

Untold Stories of the Members of LGBTQ+ in the Workplace

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals in the workplace, focusing on discrimination and marginalization in sectors like employment, education, healthcare, and social interactions, with a particular focus on Ozamiz City, Misamis Occidental, Philippines. Using a phenomenological approach, the research aims to identify common themes in the challenges faced by LGBTQ+ employees, ranging from overt discrimination to subtle biases and microaggressions. The findings highlight five key themes: workplace inclusivity, self-identity and positivity, workplace policies and areas for improvement, stress management and well-being, and support for future generations of LGBTQ+ employees. Through in-depth interviews, the study provides insights into how LGBTQ+ individuals navigate their work environments and the coping strategies they employ. The research emphasizes the importance of comprehensive policies that promote acceptance and celebrate diversity. It also recommends addressing biases, supporting gender transitions, and offering targeted mental health resources to enhance well-being. By valuing diversity and providing tailored career development opportunities, organizations can empower LGBTQ+ employees, improving engagement and contributing to long-term success. The study contributes to the broader discussion on LGBTQ+ rights, offering valuable lessons for organizations, policymakers, and communities working to create safe and equitable spaces for all.

Keywords: LGBTQ+ individuals, marginalization, workplace discrimination, workplace inclusivity, workplace policies

INTRODUCTION

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer people are commonly referred to as LGBTQ individuals (Nadal, 2019). They represent a broad range of gender and sexual orientations. Because of their sexual orientation or gender identity, LGBTQ individuals may face a lot of challenges, such as structural barriers, prejudice, and discrimination that affect their access to our community, such as social acceptance, employment opportunities, and healthcare. Increasing awareness in terms of LGBTQ rights, including legal protection, marriage equality, and anti-discrimination laws, is an outcome of advocacy activities in many nations (Ayoub, 2021). However, many LGBTQ individuals still face many challenges, like discrimination, violence, and inequality in terms of mental health, which emphasizes the ongoing need for campaigns, instruction, and support for LGBTQ individuals (Schmitz, 2020).

Examining LGBTQ lives via a phenomenological perspective provides a rare chance to dive into the complex and frequently disregarded facets of their lived reality (Mencarini, J. 2022). Through phenomenological investigation, scholars can unearth the substance of LGBTQ people's experiences, enabling a more profound comprehension of the subtleties, obstacles, and victories that characterize their journeys (Jackson & J. J., 2024). There are numerous reasons to carry out this kind of research, all of which are vital to the advancement of society and research.

There is still a lack of comprehensive qualitative research that fully reflects the complex experiences of LGBTQ people, even in the face of advances in LGBTQ visibility and rights (Weintrob, 2021). Researchers

can close this gap by using a phenomenological approach to provide rich, in-depth narratives taken straight from LGBTQ people's lives.

It is essential to comprehend the lived experiences of LGBTQ people in order to inform inclusive actions and policies in a variety of contexts. By providing the spotlight on the distinct obstacles encountered by LGBTQ people and the elements that enhance their resilience and overall health (Read, 2024). By highlighting the intersections of LGBTQ identities with other social categories like race, ethnicity, class, and ability, society can work towards creating more inclusive and affirming environments that foster the well-being and flourishing of all individuals, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity (Parmenter et al., 2021). This will help society recognize and address the unique needs and concerns of LGBTQ people.

LGBTQ individual's growth and well-being depend on inclusive environments. This study sheds light on the elements that make environments inclusive or exclusive, which can help develop methods for promoting greater inclusion in a variety of settings, including the workplace, healthcare, and educational institutions. For LGBTQ individuals, discrimination and marginalization still present serious obstacles (Rodríguez-Roldán, 2019). This study can support advocacy efforts aiming at promoting social justice and fighting systemic disparities by elevating their voices and experiences.

Evidence-based insights are necessary for policymakers, educators, healthcare professionals, and other stakeholders to create inclusive policies and practices that cater to the unique needs of LGBTQ (Russell, 2022). The study's conclusions can guide the creation of programs and interventions meant to provide safer, more accepting environments for LGBTQ people. By examining LGBTQ experiences, the research may increase empathy and understanding among people who do not identify as LGBTQ. It may eliminate prejudice, challenge assumptions, and foster empathy across different communities by humanizing these experiences (Janezic, 2021).

