THE LGBTQA INTERCOLLEGIATE ATHLETES’ EXPERIENCES IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN THE PHILIPPINES: BASIS FOR AN INSTITUTIONAL INCLUSIVE SPORTS PLAN

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Abstract

This study used an explanatory sequential mixed method design to examine discrimination experienced by selected LGBTQA intercollegiate athletes from private and public higher education institutions in the Philippines. The results reveal that participants frequently encountered sexism and verbal harassment at various places and times, that the audience or fans are more likely the perpetrators, and that ignoring the abuse is the most common reaction to harassment. The study proposes an inclusive institutional sports plan to support fair gender treatment that underpins the revisiting or re-examining of institutional policies, strengthen inclusive codes of conduct, provides training on a gender-fair environment, and recognizes several LGBTQA events and celebrations. The researcher concluded that ignoring inequality does not prevent abuse, but progressively worsen the aggression toward sexual minorities. Additionally, if athletes are freed from discrimination and stress, they will be better able to focus and improve their performance.

Keywords: Gender and development; Higher Education; Intercollegiate sports; LGBTQA.
1. INTRODUCTION

In the Philippine higher education system, the social acceptability of sexual minorities is limited (Adeyemo, 2020). Students who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or asexual (LGBTQA) face oppression, an absence of LGBTQA-related knowledge, and, in some cases, violent attacks during their schooling (Human Rights Watch, 2017). Sexual minority college athletes are significantly more likely than their heterosexual counterparts to receive harassment, to have more unfavorable climates, and to be ignored or excluded from team activities (Rankin & Weber, 2014). Athletic programs should include policies and procedures to guarantee a favorable climate for LGBTQA athletes, such as forbidding verbal harassment by fans at competitions and offering training on LGBTQA issues for physical education (Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network, 2013). But sports organizations are struggling to form and implement such policies (Drummond et al., 2021).

LGBTQA participation in athletic competitions has been remarkable throughout history. The 2020 Tokyo Summer Olympics were historically momentous because almost 200 LGBTQA athletes participated. In contrast, the Philippine team had two LGBTQA athletes, most likely for the first time (Manipon, 2021). Merging sports and tertiary education influences the athlete’s performance positively (European University Sports Association, 2018). Philippine higher education institutions (HEIs) are a haven for developing professional athletes. Public and private higher education institutions compete in national, regional, and invitational sporting events such as the State Colleges and Universities Athletic Association (SCUAA) Meet, the Private Schools Athletic Association (PRISAA) Meet, the National Collegiate Athletic Association Competition, the University Athletic Association of the Philippines Competition, and the Congressional Cup. LGBTQA athletes dominated in different sporting events. For example, transwomen are bigger than cis women, so there are some reasons for concern over a potential safety issue (Ward, 2021). Volleyball, in particular, is an equalizer, providing a safe zone for the LGBTQA population in the Philippines (Santos, 2020).

The Philippines ranks high in Southeast Asia for gender equality according to the global gender gap report of 2021 (Mishra & Joe, 2021). However, the Philippines is a dominantly Christian country, with 1,345 Christian schools according to the Catholic educational Association of the Philippines. Hence, the religious “overhang” remains established in the culture, giving LGBTQA individuals the impression that “you can exist, but we will not try to comprehend you” (Gray & Walden-Schertz, 2019). The 2019 human development index (HDI) for the Philippines was 0.718, which was high. But it falls to 0.587 when adjusted for inequality, a decrease of 18.2% due to the distribution disparity of the HDI dimension indices. In addition, students’ perceptions of LGBTQA people and issues in school are most often negative, with being seen as immoral or unnatural (Human Rights Watch, 2017).

