue our lives together.

My name is Malek and I was born in 1987 in Baghdad to a poor family. I'm a homosexual person who lives in a society that is not civilized. My only dream is to have the freedom of choosing my sexual orientation, and be with a man who loves me and who I love truly -- someone who owns my heart and I own his without harassment from the community and tribal values. I want to be a simple free human being without the violence of my family and the other people whom I know and mingle with. I hope that one day, my dream comes true, and I marry a man who I live with and share the rest of my life.

My feelings since childhood were feminine. I played like girls and even in school my desire was to play games with girls. When I got older and went to secondary school, I felt that I was different from other boys; my character was not the same as the other guys in my school. I thought, "I'm the only one like this. This only exists inside me." But after mixing with friends, and knowing people like me, like my nature (gays), I started sharing my secrets and stories with them, like with my Christian friend, Dani. After talking about my feelings, and myself, he supported me and expressed that he had the same feelings inside. He told me about himself and his relationships. I felt a great joy that I found someone like me and to know that I'm not the only guy who feels like a girl.

After a period of time, I got to know a young man in the area where I live, and he was my first love affair. I was 16 years old. We stayed together for two and a half years. After three months from the beginning of this relationship, we had sex in his apartment. This was the first time I had ever had sex with anyone. He loved me and treated me like a loved person. He never let me need anything. He was helping, and loving me as a brother, a friend, and a father. But he was a father that I only saw once every few weeks because of the many wives he had and his position as a tribe leader.

In the meantime, I made a new friend, Amir Jabbar, who was living in our neighborhood. He was 17 years old, gay, and became my closest friend. I met him through my boyfriend, Hayder. We spent all of our time together. Once when we were going to shop in 2005, we were threatened by the Mahdi army in Baghdad Jadida market, which is an old poor neighborhood. They threatened us to be men and stop acting like women. I was very scared and felt very worried because this army kills people, and also because I was afraid my dad, with all his power, would know about me. So I moved to live with my sister in Al-Mansour area, which is a very classy neighborhood located close to Baghdad International Airport.

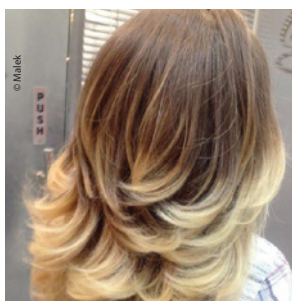
Later that year, a guy riding a motorcycle shot my friend Amir in front of his dad's restaurant. I don't know why he was killed, but it's most likely because he was gay. Amir took three bullets - two in his stomach and one in his waist. After being hospitalized in the medical city, and being there for three months, he passed away.

This was the start of all the bad things in my life. I lost my best friend and my boyfriend left me because his friends started suspecting our relationship. I kept living with my sister until 2006 when my brothers forced me to join the Iraqi army claiming that this would be the solution for me to be a man, depend on myself, and keep away from my friends who have bad influence on me. The army in Iraq is not a mandatory thing, but my family made me join when I was 19 years old. I first joined Muthana airport before joining the army as a preparatory step. Muthana airport was mainly used for military purposes in Baghdad, and it's closed now. After only a few months, I received a threat telling me to quit my job or I would be killed because they didn't like the way I looked and behaved. So, I left my job and I went back to live with my sister. My parents never took me back because I attract danger to them. It was true, because we kept receiving threats that made us move into another neighborhood. All of my family members were blaming me. The only support system I had was my mother who had a heart attack. She became disabled because of what I was going through and because of my problems with my brothers. My brothers kept calling me shameless faggot, and kept blaming me for the family having to move into a new neighborhood.

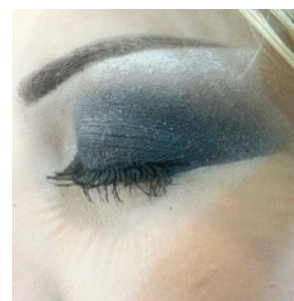
When I was 20 years old in 2007, I started working as a hairstylist and make up artist in a women's salon with one of my friends. I loved my job, but my family didn't like what I was doing. Because of tradition and their ideas about how a man should act, they forced me to quit.