For this, the study of LGBTQ experiences has significant implications that go well beyond the boundaries of academic research, acting as a spur for the advancement of diversity, social justice, and empathy in society. By exploring the real-life experiences of LGBTQ people, the research promotes concrete advancements in welfare and rights while simultaneously illuminating systemic injustices and prejudice (Davis et al., 2021). The researcher's understanding of psychology, sociology, education, and related fields is expanded, and the study offers valuable insights into internationalization, resilience, and the impact of social contexts. It also helps create a more equitable and inclusive society where diverse identities are acknowledged and affirmed by amplifying underrepresented voices and informing inclusive policies and practices. In the end, by giving LGBTQ people's voices priority, the research develops empathy, creates deep connections, and opens the door for a future marked by justice, acceptance, and diversity celebration (Evans et al., 2022)

As a result, knowing LGBTQ individuals in criminology is essential for creating an inclusive and equitable criminal justice system (Panfill et al., 2022). This study addresses concerns unique to the LGBTQ+ population, promotes social justice, and informs laws to safeguard their welfare and rights. Understanding and addressing the challenges faced by LGBTQ+ individuals may lead to less prejudice, improved access to resources, and an equal society (White et al., 2021).

The LGBTQ+ group commonly experiences harassment and discrimination at work, which criminology studies as types of social harm. This branch of study explores the underlying patterns and systemic problems that support these actions, acknowledging them as expressions of larger societal prejudices and power disparities rather than just individual events. Through the application of criminological analysis to these acts, scholars can reveal the ways in which institutional structures, cultural norms, and workplace rules serve to marginalize LGBTQ+ people. This knowledge is essential for creating focused interventions, rules, and training initiatives meant to promote diversity, stop prejudice, and guarantee that the workplace is a fair and secure environment for all.

The experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals can provide important insights for the development of laws and regulations that protect vulnerable populations in the workplace. By comprehending the distinct obstacles and

prejudices encountered by LGBTQ+ workers, governments can formulate focused approaches that effectively tackle these problems. Informed policies have the potential to foster inclusivity and equity, thereby establishing a work climate that not only accepts but also celebrates difference. By taking a proactive stance, bullying, harassment, and discrimination in the workplace can be greatly decreased, creating an environment that values and supports one another. By guaranteeing that everyone is treated fairly and with dignity, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity, utilizing these insights ultimately results in a more productive work environment that benefits both employees and organizations.

METHODS

This study used a phenomenological approach to explore shared experiences among LGBTQ+ individuals in Ozamiz City, Philippines. Nine participants were selected through snowball sampling, and in-depth interviews were conducted using a pre-approved interview guide and audio recorder. Data was analyzed using Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological reduction method, which involved bracketing, horizontalization, clustering into themes, and creating textural and structural descriptions to capture the essence of the participants' experiences. Ethical considerations included informed consent, voluntary participation, anonymity, and respect for participants' identities. The study aimed to identify common themes and provide insights into the LGBTQ+ experience in this specific cultural and socio-economic context.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Profile of the Participants

The study participants were employees of Misamis University, with the majority falling within the age range of their early to late twenties. Out of the nine participants, seven individuals were in this age group. It is also evident that the majority were bisexual, and their educational attainment varied, reflecting a diverse representation among the participants.

Profile of the Participants

Code Name	Age	Sexual Orientation	Educational Level
P1	27	Bisexual	Doctorate Degree, 2 nd Year Doctor of Education Major in Education Management
P2	23	Homosexual	Bachelor in Secondary Major in Social Studies, College Level Graduate
P3	29	Gay	College Graduate
P4	26	Bisexual	Master's Degree of Public Administration
P5	24	Gay	BSED Major in Social Studies
P6	29	Lesbian	Master's Degree
P7	38	Bisexual	College Graduate
P8	42	Bisexual	Registered Nurse, on-going Master's Degree
P9	24	Gay	College Graduate