Gender equality is not just a fundamental human right, but it is also the core of a peaceful, prosperous, and equitable world (Pocaan, 2022; United Nations, 2015). The Commission on Higher Education (CHED) (2017) brought together higher learning
leaders and representatives of the educational community from the south-east Asian nations to discuss how to make higher education more gender-balanced and to agree on a typical plan of action for the region to follow. One of the initiative’s primary goals is to bring awareness of the gaps in gender mainstreaming measures. CHED Memorandum Order No. 01, Series of 2015, also known as “Establishing Policies and Guidelines on Gender and Development in CHED and HEIs” (CHED, 2015), released several necessary policy declarations and papers. Gender and Development (GAD) requires private and public HEIs to provide necessary policies to support the rights of women and sexual minorities. GAD also allows every HEI to allocate funds for research projects, extension programs, and other relevant activities. It is necessary not only for an individual’s growth but also for the country’s development (United States Agency for International Development, 2015).

2. RELATED LITERATURE

Gender discrimination in athletics has long been controversial (Deshpande, 2016). According to a review by Mattson (2018) athletes have encountered discrimination and harassment in various ways because of their sexuality. Certain college athletes have been excluded from teams due to their sexual orientation. Rankin and Weber (2014) developed and tested the student-athlete climate conceptual framework, which analyzes the impact of the social and educational environment on the success and outcomes of athletes. Their findings revealed that climate significantly affects sexual minority college athletes who, on average, face a more hostile milieu than their heterosexual colleagues.

A study by Roper (2013) examined the broader issue of gender relationships in athletics. The author argued that it is a tradition that athletes keep their sexual orientation private to protect their careers. Carrol (2016) identified several athletes who have openly discussed their sexual orientation or gender identity and several cases of prejudice. Carrol stressed that there is still discrimination against LGBTQ athletes and that people must remain cautious and advocate for all athletes’ safety and dignity.

A study by Denison, Bevan, and Jeanes (2021) examined the evidence of LGBTQ exclusion and prejudice in sports. Based on the findings, sports organizations continue to give low priority to LGBTQ people. The absence of tangible and practical solutions has greatly hampered progress toward LGBTQ equality in sports participation (Herrick et al., 2021).

Pérez-Samaniego et al. (2019) looked at transgender people’s experiences in physical activity and sports. The difficulties they listed indicate how trans people deal with numerous types of harassment. According to Defoor et al. (2018), understanding the constraints and prejudices must encourage all sports science experts to collaborate in deconstructing the current heterosexist customs of sports on a personal and organizational level by promoting a climate where all student athletes can indeed participate equally and openly.

The coalition report of the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC, 2012) claims that despite the adoption of government initiatives combating prejudice and abuse of sexual minorities, the Philippine government has failed
to address the excessive number of hate crimes and killings. Moreover, there are contradicting data addressing the differing reactions of collegiate athletes and non-athlete collegiate peers to stressful events, primarily in private versus state universities (Humphrey et al., 2000). Mortazavi (2016) analyzed laws and the policies of professional sports leagues on gay athletes and emphasized that sexual minority athletes should be aware that they have legal redress to sexism.

Research findings on the experiences of LGBTQIA athletes convey an apparent consistency. In light of the previous research, the present study examines the inequalities experienced by LGBTQIA student athletes in Philippine higher education institutions and proposes an institutional inclusive sports plan.

3. RESEARCH AIM

Teamwork, respect, sportsmanship, and fairness are all qualities and virtues commonly associated with sports (Richards, 2017). However, sports can encompass bad ideals and immoral activities that contribute to society’s divisions. Limited research exists on gender and sports in the Philippines. Hence, this study explores the status of LGBTQIA athletes in private and public HEIs with the following research objectives:

- Examine the sexist behavior experienced by selected LGBTQIA intercollegiate student-athletes;
- Examine the verbal abuse received by selected LGBTQIA intercollegiate student-athletes; and,
- Propose an institutional inclusive sports plan.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1. Research Design

The study used the explanatory sequential mixed method design. The initial phase was quantitative and used a survey questionnaire in which categorical variables were gathered, analyzed, and discussed. Means and standard deviations, which are parametric tests that quantify ordinal variables, were included in the descriptive section of this study. On the other hand, the nominal variables were described using nonparametric tests such as frequency and percentage. Then, the second phase of the study used phenomenological qualitative research, to explore the outcomes of the initial phase.