Malek preparing to dye a customers hair



Hairstyle by Malek



Makeup by Malek

In 2009, I lost my mother. My situation became worse. My brothers always beat me, and I still have some bruises until this very moment. I couldn't take all that anymore, so I traveled to Basra and stayed with a friend. That's when I met someone new, someone I never thought I would love. But his care and love for me made me love him, and we began a relationship. He was 32 years old, and I was 22 years old. He gave me hope again, and I felt that I was not alone anymore. We decided we would travel and pursue a new life in a different country. We arranged everything and headed towards Turkey. But because we didn't have enough money on us, they didn't let us cross the borders. Iraqis back then needed to carry \$2000 in order to get a visa at the border or at the airport, and could stay for a month. We didn't have the funds, so we went back to Iraq. My boyfriend went to Basra. I went to stay with a friend in Baghdad because my boyfriend couldn't take care of me as he spent all his money on the Turkey trip.

In 2011, when I was 24 years old, I was going to visit a friend in Karada neighborhood. Three guys grabbed me, raped me behind a gas station, burned me with cigarettes, and stole a memory stick I had with me. That memory stick contained pictures of me wearing women's clothes and make up. They published these pictures. When my family saw these pictures, they started chasing me to kill me.

I turned to a friend who had a beauty salon; I started working and sleeping there for a few months. Then I moved in with another friend of mine. I couldn't go out anymore, especially because of the EMO killing campaigns and the published list of names of guys who were wanted to be killed -- which my name was on.

I moved from one house to another, until I found out about an organization that provides protection and a shelter for gay people. I moved into this shelter a few months ago, in November 2013. I can't work as I only studied until 12th grade. I'm suffering from an STI in my anus, and I can't have sex comfortably. I'm very worried that this could get worse.

I have no problem with the way I am. God created me like that. I have no control of who I am. I just want to live freely.



I am a person that loves freedom, a simple guy who wishes to have a good future, and marry a man that loves me, and that I love. These are my hopes.

My name is Nawar, and I'm a gay person from Iraq. I was born in 1990.

I discovered that I'm a homosexual when I was in Jordan, where I liked a guy that went to my school. We had something developing, and I felt like a girl that is getting closer to a guy. My heart was beating so fast. We were together for a year and a half.

During that time, my family decided to go back to Iraq, which we did. And that's when my tragic story started -- a tragedy in a country where no kind of freedom is allowed or available.

I dropped out of school when I was 14 or 15 years old because of the situation that I was living in.

After we went back to Iraq, my father was very violent with me. He used to hit me for the smallest of reasons, and call me an atheist faggot. Whenever I talked back and tried to stand up for myself, he would hit me even harder! I still have marks on my head, foot, and left thigh.

I made an arrangement with some of my relatives to live in my grandparents' house. After a while, even my grandparents started treating me differently. So I started spending most of the time at a friend's house to avoid my grandparents and their cruel comments, or went to stay with my aunt.

Staying with my aunt opened up a different door for me. I started working in theatre. I participated in four plays that were shown at the Iraqi National Theatre in Baghdad. Then I was offered a part on a TV show playing the role of a homosexual person. The show aired on Sharqiya TV, one of the most locally popular Iraqi channels, mostly famous for showing TV series.



The national theatre is where a number of Nawars acting experience was shown



An ad. Nawar designed for Zain Telecommunication Company

After the show was on TV, I faced a number of dangerous incidents. When I was going back home one day, a car stopped in front of me in a Jihad neighborhood located in west Baghdad mostly controlled by the Shia Mahdy army. Two of the passengers got out of the car and beat me until I passed out. When I woke up, I found myself in a car with four guys who drove me to a house in the same neighborhood where my grandparents live. They raped me. Then another person came who was called Alaa Muzher, a neighbor of my grandparents, and he raped me too and started hitting me. He was a member of the Mahdy army. After that, two of them grabbed me and another one put a wick/bandage, which in Iraqi is called Fteela, in my anus. They called one of their friends to tape me on video on his cellphone. Finally they put glue in my anus, and threw me in front of my grandparents' house.