Navigating Acceptance – Tales of Inclusivity and Facing Discrimination

Workplace inclusivity refers to creating an environment where all employees, regardless of their background or identity, feel respected, valued, and have equal opportunities to succeed. Discrimination, on the other hand, involves unfair treatment based on personal characteristics, such as sexual orientation or gender identity, and often manifests in the untold stories of LGBTQ+ employees who face bias, exclusion, or the fear of being authentic in their work environments. The responses from the participants reveal a range of experiences related to workplace inclusivity and discrimination, with many reporting positive, supportive environments. Several

participants, including those from the College of Arts and Sciences and the College of Nursing at Misamis University, describe their workplaces as safe and inclusive, free from discrimination or bias related to their LGBTQ+ identities. These responses suggest that certain departments foster a culture of respect and acceptance. However, subtle instances of discrimination still emerge, such as in Participant 1's experience, where friendly teasing among colleagues is dismissed as harmless but could still reinforce biases or exclusionary norms. Participant 9 highlights minor gendered comments about their use of makeup, reflecting how even small, seemingly benign remarks can reinforce traditional gender expectations, creating discomfort for those who don't conform to them. Participant 2 provides a contrast by noting that, while they haven't encountered discrimination in their current role, they faced significant biases as a student, suggesting that discriminatory experiences can be more prevalent in academic settings than in professional ones. Overall, while most participants report an inclusive work environment, these experiences underscore the presence of subtle micro aggressions and the importance of addressing all forms of discrimination, even those that might seem trivial or unintentional, to ensure that workplaces remain truly inclusive for all employees. These are evident in the responses of the participants during the interview.

"In my workplace, instances of discrimination are rare and often come across as friendly teasing among colleagues, which I do not perceive as harmful." (Participant 1)

"As a new employee at Misamis University, I have not experienced discrimination in the workplace so far, but during my time as a student, I faced significant biases due to my identity." (Participant 2)

"My workplace, primarily composed of female employees, has been a safe and inclusive environment where I have not experienced discrimination due to my LGBTQ+ identity." (Participant 3)

"During my tenure, I have not encountered any discrimination as a member of the LGBTQ+ community, and I find the workplace environment inclusive and supportive." (Participant 4)

"In my workplace, particularly in the College of Arts and Sciences at Misamis University, I have not experienced discrimination or bias due to my LGBTQ+ identity." (Participant 5)

"In my workplace at the College of Nursing at Misamis University, I have not experienced any instances of discrimination or bias related to being a member of the LGBTQ+ community." (Participant 8)

"As a gay individual working in both office and classroom settings, I have encountered minor comments related to my appearance, such as the use of cosmetics. Faculty members have remarked that applying makeup is typically a woman's domain, but I see it as part of presenting myself professionally." (Participant 9)

Workplace inclusivity is fundamental to fostering a diverse, equitable, and productive work environment (Ahmed et al., 2023). Research consistently shows that inclusive workplaces not only improve employee satisfaction and engagement but also enhance innovation and business outcomes. An inclusive environment promotes equal opportunities for all employees, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, race, or background, and encourages individuals to bring their full selves to work without fear of discrimination. For LGBTQ+ employees, a supportive and inclusive workplace can significantly impact their mental and emotional well-being, reducing the stress associated with hiding one's identity or facing overt or subtle biases (Oliveira et al., 2024). Companies that prioritize inclusivity through clear policies, diversity training, and leadership commitment are better equipped to retain top talent and foster a positive organizational culture.

However, even in workplaces that are largely inclusive, subtle forms of discrimination can persist in the form of micro aggressions and unconscious biases (Holder ET AL., 2019). These are often overlooked or dismissed as harmless behavior but can accumulate over time, creating a hostile or uncomfortable environment for certain groups. For example, comments on an individual's appearance, gender expression, or personal choices, such as makeup used by a male employee, may seem trivial but reinforce traditional gender roles and contribute to

an atmosphere of exclusion. Additionally, the experience of being "teased" or receiving offhand comments about one's identity, while intended as friendly, can still be hurtful, especially if they target someone's LGBTQ+ identity. These subtle forms of discrimination can undermine the sense of psychological safety and belonging that is critical to employee well-being and productivity (Schmitt et al., 2019).

Despite the challenges, many workplaces are increasingly recognizing the importance of addressing these subtle biases and creating an environment where all employees feel safe, respected, and valued (Perez, 2019). Efforts such as comprehensive diversity training, clear anti-discrimination policies, and support networks for underrepresented groups play a crucial role in creating a truly inclusive culture. It is important for organizations to not only focus on overt instances of discrimination but also to actively work to eliminate micro aggressions and subtle biases that can erode inclusivity. By promoting openness, educating employees, and fostering a culture of respect, companies can ensure that every individual, regardless of their background or identity, can thrive in the workplace (Malhotra, 2024).