4.2. Participants

The participants of this study were LGBTQIA student-athletes enrolled in various HEIs in the Bicol region of the Philippines. These HEIs participate in regional and national SCUAA, regional and national PRISAA games, and in invitational games. In all,
25 athletes from public HEIs and 25 from private HEIs participated in this study. The study was conducted during the second semester of the 2021-2022 academic year.

Table 1. Profile of Participants

| Profile                   | Number |
|---------------------------|--------|
| Type of School:           |        |
| Public Higher Education   | 25     |
| Institution              |        |
| Private Higher Education  | 25     |
| Institution              |        |
| Gender:                   |        |
| Lesbian                   | 16     |
| Gay                       | 13     |
| Bisexual                  | 9      |
| Transgender               | 8      |
| Queers                    | 3      |
| Asexual                   | 1      |
| Sports involvement:       |        |
| Volleyball                | 25     |
| Basketball                | 13     |
| Swimming                  | 3      |
| Softball                  | 3      |
| Track and Field           | 2      |
| Soccer                    | 2      |
| Combat Sports             | 2      |

4.3. Research Instrument and Validation

The initial phase of the study used a self-assessed survey questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of two parts: (1) athlete’s profile and (2) discrimination experienced. The first part of the questionnaire comprised seven items seeking gender, age, year level, sports involvement, the highest sporting event competed, the number of years played as an intercollegiate athlete, and type of institution. The second part of the questionnaire consisted of questions on respondents’ encounters with sexist behavior, verbal harassment, and physical assault. The qualitative phase employed an in-depth interview that used open-ended questions relevant to the results of the initial phase.

4.4. Data Collection Procedure

Since no verified school document declare the participants’ preferred gender, the researcher used the snowball sampling technique. Initially, the researcher provided a letter of permission and communication to the coaches in the different HEIs to identify the participants. After identifying several potential participants, the data gathering began. As
part of the snowball sampling technique, the same participants were asked to identify colleagues or teammates who belong to the LGBTQA community. The researcher was able to get the consent of the participants by having them fill out the informed consent form. Then, the researcher administered the research questionnaire and the interview. After the interviews and snowball sampling, the researcher achieved the desired number of participants.

4.5. Data Analysis

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26.0 was used to analyze the data for the quantitative phase. The researcher employed descriptive statistics to address the answers to research objectives 1 and 2 (given in section 3). The second phase consisted of data cleaning and corroboration in a qualitative master datasheet.

5. RESEARCH RESULTS

5.1. Sexist Behavior Experienced by LGBTQA Intercollegiate Student-Athletes

| The Sites of Sexist Behavior | Public HEIs | Private HEIs |
|-----------------------------|-------------|--------------|
| Online, including social media, networking, etc. | 13 (52%) | 4 (16%) |
| While socializing after the match or activity | 6 (24%) | 5 (20%) |
| During the match | 6 (24%) | 2 (8%) |
| During warm-up | 1 (4%) | 5 (20%) |
| At training | 0 (0%) | 4 (16%) |
| In the changing room | 0 (0%) | 3 (12%) |
| Total | 25 (100%) | 25 (100%) |

Table 2 shows that online (52%) is the main site of sexist behavior followed by during the match and socializing after the match or activity (24%), and during warm-up (4%) for the participants from public HEIs. The participants from private HEIs mostly encountered sexism while socializing after the match or activity and during warm-up (20%), followed by online and at training (16%) and in the changing room (13%). The participants also indicate that:

**PriP22**: “Sexists say on social media that gays and bisexuals have no place in sports.”

**PubP21**: “They said that we are sinners.”

**PubP17**: “They said that gays and lesbians must be disqualified from sports since they are not pure men and women.”
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PubP18: “Others message us that we will be smashed during the game.”

PubP21: “Opponents called us dirty, telling us that we have no potential.”

PubP13: “The crowd always shouts at us and tells us that we do not deserve a spot on the team.”

PriP23: “The crowd sometimes cursed us during and after the game.”

PriP12: “My teammates underestimate me.”