When I went inside, I found my grandmother waiting for me. She didn't want to sleep before I got back -- and she was shocked when she saw the blood dripping from my head and mouth. I told her that they put glue in my anus. She was understanding and asked me to travel to Syria and get treated.

I didn't sleep until the morning, and then I went to book the ticket to go to Syria. I called my friend Sarmad there, and told him about what happened. The moment I arrived there, they put me into surgery. I stayed there for a week and then went back to Iraq.

Later, I got back my work at the national theatre, but I stayed with my aunt in Saydia neighborhood, southwest of Baghdad, and mostly occupied by Sunni Arabs. The threats and the danger I faced never stopped. In 2006, the Mahdy army broke into my grandparents' house. They wanted to kill me. At that very moment, my uncle came back. It turned out that he worked with them, so they didn't kill me. In 2012, I witnessed the killing of my friend in the Emo killing campaign.

I suffer verbal abuse almost everywhere I go to because of the way I look, dress and behave. But I always thought, "I'm a normal person. I don't think there's anything wrong with me."

Since my return to Baghdad, I've been in a number of relationships with different guys. The last relationship I was in was with Abdullah, who owned a cafe. I told him my story, so he decided to rent an apartment for me and let me live in it. After one year of our relationship, his family found out that he rented the apartment for me, so he moved in with me to diminish their suspicions. We stayed together for four beautiful years.

After a while, we received a threat from an unknown source, and we decided to go to Turkey and apply for the UNHCR as refugee status. A friend of my boyfriend helped us when we arrived in Ankara. From the moment we arrived, I started asking about when we would go and actually apply. He kept asking me to wait.

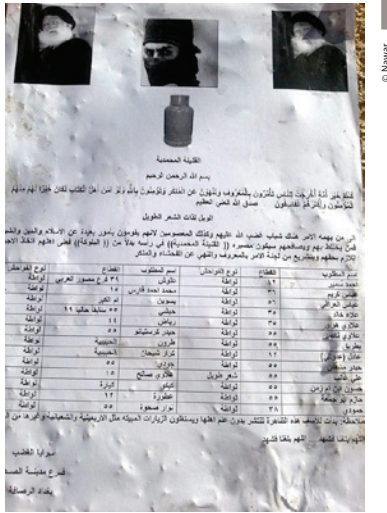
After staying in Turkey for a number of days, Abdullah changed. We started fighting for different reasons, like him flirting with girls in the street. I felt like he turned into a monster and was not the person I knew in Baghdad.

After a while, he and his friend kicked me out of the apartment, accusing me of stealing \$1000. So I went out, headed towards an airline company, booked the next flight to Baghdad, and went back to live with my grandparents.

Abdullah had filmed me when I was having sex and sent the video to my father on Facebook. Three days after arriving back in Baghdad, my mother called me and said that I should escape and leave my grandparents' house because someone sent a video of me to my father, and that he and my uncles and cousins were looking for me to kill me. She said, "They think killing you is their duty to protect their honor."

I escaped and turned to my friend Omar, who told me about an organization helping LGBT people that would protect me. Before then, I had never asked any organization for help.

I contacted the person in charge of the LGBT project at the organization in June 2013. They asked me to come to do an interview to tell them my story. They offered me a safe place, food, and medical services. I told them that my main and top priority is my safety. So, a few months after that interview, I decided that I would move into their shelter.



A list released by one of the militias targeting LGBT people in Sadr City, and Baghdad

Since then, my name was on a list of another gay killing campaign that was published all around Sadr City, known before as Thawra neighborhood, but changed to Sadr City after the Shia Mahdy army took control of the area after 2003. But my life started changing towards a more positive thing. Two of the organization's members were and still are big supporters for us. And the consultant who also worked on this project was very understanding. This consultant is my idol. He inspired me that instead of being a victim, I could stand up for myself, and that's what I have been doing. I've been helping with the project. I want to learn more about rights, and about being gay.

My name is Yasir. I was born in 1989 in Baghdad. My journey as a gay person started when I was seven years old. Our neighbor's son seduced me to have sex with him. Days, months and years passed by and we were sexually involved. When I turned 10, I had sex with his brother too. They were Christian, open minded, and I liked being gay.