This is supported by the Minority Stress Theory by Allan Meyer and the Trauma Theory by Sigmund Freud. Minority Stress Theory suggests that LGBTQ+ individuals experience chronic stress from both overt discrimination and subtle micro aggressions, which can lead to mental health challenges such as anxiety and depression (Wolf et al., 2020). Even in inclusive workplaces, these daily stressors can accumulate, affecting well-being. Freud's Trauma Theory further explains how past negative experiences, including discrimination, can have lasting psychological effects, even if the current work environment is more supportive (Lee et al., 2021). Repressed traumatic memories may cause individuals to remain on high alert, affecting their behavior and emotional responses. Together, these theories highlight that creating a truly inclusive workplace requires not only addressing overt discrimination but also acknowledging and mitigating the emotional and psychological toll of both subtle biases and past trauma.

Related studies support the findings that inclusive work environments and the presence of micro aggressions or subtle biases significantly impact the well-being of LGBTQ+ employees. Research by Meyer on Minority Stress Theory emphasizes that chronic stress from discrimination, both overt and covert, can lead to higher rates of mental health issues, such as anxiety, depression, and substance abuse, among sexual minorities. Additionally, studies have shown that even workplaces with formal diversity policies may still harbor micro aggressions that negatively affect LGBTQ+ employees' mental health and job satisfaction (Sooknanan et al., 2023). Similarly, research on Trauma Theory highlights those past experiences of discrimination, such as during adolescence or earlier career stages, can leave lasting psychological scars that affect an individual's trust and behavior in new environments (Kite et al., 2020). These studies underscore the importance of not only fostering inclusive workplace cultures but also addressing the residual effects of discrimination and bias through targeted support and interventions.

The findings have important implications for organizations seeking to create truly inclusive and supportive work environments for LGBTQ+ employees. First, it highlights the need for workplaces to go beyond formal anti-discrimination policies and actively address both overt discrimination and more subtle forms of bias, such as micro aggressions, which can accumulate and contribute to minority stress. This may involve providing ongoing diversity training, promoting cultural awareness, and creating safe spaces where employees feel comfortable discussing their experiences. Furthermore, recognizing the long-term psychological impact of past discrimination, organizations should offer resources such as counseling services and trauma-informed support to help individuals process and heal from previous negative experiences. By acknowledging and addressing both the immediate and residual effects of discrimination, organizations can foster a workplace culture that not only attracts but also retains diverse talent, ultimately contributing to a more inclusive and productive organizational environment.

Finding Strength – Personal Journeys of Self-Identity and Positivity

Self-identity refers to an individual's understanding and expression of who they are, encompassing their values, beliefs, and unique characteristics, including their gender identity and sexual orientation. For LGBTQ+

employees, untold stories often reflect the struggle to reconcile their authentic selves with workplace expectations, where positive self-identity is shaped by overcoming challenges of discrimination, micro aggressions, and the need for acceptance, yet it can also be a source of strength, resilience, and empowerment. The responses from participants highlight various strategies for maintaining positivity in the workplace, with a strong connection to self-identity. Many participants, such as Participant 1 and Participant 2, emphasize the importance of fostering harmonious relationships and collaboration with colleagues, which creates a supportive, respectful environment that enhances both their well-being and sense of belonging. Similarly, Participant 3 and Participant 5 stress the significance of mutual acceptance and valuing oneself, particularly in the face of challenges related to gender identity, which helps them stay positive by affirming their self-worth and focusing on inclusivity. Participant 6 and Participant 8 take a more personal approach, drawing strength from faith and gratitude, respectively, which suggests that positivity can also stem from internal resilience and a mindset of appreciation. These responses demonstrate that positivity is closely tied to how individuals perceive their own value and how they engage with others, with a strong sense of self and supportive relationships serving as key factors in maintaining a positive outlook in the workplace. These are evident in the responses of the participants during the interview.

"I maintain a positive outlook by fostering harmonious relationships and viewing my coworkers as friends rather than competitors." (Participant 1)

"To maintain positivity at work, I prioritize respect and collaboration with colleagues, fostering a harmonious environment." (Participant 2)

"I maintain a positive outlook by fostering mutual acceptance and inclusivity with colleagues, regardless of gender." (Participant 3)

"To maintain positivity, I believe in myself and find strength in my faith, knowing that God is always with me." (Participant 6)

"To maintain a positive mindset, I focus on self-worth, valuing myself, and treating everyone equally while disregarding negative comments or criticisms about my identity." (Participant 5)

"Although I do not remain positive every day, I make it a point to start each day by appreciating the blessing of being alive." (Participant 8)