The results imply that the participants experienced sexism at different places and times. The relevant report of the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) (2021) states that 64% of LGBTQ social media users reported experiencing cyberbullying as a serious problem that needs to be addressed (Cocal, 2019). Social media is the avenue where people express their opinions, thoughts, feelings, and emotions. Furthermore, LGB individuals who revealed their sexual orientation to their colleagues were considerably more likely to face racial slurs than others who stayed in the closet (Denison, Jeanes, et al., 2021). It can also be inferred that discrimination against them still happens whatever the results of the game played by LGBTQA athletes.

| Sexist Behaviors                     | Public HEIs |          | Private HEIs |          |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|----------|--------------|----------|
|                                     | Frequency   | Percentage (%) | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
| Excluding                           | 11          | 44       | 14           | 56       |
| Sexist attitudes                    | 7           | 28       | 7            | 28       |
| Homophobic/Transphobic attitudes    | 5           | 20       | 1            | 4        |
| Priority to cis-genders             | 2           | 8        | 3            | 12       |
| Total                               | 25          | 100      | 25           | 100      |

According to the statistics in Table 3, exclusion (44%) is the sexist behavior most often experienced by the participants in public HEIs, followed by sexist attitudes (28%), homophobic/transphobic attitudes (20%), and priority to cisgenders (8%). Hence, the participants from private HEIs also experienced excluding (56%) as the most common sexist behavior encountered followed by sexist attitudes (28%), priority to cisgenders (12%), and homophobic/transphobic behavior (4%). The participants stated the following:

PubP2: “They always idolized cis men before us.”

PubP15: “Verbal harassment, like cursing by the crowd is almost normal to us in every competition we played.”

PubP25: “Sometimes, our teammates and the audiences communicate with disrespect by calling us dirty names and belittling us.”
PriP7: “There is monotony in the decisions.”

PriP19: “Some coaches prefer cis men and cis women in selecting players for the team.”

According to the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (2013), many LGBT students claimed that discrimination hindered them from participating entirely and securely in sports. The results indicate that there is still a social stigma associated with LGBTQA involvement in sporting events. Isolating and impeding LGBTQA athletes from gaining societal acceptance prevents them from revealing their preferred gender. Moreover, Frankowski and the American Academy of Pediatrics Committee on Adolescence (2004) stated that if their social environment disapproves of their emerging sexual orientation, minorities may experience profound isolation and fear of discovery, interfering with their ability to complete primary developmental tasks.

Table 4. Reactions to Sexist Behavior

| Reactions            | Public HEIs | Private HEIs |
|----------------------|-------------|--------------|
|                      | Frequency   | Percentage (%) | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
| Nothing              | 12          | 48           | 14        | 56           |
| Confronted individual(s) | 9          | 36           | 8         | 32           |
| Motivation           | 4           | 16           | 3         | 12           |
| Total                | 25          | 100          | 25        | 100          |

Table 4 shows that most LGBTQA participants in this study ignored the sexist behavior they received in sports engagements (48% in public HEIs; 56% in private HEIs), followed by confronting individual(s) (26% in public HEIs; 32% in private HEIs) and motivation (16% in public HEIs; 12% in private HEIs). According to the participants:

PubP2: “Being a gay athlete, you must prepare yourself not only for the game but also for the reactions of others.”

PubP8: “By ignoring them [perpetrators], I can show my sportsmanship.”

PubP21: “I keep on ignoring the verbal abuse because of the fear of violating the rules.”

PriP16: “I reacted and confronted them because of too many belittling and wrong accusations.”

PriP19: “Since I’m outnumbered, I would rather practice more and concentrate more on the game instead of confronting them.”

PriP23: “Sometimes, it is hard to be gay and surrounded by very religious people.”
Sexual minorities are forced to conceal their identities because of fear of reprisal (United Nations Development Programs, 2019). In a religious country, a common view is that homosexuality is immoral. Thus, religious convictions remain a significant barrier to mainstream acceptance of homosexuality (Pew Research Center, 2013). Participants often experience sexist behavior but most are likely to ignore it. LGBTQ activists also claimed that they are tolerated but not accepted in the Philippines (Gutierrez, 2017).

