BAHAGI KA NG BAHAGHARI[1]: Advocating a gender-responsive program against LGBTQ+ prejudice and discrimination in the Philippines

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The lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and queer (LGBTQ+) community has been historically marginalized and reports widespread experiences of hate and discrimination all over the world. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (2012), LGBTQ+ people and other gender and sexual minorities face criminalization, systemic violence, discrimination in employment and health care, lack of legal recognition concerning their families and partnerships, and restricted freedoms of expression, association, and peaceful assembly. Moreover, in a Pew Research Center report, Poushter and Kent (2020) mentioned that there remains to be a sharp divide in public opinion about the acceptance of "homosexuality" in terms of country, region, and economic development.

In recent years, there have been developments that indicate a shift in more positive attitudes toward LGBTQ+ people globally (see Herek, 2009; Manalastas et al., 2017); however, discriminatory attitudes on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity are still perpetuated by existing institutional systems (see Herek & McLemore, 2013). Moreover, several studies have found links between the experiences of hate and discrimination to have severe effects on the mental health and well-being of LGBTQ+ individuals. Even during the current global health crisis, minoritized individuals, like the LGBTQ+ community, continue to experience various forms of discrimination.

[1] "*Bahagi ka ng bahaghari"* is a Filipino statement that translates to "You are part of the rainbow."

The LGBTQ+ community continues to face discrimination and abuse both at an individual level and as members of society (UNDP & USAID, 2014). In the Philippines, there were several instances when LGBTQ+ individuals were treated differently because of their gender and sexuality. During the COVID-19 pandemic, they were humiliated for violating quarantine protocols (e.g., curfew hours, etc.). This pandemic has exposed the inequalities that LGBTQ+ people experience and, to some extent, has even exacerbated the challenges that already existed even before the pandemic.

In the 2013 Philippine National LGBT Community Dialogue, the development of monitoring mechanisms to review existing education-related materials and ensure they were sensitive to one's sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGIE) was recommended. It was also recommended to develop awareness-raising campaigns specifically to promote respect for diversity through education. Aside from these, other barriers experienced by LGBTQ+ Filipinos were identified.

In 2011, the Psychological Association of the Philippines (PAP) released a position paper that aligns itself with "global initiatives to remove the stigma of mental illness that has long been associated with diverse sexualities and to promote the well-being of LGBT people." In conjunction, the PAP Code of Ethics for Philippine Psychologists (2010) and the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC) Code of Ethics and Professional Standards for Psychology Practitioners in the Philippines (Adoption and promulgation of the code of ethics and professional standards for psychology practitioners in the Philippines, 2017) call for Filipino psychologists to "respect the diversity among persons and peoples." In 2013, the PAP released another position paper as a reaffirmation of the non-discrimination of LGBT Filipinos which was a response to an article published in a local news outlet and to reaffirm its position that being gay

is not a disease nor a disorder (PAP, 2013). More recently, the PAP also published its statement that upholds the basic human rights and well-being of LGBT persons based on the psychological science of SOGIE (PAP, 2020a) and another one on non-discrimination based on SOGIE (PAP, 2020b).

LGBTQ+ Psychology has a strong presence in the Philippines and was institutionalized as a Special Interest Group within the PAP in 2014. The LGBT Psychology Special Interest Group (SIG) adopted the gender mainstreaming and development framework to LGBTQ+ psychology that unfolds in three stages: (1) adoption of SOGIE terminology and the language of LGBTQ+ inclusion; (2) putting in place policies related to LGBTQ+ inclusion; and (3) implementation (Manalastas & Torre, 2016). Four areas were identified as the main foci of the LGBT Psychology SIG, namely: (1) research; (2) education; (3) advocacy/outreach; and (4) professional practice.

The Proposed Program

The proposed program is aimed at addressing discriminatory and hateful practices toward the LGBTQ+ community. Particularly, this is intended for people working in government agencies, local government units, and educational institutions to provide them with information that is intended to form their foundation in becoming more gender-sensitive thereby allowing for the creation of mechanisms that will further address discrimination and hate against the LGBTQ+ community. At present, Gender and Development (GAD) Programs are already instituted in many government agencies; however, there still seems to be a lack of understanding of gender and sexuality concepts which perpetuate misconceptions toward sexual and gender minorities. This further leads to acts of discrimination and hate.

Gender equality is among the 17 goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development which was adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015 (United Nations, 2015). As such, this project is aligned with this global initiative to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, and in this case, the LGBTQ+ community as well.

The design of the proposed program will follow the gender mainstreaming and development framework adapted to LGBT psychology used by Manalastas and Torre (2016). Gender mainstreaming is based on the idea that equality is a goal to achieve in decision-making; therefore, to achieve equality, the impact of decisions on all groups should be considered (International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association [ILGA], 2007). In other words, gender mainstreaming seeks to avoid possible discrimination on the grounds of SOGIE (ILGA, 2007). Thus, the goal of the proposed program is to include the experience, knowledge, and interests of LGBTQ+ individuals when looking at the development agenda and modify these in a way that benefits these often minoritized individuals. Ultimately, this project is envisioned to strengthen existing mechanisms that attempt to transform or change social and institutional structures that perpetuate inequality. In this proposed program, gender mainstreaming is seen as a process.

Level 1: Adoption of SOGIE terminology and the language of LGBTQ+ inclusion

The first level will involve a series of activities that will raise people's awareness of SOGIE-related terminology and language that center on LGBTQ+ inclusion. Laying the ground for understanding these concepts is expected to increase people's support of mainstreaming. Potential challenges for this initial level could be activating people to support change by making them understand such concepts.

Level 2: Put in place policies related to LGBTQ+ inclusion

Level 2 allows for the creation of mechanisms that will lead to mainstreaming of LGBTQ+ inclusion. This could be done by getting significant support from top officials to institute systems and mechanisms to facilitate LGBTQ+ mainstreaming.

Level 3: Implementation

For the last level, LGBTQ+ programs and initiatives are expected to be institutionalized already and the sustainability of such programs is guaranteed. Sensitivity to the experiences of gender and sexual minorities is taken into account to allow for more gender-responsive programs from local government units, government agencies, and educational institutions. Further, there is also a need to continuously improve on these existing programs and initiatives to ensure that they stay relevant and timely.

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