Maintaining positivity in the workplace is often linked to the development and affirmation of self-identity, particularly for LGBTQ+ employees who may face unique challenges related to their gender and sexual orientation. Research shows that employees who feel supported and respected in their identity are more likely to have higher job satisfaction, increased productivity, and better mental well-being (Judge et al., 2023). A positive work environment fosters inclusion, where colleagues view each other as collaborators rather than competitors, and respect for personal identities is a cornerstone of daily interactions. When individuals feel that their authentic selves are valued, they are better equipped to overcome workplace stress and challenges, maintaining a positive outlook even in difficult situations (Gardner et al., 2021). The ability to build strong, harmonious relationships with coworkers often creates a sense of belonging, which is crucial for promoting both individual and collective positivity in the workplace.

Self-worth also plays a critical role in sustaining positivity, especially in environments where subtle forms of bias or micro aggressions may still exist (Penda et al., 2022). LGBTQ+ employees who cultivate a strong sense of self-worth are less likely to be impacted by negative comments or criticisms about their identity. This resilience allows them to focus on their professional strengths and contributions rather than internalizing harmful remarks. Research suggests that when individuals value themselves and their abilities, they are better able to deflect negativity and remain positive, even in the face of adversity (Polizzi et al., 2020). Moreover, for some, personal beliefs, such as spirituality or gratitude, can serve as powerful tools for reinforcing a

positive mindset, allowing them to navigate workplace challenges with a sense of purpose and resilience. Overall, positivity in the workplace is not only the result of external factors, such as supportive colleagues or inclusive policies, but is also deeply rooted in individuals' internal sense of identity, self-worth, and the ability to maintain a constructive perspective, no matter the circumstances.

This is supported by Freud's Trauma Theory, suggesting that defense mechanisms help individuals manage anxiety and emotional stress (Babl et al., 2019). In the workplace, supportive networks and respect among colleagues serve as buffers against stressors like competition and conflict, promoting emotional well-being. Additionally, Minority Stress Theory by Alan H. Meyer highlights how individuals from marginalized groups face unique stressors from stigma and discrimination, but coping strategies and positive self-identity can mitigate these effects. By affirming self-worth and cultivating a sense of inclusion, individuals can reduce the psychological toll of adversity (Manning et al., 2019). Fostering positive connections and self-empowerment in the workplace helps protect against emotional distress, supporting resilience and well-being.

Several studies have explored the relationship between positive workplace environments, interpersonal relationships, and psychological well-being. Research by Cohen & Wills emphasizes that social support acts as a buffer against stress, helping individuals cope with workplace challenges like competition and interpersonal conflict (Foy et al., 2019). Similarly, Kobasa found that individuals with strong social networks and positive self-identity exhibit greater resilience to stress, demonstrating the protective role of emotional support in high-stress environments. In the context of minority stress, marginalized groups face unique stressors due to societal stigma and discrimination, but protective factors such as self-affirmation and inclusive work environments can mitigate these effects. Furthermore, Sherman and McDermott found that workplaces that prioritize inclusivity and respect contribute to improved mental health outcomes for employees from diverse backgrounds, reinforcing the importance of fostering a positive, supportive environment to reduce psychological distress (Travis et al., 2019). These studies collectively support the idea that positive interpersonal relationships, self-empowerment, and respect in the workplace are crucial for emotional well-being and resilience.

The implications of these findings are significant for workplace management and organizational culture. By fostering supportive, inclusive, and respectful environments, organizations can reduce stress and improve the mental health and well-being of their employees, especially those from marginalized groups. Implementing practices that encourage strong interpersonal relationships, such as team-building activities, mentorship programs, and open communication, can create a psychologically safe space where individuals feel valued and supported. Additionally, promoting self-affirmation and personal empowerment through diversity training, mindfulness initiatives, and leadership development can help mitigate the impact of stressors like stigma and competition. In doing so, organizations not only enhance employee resilience and job satisfaction but also improve productivity and retention, ultimately contributing to a healthier and more harmonious workplace.

