

Iran's War on LGBT Citizens

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The Iranian regime persecutes and discriminates against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) citizens. Tehran criminalizes and harshly punishes same-sex intercourse, provides no legal protections for LGBT individuals, compels LGBT children to go through brutal “conversion therapy,” and pressures gay and lesbian Iranians to undergo sex-reassignment surgery. Consequently, gay, lesbian, and bisexual Iranians are forced to hide their sexual orientation and conceal same-sex romantic relationships in order to avoid arrest, imprisonment, flogging, and even execution.

Criminalization and Punishment

Consensual sexual relations between two men or two women is forbidden by Iran’s [Islamic penal code](#). Penetrative intercourse between two men is punishable by death, while non-penetrative intercourse generally incurs a penalty of 100 lashes. Intercourse between two women incurs a penalty of 100 lashes and is punishable by death upon the fourth offense. The penal code even punishes with lashes non-blood-related women who “lay naked [together] under the same cover without any necessity.”

Iranian law does not distinguish between consensual and non-consensual intercourse, and therefore the authorities can prosecute both perpetrators and victims of sexual assault.

In June of 2019, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif [defended](#) his government’s execution of gay people, stating, “Our society has moral principles. And we live according to these principles. These are moral principles concerning the behavior of people in general. And that means that the law is respected and the law is obeyed.”

According to the [U.S. State Department Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2019](#), Iranian security forces harassed and arrested individuals suspected of being LGBT, in some cases raiding their houses or monitoring their internet activity to gather information. Individuals charged with “sodomy” faced trials where basic evidentiary standards were not upheld and were reportedly subjected to forcibly invasive examinations while in regime custody, which is classified by the United Nations and World Health Organization as potentially constituting torture.

In January 2019, Iranian media [reported](#) that a 31-year-old man was publicly hanged in the southwestern city of Kazeroon based on criminal charges of *lavat-e be onf* – sexual intercourse between two men – as well as kidnapping charges. In 2017, Iran [hanged](#) a man who was 15 years old at the time of his 2012 arrest on charges of *lavat-e be onf* and murder. The executed man maintained that his confession was coerced under torture by regime security forces. In 2016, Iran [hanged](#) another man charged with *lavat-e be onf* who was 17 years old at the time of his arrest. LGBT activists in Iran have [raised concern](#) that the regime has used the pretense of other crimes, such as sexual assault, to execute LGBT Iranians.

In December 2019, Rezvaneh Mohammadi, an activist for gender equality, [received a five-year prison sentence](#) for the unprecedented charge of “collusion against national security by seeking to normalize homosexual relations.” The sentence, imposed by Tehran Revolutionary Court Judge Mohammad Moghiseh, came after Mohammadi was placed in solitary confinement for weeks at the notoriously brutal Evin Prison. Her captors tried to force her to confess to receiving funds for the purpose of overthrowing the regime.

Iranian law [classifies gay men and transgender women as mentally ill](#) and therefore excludes them from mandatory military service. Military identification cards identify the legal provisions that justify each card-bearer’s exemption. Therefore, the cards effectively “out” those individuals as gay or transgender and thereby leave them vulnerable to discrimination and physical harm.

Absence of Legal Protections

Iranian law [does not prohibit discrimination](#) on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity. The state does not recognize same-sex marriages, civil unions, or domestic partnerships.

Conversion Therapy

The [United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child](#) has expressed concern about reports that LGBT children in Iran have been forced to undergo forced “therapy”—including the administration of electric shocks, hormones, and psychiatric medications—to change their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. According to Iranian LGBT activist group [6Rang](#), the number of private and government-backed psychological clinics engaging in “corrective treatment” of LGBT Iranians increased in 2018.

In July 2019, the NGO 6Rang [reported](#) a continued increase in the number of semi-governmental and private clinics providing reparative therapy.

Pressure for Surgery

Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, Iran’s first supreme leader, issued a fatwa (legal opinion) 30 years ago [permitting sex-reassignment surgery](#). Consequently, the Iranian regime permits and partially subsidizes such procedures. However, because Tehran criminalizes and harshly punishes same-sex intercourse and treats same-sex attraction as a disease, the regime’s transgender policy de facto results in the [authorities](#) and [mental-health professionals and families](#) pressuring gay and lesbian cisgender Iranians to undergo unwanted surgery in order to be able to enter into same-sex relationships without fear of arrest and punishment.