5.2. Verbal Abuse Received by LGBTQA Intercollegiate Student Athletes

Table 5. Frequency of Verbal Harassment Received in Sports Engagements

| Types of Institution | Description | Mean | Std. Dev. | N  |
|----------------------|-------------|------|-----------|----|
| Public HEIs          | Always      | 4.60 | .645      | 25 |
| Private HEIs         | Very Often  | 4.32 | .690      | 25 |

Notes: Never = 1.0–1.49; Rarely = 1.50–2.49; Sometimes = 2.50–3.49; Very Often = 3.50–4.49; Always = 4.50 and above.

The descriptive statistics of Table 5 indicate that, on average, participants from public HEIs reported that they always received verbal harassment (M = 4.60) and participants from private HEIs reported they received verbal harassment very often (M = 4.32).

PubP3: “I’m labeled as a sinner and immoral because of my preferred gender.”

PubP7: “Sometimes, even young children called us dirty names.”

PubP23: “They say that there is no place in heaven for us [sexual minorities].”

PriP18: “Ignoring or confronting them does not make sense anymore.”

PriP24: “They considered me as the clown of the team.”

Verbal harassment is the most frequent type of bullying of sexual minority students in the Philippines, as many students labeled them as sinners or aberrations (Human Rights Watch, 2017). The LGBTQA community experiences homophobic discrimination since most religions do not condone homosexuality (Santos & De Jesus, 2020; Barnes & Meyer, 2012). This result is expected since only limited policies and laws protect the LGBTQA community from discrimination.

Table 6. Perpetrators of Discrimination in Sports

| The Perpetrators | Public HEIs | Private HEIs |
|------------------|-------------|--------------|
|                  | Frequency   | Percentage (%)| Frequency | Percentage (%)|
| Audience         | 16          | 64           | 19        | 76           |
| Teammate         | 7           | 28           | 4         | 16           |
| Opponent         | 2           | 8            | 2         | 8            |
| Total            | 25          | 100          | 25        | 100          |
Table 6 shows that participants from public HEIs (64%) and private HEIs (76%) mostly received discrimination from the audience, followed by teammates (28% in public HEIs; 16% in private HEIs) and opponents (8%).

PriP50: “The supporters of the opponents normally cursed us.”

PubP12: “I am playing arnis, and I experienced that the audience laughed at me because I am gay.”

PubP20: “They compare me to animals and sometimes call me a monster, cat, dog, goat, etc.”

PriP17: “If I made a mistake during the game, my teammates and opponents belittled me and cursed me.”

PubP14: “Opponents sometimes trash-talk me because of my preferred gender.”

The vast majority of the population and sports enthusiasts are not yet willing to publicly welcome LGBT players (Cunningham, 2012). This implies that sports are labeled based on masculinity. For example, it is unusual to see gay athletes playing basketball or combative sports. Another implication of this finding can be related to game pressure, where the excitement and support of the fans for their chosen team encourage them to engage in verbal harassment and sexist behavior toward an opposing team having an LGBTQQA team member. The public and media’s attitude toward a transgender person competing in a sport is frequently unfavorable and uninformed by reality (GLAAD, 2016). Based on a survey conducted by the MaristPoll (2017), most Americans (80%) believe that sports fans discriminate against LGBT athletes.

| Reactions                    | Public HEIs |                         | Private HEIs |                         |
|------------------------------|-------------|--------------------------|--------------|--------------------------|
|                              | Frequency   | Percentage (%)           | Frequency    | Percentage (%)           |
| Nothing                      | 15          | 60                       | 13           | 52                       |
| Confronted individual(s)     | 5           | 20                       | 7            | 28                       |
| Motivation                   | 5           | 20                       | 5            | 20                       |
| Total                        | 25          | 100                      | 25           | 100                      |

Table 7 shows that most participants chose to ignore or do nothing in response to verbal harassment. Ignoring verbal harassment was the response of 60% of the public HEI and 52% of the private HEI participants. The participants also stated the following:

PubP12: “I always ignore them because I’m outnumbered.”