The Hidden Gaps – LGBTQ+ Perspectives on Workplace Policies and Needed Improvements

Workplace policies are formal guidelines designed to promote fairness, inclusivity, and a safe environment for all employees, ensuring that individuals, including those from the LGBTQ community, are protected from discrimination and harassment. However, areas for improvement often lie in addressing the untold stories of LGBTQ members, whose experiences of microaggressions, lack of support, or limited visibility highlight the need for policies that go beyond legal compliance to foster authentic, inclusive cultures where diverse identities can thrive. The participants' responses to workplace policies reveal a spectrum of perspectives on inclusivity and areas for improvement. Participants like Participant 1 and Participant 2 highlighted that while existing policies are generally inclusive, there is room for improvement such as allowing transgender employees to wear uniforms aligned with their gender identity and creating more targeted policies specifically for LGBTQ+ employees. These participants expressed a desire for more tailored support and clearer guidelines for queer staff. In contrast, Participant 3 noted that while there are no specific policies for LGBTQ+ employees, they have not experienced discrimination, suggesting a more passive stance toward the need for specialized

policies. On the other hand, Participant 5 and Participant 8 expressed satisfaction with their institutions' existing policies, finding them both inclusive and supportive without notable issues, indicating that for some, the current framework is already sufficient. Overall, the responses illustrate a divide between those seeking more focused, proactive policies for LGBTQ+ employees and those who feel the existing framework is already adequate. These are evident in the responses of the participants during the interview.

Our workplace policies are inclusive, but there is room for improvement, such as allowing transgender employees to wear uniforms aligned with their gender identity." (Participant 1)

"While I find my institution's general policies comprehensive, specific support for LGBTQ+ employees are lacking, and I believe dedicated policies should be developed." (Participant 2)

"While there are no specific workplace policies for LGBTQ+ employees, I have not felt the need for them as discrimination has not been an issue." (Participant 3)

"The school's policies for LGBTQ+ professionals are adequate and inclusive, ensuring a supportive environment without notable inefficiencies." (Participant 5)

"The policies in our college are inclusive, with a strong belief in equality and no place for judgment." (Participant 8)

Workplace policies that are designed to be inclusive play a crucial role in fostering a diverse and supportive environment for all employees, including those from the LGBTQ+ community (Sabharwal et al., 2019). While many organizations have made significant strides in implementing anti-discrimination policies that explicitly protect LGBTQ+ employees, there remains a gap in addressing the unique needs of this group. For instance, policies may outline non-discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity, but they often lack specific provisions that directly support LGBTQ+ individuals, such as those related to transitioning employees, gender-neutral facilities, or the ability to express gender identity through uniforms or dress codes. Without these specific provisions, employees may still face subtle discrimination or exclusion in areas where the policies are not fully enforced or are too broad to address individual needs (Sullivan et al., 2021).

Moreover, while many workplaces have inclusive policies, the real challenge often lies in their implementation and enforcement. An inclusive policy on paper is only effective if it is actively applied and backed by a culture of acceptance and openness (Dobusch et al., 2019). This is particularly important for LGBTQ+ employees who may face microaggressions or feel uncomfortable disclosing their identity without the assurance of confidentiality or support. To address these concerns, organizations can benefit from regularly updated training programs on LGBTQ+ issues, clearer reporting mechanisms for discrimination, and the establishment of LGBTQ+ employee resource groups to provide peer support and advocacy (Roberson et al., 2024). These measures not only ensure that the policies are truly inclusive but also create a more visible and active commitment to LGBTQ+ inclusion.

This is supported by Trauma Theory, as proposed by Freud, which highlights how unresolved psychological distress from past experiences, such as rejection or marginalization, can impact an individual's engagement with the workplace (Jackson et al., 2020). It emphasizes the need for organizations to not only implement inclusive policies but also create trauma-informed environments that support the emotional and psychological needs of LGBTQ+ employees. Similarly, the Minority Stress Theory by Alan H. Meyer explains how sexual and gender minorities experience heightened stress due to stigma and societal marginalization, which can negatively impact mental health (Diamond et al., 2022). These stressors are exacerbated by a lack of institutional support, such as gender-affirming policies, which can lead to anxiety, burnout, or depression. Both theories underline the importance of creating policies that directly address the unique needs of LGBTQ+ employees to reduce stress and promote a more supportive and equitable workplace.