My family, which consisted of my parents, two brothers, three sisters and me, lived in a nice big house, with my uncles and aunts as well. My family started doubting my sexual orientation, and my gay-like behavior, but they didn't do anything because they looked at me as the youngest, spoiled member of the family.

I only have some basic education. I only went to school for a few years, up until 4th grade. Now, I can't remember how to read or write.

One day, I was home alone with my cousin from my dad's side, when he started beating me, and sexually abusing me. He threatened me not to tell our families. He continued abusing me until I was 12 years old. That's when my dad passed away, and my mom had to become my father and mother. And my cousin kept abusing me.

After that, a new person moved into our neighborhood, and I discovered that he was homosexual. We became friends; he understood me. I was very relieved and happy that I had a friend who could understand me. We were romantically involved, but I still practiced sex with my cousin.

Hayfa street: one of the neighborhoods where Yasir used to live.



In 2002, because of some political problems my uncle had with a government official, we had to move out. We all split and lived in different places. We moved to Hayfa Street, which is a two-mile long street in Baghdad, mostly known for its apartment compounds where usually rich people live. We lived in a house that had no services, no electricity, and no water.

Life became harder, and I had to work to help my family. I worked in a carpentry shop, and my brother used to steal the little money I made from working there.

One day, the shop owner tried to abuse me, but I managed to escape. I didn't tell anyone about this, but I never went back to work there again.

In 2004, when I was 15 years old, I started working at camp Ferrin Huggins, a war camp established by the American army, and fought the Mahdi army from there. I worked for the housing services section. That's where I met my first love. That's where I really felt something towards someone, the first time in which I felt free. It was a mix of weird but good feelings.

After working there for a number of months, I had to quit my job because of the bad security situation in Baghdad, and the threats by the militias. They threatened and killed people.



The camp where Yasir used to work at...

We had to leave the country because of the situation, but we could only afford to leave and live in Syria for three months. We had to go back to Iraq because we didn't have enough funds.

In 2005, my mother was killed in one of the fights between the Americans and Al-Qaeda. That's when my real tragedy started. This is when the real sorrow and difficult life started.

We had to move out to the compounds that were built by camp Ferrin Huggins, where I used to work before. Now I had to support myself, and got my old job back.

My brother kept taking my money saying he was going to save the money for me. In fact, he was spending it to support his wife.

After a while, my contract ended, and I stayed at home with my siblings. I listened to their insults without being able to answer them because I was afraid that I would be kicked out of the house. The only good relationship I had was with one of my sisters-in-law, who knew about me and was comforting me.

One day, another sister-in-law hit me for no reason. When I told my brother, he started beating me as well, and threw all of my clothes in the street.

I left the house, and headed towards Kerbala, I slept in the streets for two months, then I went back to Baghdad and stayed with my sister. But it didn't take long for my brother-in-law to start hitting me, and kick me out of the house. He didn't want me in the house because my older brother asked him not to keep me there. He also said that he didn't want his son to turn gay like me.

My sister asked one of my brothers to keep me at their house, and one of them did. I started making friends in the neighborhood. I worked for a few months in Elaf Islamic Bank. One of the guys that I became friends with was Dani, who became very close to me. He taught me how to think and behave. We kept each other's secrets. He introduced me to a lot of other gay people. I was surprised. That was the first time I was in such an environment. I even got involved in a relationship with a guy from the neighborhood. We had a beautiful thing going.

All this didn't last long. My brother kicked me out. My aunts didn't take me in. My boyfriend left me. I was alone.

I was forced to work as a sex-worker. I was forced to sell my body. I started meeting guys in cafes, cafes like Usud Al-Rafidaen located in Karada neighborhood, and closed now. That café was a place for gay people to meet, and that's where I met the coffee shop owner. He is a (top) gay who approached me, and offered to provide everything for me if I stopped being a sex-worker. I did. He became my world, and we were romantically and sexually involved, until he died in a bombing five months after.