PubP17: “I do not take things seriously.”
PriP3: “I was verbally abused since I was a child, so nothing bothers me because I am used to it.”

PriP16: “I always have a limit if the abuse is too much.”

Ignoring or doing nothing against received homophobic behavior may result in gender treatment deterioration. Internalized homophobia is a defeatist attitude carried by sexual minorities as an outcome of growing up in an environment where heterosexual bigotry is prevalent (Kimmel, 2004). Verbal/psychological homophobic bullying among LGBTQ individuals is a widespread phenomenon (Blais et al., 2014) seen in various countries and ethnicities (National Coalition Anti-Violence Programs, 2007; Takács, 2006). Furthermore, according to Parrott et al. (2011), the link between conventional male gender norms and aggressiveness against sexual minorities can be explained by negative attitudes and an inclination to suffer negative consequences from conforming to prescribed masculinity standards.

Table 8. Times and Sites of Verbal Harassment

| Time or Site of Verbal Harassment          | Public HEIs |          | Private HEIs |          |
|-------------------------------------------|-------------|----------|--------------|----------|
|                                           | Frequency   | Percentage (%) | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
| During the match                          | 17          | 68       | 8            | 32       |
| While socializing after the match or activity | 4          | 16       | 3            | 12       |
| Online, including social media, networking | 4          | 16       | 4            | 16       |
| During warm-up                            | 0           | 0        | 5            | 20       |
| In the locker room                        | 0           | 0        | 3            | 12       |
| During training                           | 0           | 0        | 2            | 8        |
| Total                                     | 25          | 100      | 25           | 100      |

Table 8 shows that most participants in public HEIs experienced verbal harassment during the match (68%). Harassment while socializing after the match and online (16%) were the next most common. The participants from private HEIs also most often reported receiving verbal harassment during the match (32%), followed by during warm-up (20%), online (16%), while socializing after the match or activity, and in the changing room (12%). The participants made the following statements:

PubP16: “The crowd from the opposing team verbally abused me because I am gay.”

PubP19: "The crowd wanted to destroy my gameplay, so shouted negative comments at me."

PriP17: “Some of my teammates blamed me because we lost the match.”

PriP13: “Win or lose, I sometimes receive negative social media posts or messages.”
As presented in Table 6 audiences are the dominant offenders of harassing LGBTQA athletes. This implies that because of game pressure and the support of the fans, LGBTQA players on the opposing team may experience sexism and verbal harassment. Trash talking heightens the emotional stakes of competition and incentivizes targets to surpass their competitors (Yip et al., 2018). It also implies that the audience intends to distract the opposing team’s focus on the game through verbal discrimination and sexist attitudes. According to Conmy et al. (2013), trash talk or verbal harassment arranges from playful joking to nasty insults and is conveyed to disrupt another person’s attention or play.

Table 9. Incidence of Physical Assault

| Reactions | Public HEIs | Private HEIs |
|-----------|-------------|--------------|
|           | Frequency (f) | Percent (%) | Frequency (f) | Percent (%) |
| No        | 23           | 92           | 24           | 96         |
| Yes       | 2            | 8            | 1            | 4          |
| Total     | 25           | 100          | 25           | 100        |

Based on the data in Table 9, most participants did not encounter physical assault (92% on public HEIs; 96% on private HEIs). The participants also stated the following:

*PubP10:* “Physical assault is too much; I will fight them.”

*PriP12:* “When I was in high school, I experienced being physically bullied, but then I realized that it is my right to fight for myself.”

Although the respondents ignored sexist behavior and verbal harassment, they did not tolerate physical assault. The physical assault also can result in physical evidence that may serve as grounds for criminal charges (Revised Penal Code, Act No. 3815, National Water Resources Board, n.d.).