Related studies have consistently highlighted the impact of inclusive workplace policies on the well-being of LGBTQ+ employees. Research has shown that LGBTQ+ individuals in organizations with explicit non-discrimination policies and supportive environments report lower levels of stress, higher job satisfaction, and improved mental health outcomes. For example, a study by Ragins found that LGBTQ+ employees who perceived their workplace as inclusive were less likely to experience psychological distress and more likely to feel a sense of belonging. Similarly, studies on minority stress have found that LGBTQ+ individuals in hostile or non-affirming environments experience elevated levels of anxiety, depression, and burnout (Reece-Nguyen et al., 2022). Research also emphasizes the importance of trauma-informed practices, showing that when workplaces provide resources such as mental health support, gender-affirming policies, and safe spaces, LGBTQ+ employees are better able to overcome past trauma and thrive in their roles. These studies underscore the critical need for organizations to implement comprehensive, tailored policies that not only protect LGBTQ+ employees but also promote their psychological well-being and overall job performance.

The implications of these findings are significant for organizations seeking to create truly inclusive and supportive workplaces for LGBTQ+ employees. To effectively reduce minority stress and support mental well-being, employers must go beyond broad non-discrimination policies and develop targeted strategies that address the unique needs of LGBTQ+ individuals. This includes implementing gender-affirming policies, offering mental health resources, fostering a culture of acceptance, and ensuring that all employees feel safe to express their identities without fear of discrimination or marginalization. Additionally, organizations must adopt trauma-informed approaches that recognize the potential psychological impacts of past experiences, such as discrimination or rejection, and create environments that promote healing and resilience. By doing so, employers can not only enhance the well-being of LGBTQ+ employees but also improve organizational outcomes, such as job satisfaction, retention, and overall productivity, creating a more inclusive and equitable workplace for all.

Silent Struggles – Stories of Stress, Resilience, and Pursuing Well-being

Stress management refers to the strategies and techniques individuals use to cope with the pressures and demands of their work environment, while well-being encompasses the overall mental, emotional, and physical health of employees. For LGBTQ members in the workplace, untold stories often reveal how chronic stressors, such as discrimination, lack of support, and fears of being outed, can significantly impact their well-being, highlighting the need for tailored resources and environments that promote both psychological safety and inclusive care. The participants' responses to stress management and well-being highlight various personal strategies for coping with workplace challenges, with some common themes emerging. Several individuals emphasized the importance of maintaining professionalism and clear boundaries, such as Participant 1, who separates personal issues from work, and Participant 2, who focuses on staying true to themselves and communicating openly. These approaches suggest a focus on self-regulation and managing workplace dynamics while prioritizing authenticity. Meanwhile, Participant 3 emphasized the role of mutual understanding and adaptability in fostering a supportive work environment, which aligns with the broader theme of cultivating positive relationships to manage stress. Participants like Participant 4 and Participant 9 reflected a more proactive approach to well-being, with one emphasizing a positive mindset and self-affirmation and the other using available leave to recharge. Additionally, Participant 8 shared a more spiritual approach to stress management, relying on prayer for strength and guidance. These diverse responses reflect the varied ways individuals navigate workplace stress, underscoring the importance of personalized coping strategies for maintaining well-being. These are evident in the responses of the participants during the interview.

"To manage challenges, I separate personal issues from work and focus on professionalism." (Participant 1)

"I ensure my well-being by staying true to myself, adhering to workplace responsibilities, and communicating openly with colleagues." (Participant 2)

"I focus on mutual understanding and adaptability with my coworkers." (Participant 3)

"I manage stress by maintaining a positive mindset and affirming my worth." (Participant 4)

"I utilize my six-day leave allowance to take breaks and recharge." (Participant 9)

"I always pray to God for guidance and strength." (Participant 8)

Stress management and well-being in the workplace are essential components of maintaining a productive and healthy environment for all employees, including those in marginalized groups like LGBTQ+ individuals. Effective stress management involves both individual coping strategies and organizational support systems (Schwarzer et al., 2023). Employees may adopt various personal approaches to managing stress, such as setting boundaries between personal and professional lives, maintaining a positive mindset, or practicing self-care techniques like taking regular breaks. For LGBTQ+ employees, stress management is particularly crucial as they often navigate unique challenges, including the fear of discrimination, microaggressions, or the stress of concealing their identities (Warrier et al., 2024). These pressures can take a significant toll on mental health and overall well-being. To support these employees, workplaces need to foster an inclusive culture that allows individuals to be authentic and ensures that resources for mental health and stress management are easily accessible.