I moved back in with my brother, and after some time of being alone, and sad, I met someone from the neighborhood. I was very attracted to him. He came one day to visit me at home. We went to my room, and started kissing each other. My brother walked in on us, and saw us acting like a married couple. He kicked the guy out of the house, and locked me in the house for two months, two months filled with abuse, being beaten, and insults. Afterwards, I started receiving threats from local militias and Al-Qaeda, and was shot once by them by accident in 2012. That exact same day, I decided to run. At midnight, I went to my friend's house in Karada, a neighborhood located on the east side of Baghdad.

I started working in a restaurant, and moving from living with one friend to another. One time, my friend Ahmed and I were sexually abused at one of the checkpoints that separate neighborhoods in Baghdad. The following day, Ahmed's brother called and said that the police were in our apartment and looking for us.

I moved again, but this time with a group of gay people where I was raped many times. That's where I got the sexually transmitted disease in my anus. But I never cared. I had to keep the roof over my head. I stayed there for four months. I had a surgery for my anus, and after three weeks of recovery, I received a call from Ahmed telling me about this organization that is helping gay people. There I was treated with respect, mercy and humanity. I've been here for 15 months now, and despite the very bad emotional state that I'm in now, I keep going. Now I'm getting the support of people who treat me like a person.

I don't have big dreams. I want to be healthy, love someone and live somewhere where I am free and respected.



Love is what Yasir is looking for...



I G L H R C

INTERNATIONAL GAY AND LESBIAN
HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

THE INTERNATIONAL GAY AND LESBIAN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION (IGLHRC) conducts advocacy and promotes human rights documentation in partnership with people who experience discrimination or abuse on the basis of their actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity or expression.

Founded in 1990, IGLHRC is accredited with consultative status by the United Nations. IGLHRC is headquartered in New York and has staff and offices in Asia, Africa, Europe, Latin America and the Middle East.

More information is available online at www.iglhrc.org.

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تقوم اللجنة الدولية لحقوق المثليين والمثليات (IGLHRC) بحملات مناصرة، و تشجع جهود توثيق الحالات المختلفة من انتهاكات حقوق الإنسان بالتعاون مع أشخاص عاشوا مختلف أنواع التمييز والاستغلال بناء علي آراء مسبقه فعليه او متصورة عن توجههم الجنسي، نوعهم الاجتماعي والهوية والتعبير الجندري .

تأسست اللجنة في سنة ١٩٩٠، وتعتبر مصدر استشاري معتمد من قبل الأمم المتحدة. المكتب الرئيسي للجنة يقع في مدينة نيويورك، ولديها أفرع وممثلين في آسيا، أفريقيا، أوروبا، أمريكا اللاتينية والشرق الأوسط.

المزيد من المعلومات متوفرة على الموقع الالكتروني www.iglhrc.org.

MADRE Mission

To advance women's human rights by meeting urgent needs in communities and building lasting solutions to the crises women face.

MADRE Vision

MADRE works towards a world in which all people enjoy the fullest range of individual and collective human rights; in which resources are shared equitably and sustainably; in which women participate effectively in all aspects of society; and in which people have a meaningful say in policies that affect their lives.

MADRE's vision is enacted with an understanding of the inter-relationships between the various issues we address and by a commitment to working in partnership with women at the local, regional and international levels who share our goals.



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رسالة مادري

النهوض بالحقوق الإنسانية للمرأة من خلال تلبية الاحتياجات الملحة في المجتمعات المحلية، وبناء وتوفير حلول طويلة الأمد للأزمات التي تواجهها النساء.

رؤيا مادري

تعمل منظمة مادري للوصول إلى عالم يتمتع فيه كافة أفرادهم بحقوقهم الإنسانية بصورة كاملة، حيث يتم تقاسم الموارد بشكل منصف ومستدام، عالم تشارك فيه المرأة بشكل فعال في جميع جوانب المجتمع. عالم تتوفر فيه حرية التعبير للأشخاص تجاه السياسات التي تؤثر على حياتهم بشكل مباشر.

تم التفكير بهذه الرؤيا مع فهم العلاقات المتداخلة بين مختلف القضايا التي نتناولها، ومن خلال الالتزام الكامل تجاه عملنا وشركائنا مع مختلف المنظمات المحلية، الإقليمية والعالمية والتي نعمل معها للوصول إلى أهدافنا.