5.3. Proposed Institutional Inclusive Sports Plan

Sport is commonly used as a tool to reduce inequalities. However, such equality is only partially achieved, as top players, who act as role models for many youths, are regularly recorded making discriminatory insults (Iida & McGivern, 2019). Sexism and verbal harassment are severe problems encountered by sexual minority athletes that may lead to exclusion and affect their mental preparation and performance during the games. Furthermore, the lack of awareness and promotion of the rights of sexual minorities hinders their social acceptability. Thus, this study proposed inclusive institutional sports plan to solve these problems (Table 10).

Combating sexism and verbal harassment requires re-examining institutional policies and strengthening the code of conduct of every school member. It involves the initiative of school administrators and should focus on implementing non-discriminatory procedures and up-to-date policies on gender identity and expression that school
personnel, coaches, trainers, students, and athletes should observe. Furthermore, the institution should be free from discrimination, and penalties for discriminatory behaviors (sexism, verbal harassment, and physical assault) should be imposed.

### Table 10. Proposed Institutional Inclusive Sports Plan

| Problems                           | Strategic Action Description                  | In-Charge                  | Duration          | Target Outcomes                                                                                                                                 |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Sexism and Verbal Harassment       | Revisiting/reexamining institutional policies to tap gender-sensitive guidelines | School Administrators     | Annual            | Implementation of non-discriminatory and up-to-date policies on gender identity and gender expression<br>School personnel, coaches, trainers, students, and athletes are observed to follow these policies. |
|                                    |                                                |                            |                   | The institution is free from discrimination.<br>Discriminatory behaviors (sexism, verbal harassment, and physical assault) are subjected to penalties. |
| Strengthening Inclusive Codes of Conduct |                                              | School Administrators     | Year-Round        | Review of policies and codes of conduct, to create LGBTQA-inclusive environments.<br>Eliminate exclusion in sports. |
| Lack of Awareness and Promotion    | Training on Gender-fair-Environment           | Gender and Development Department | Annual            | Inclusion of LGBTQA events in the school calendar.<br>Awareness and social acceptability of LGBTQA individuals. |
| Celebration of LGBTQA Events       |                                                | Gender and Development Department, and Student Leaders | Annual            |                                                                                                                                   |

To promote the rights and strengthen the social acceptability of sexual minorities, schools should provide a gender-fair environment for their personnel and students through the support of the gender and development department. It should focus on reviewing policies and codes of conduct to create LGBTQA-inclusive environments to eliminate exclusion, especially in sports. In addition, sexual minority events should be included in the school calendar to promote their rights and to develop social acceptability. This initiative should be spearheaded by the gender and development department and a student leader.

### 6. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The Philippines is multicultural, yet sexism and verbal harassment happen everywhere and are mostly encountered by sexual minorities. Several issues regarding
the social acceptability of these minorities are being debated today in the country. Since the Philippines is highly religious and most private institutions are Catholic, this limits LGBTQA individuals from coming out of the closet. The challenges encountered by LGBTQA student athletes can be solved by examining the inequalities they experience.

Encountering sexists and homophobic behavior is routine for most LGBTQA student-athletes, and ignoring it is the most common reaction. Ignoring these abuses does not work or prevent the bully or perpetrator from further abuse. Instead, it elevates aggression. However, it is undeniable that being in a group of minorities means that they are outnumbered. Other significant reasons are that minorities are only now showing themselves to be athletes and that limited policies support their community. There is a need to revisit or reexamine institutional policies, strengthen inclusive codes of conduct, provide annual training on gender-fair-environment, and support LGBTQA events.

Homophobia and sexism are prevalent in many athletic situations that are either unfriendly or conditionally accepting to LGBTQA individuals. If student-athletes from sexual minorities are freed of the stress and discrimination that comes with concealing elements of their gender preference, they will be able to focus more on sports goals. Developing an open and friendly sports atmosphere entails enacting member protection rules and creating a responsive and welcoming organization with membership that appreciates individuality and cares for everyone.

This study focused only on the experiences of LGBTQA athletes. Further relevant information from the school administration, peers, and coaches may provide more profound results and implications. Moreover, the results of this study may guide future researchers in creating possible support programs for sexual minority athletes.

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