Organizations also play a key role in supporting employee well-being by offering concrete resources and creating an environment that encourages open communication and mutual understanding. Programs such as counseling services, flexible work arrangements, and employee resource groups can be invaluable for LGBTQ+ employees who may feel isolated or marginalized in traditional workplace settings (Tuthill et al., 2023). The importance of cultivating a supportive work culture cannot be overstated, as feeling accepted and valued is a crucial aspect of both mental and emotional health (Prilleltensky et al., 2021). Employees who are able to bring their whole selves to work without fear of discrimination or bias are more likely to experience higher levels of job satisfaction, lower stress, and greater overall well-being.

This is supported by the Minority Stress Theory by Allan H. Meyer and the Trauma Theory by Sigmund Freud, which provide valuable frameworks for understanding the unique stressors faced by LGBTQ+ employees in the workplace (Murphy et al., 2021). Minority Stress Theory suggests that LGBTQ+ individuals experience chronic stress due to discrimination, microaggressions, and societal stigmatization, which can negatively affect their mental health and overall well-being. This highlights the need for workplaces to create inclusive environments that reduce these stressors through supportive policies, resources, and open communication. Trauma Theory further explains how past experiences of discrimination can lead to long-lasting emotional and psychological effects, manifesting as chronic stress, anxiety, or burnout (Cancela et al., 2024). To support LGBTQ+ employees, organizations must not only offer stress management tools and mental health resources but also foster a trauma-informed, inclusive culture where employees feel safe, seen, and valued. By addressing both the structural and individual sources of stress, companies can promote a healthier, more resilient workforce.

Related studies reinforce the findings that LGBTQ+ employees face unique stressors in the workplace, with significant impacts on their well-being. Research by Meyer on Minority Stress Theory has shown that LGBTQ+ individuals experience heightened levels of stress due to discrimination, social exclusion, and the pressure to conceal their identities, all of which contribute to poor mental health outcomes. A study by Grant found that nearly 40% of LGBTQ+ employees report experiencing workplace discrimination, leading to increased stress and lower job satisfaction (Maji et al., 2024). Similarly, a study by Liddle highlighted the role of workplace culture in either exacerbating or alleviating minority stress, showing that inclusive policies and supportive environments can reduce the negative psychological impact on LGBTQ+ employees. Furthermore, lack of workplace support for LGBTQ+ individuals, particularly in the form of clear policies and resources, can lead to emotional distress and burnout (Wolfe et al., 2023). These studies underscore the importance of

proactive organizational efforts to address minority stress and foster a work environment that prioritizes the well-being of all employees, particularly those from marginalized groups.

The implications of these findings are significant for organizations aiming to foster a supportive and inclusive workplace for LGBTQ+ employees. By recognizing the unique stressors highlighted in Minority Stress Theory and Trauma Theory, employers can take proactive steps to reduce discrimination and create an environment that promotes well-being. This includes implementing clear anti-discrimination policies, offering mental health resources, providing training on LGBTQ+ inclusivity, and creating spaces for open dialogue where employees feel safe to express their authentic selves. Additionally, organizations should consider adopting trauma-informed practices that acknowledge the emotional and psychological impact of past discrimination, allowing for a more empathetic approach to employee support. Such measures not only help mitigate the stress and trauma experienced by LGBTQ+ employees but also enhance overall job satisfaction, reduce turnover, and improve productivity, ultimately contributing to a healthier, more resilient workforce.

Hope and Legacy – Inspiring Support for Future Generations of LGBTQ+ Employees

Support for future generations of LGBTQ+ employees involves creating an inclusive, safe, and empowering environment where individuals can thrive without fear of discrimination or marginalization. By acknowledging and sharing the untold stories of LGBTQ+ workers, those of struggle, resilience, and triumph, we honor their experiences and pave the way for future generations to feel seen, valued, and supported in the workplace. The responses from participants highlight a shared commitment to supporting future generations of LGBTQ+ employees through inclusivity, respect, and proactive institutional efforts. Participants emphasized the importance of fostering a work environment where LGBTQ+ individuals are treated equally, with clear communication and respect (Participants 2, 7, 9). They also advocate for institutions to take active steps, such as implementing thorough orientations and strengthening policies, to ensure equity and protect against discrimination (Participants 4, 5). While some responses focus on the need for personal resilience and adaptability (Participant 7), all participants agree that ongoing education, awareness, and active support are crucial for creating workplaces where LGBTQ+ employees can thrive. These are evident in the responses of the participants during the interview.

"For future generations of LGBTQ+ employees, I believe inclusivity starts with self-awareness and education. Treating everyone equally, regardless of gender, and fostering clear and respectful communication are essential." (Participant 2)

"For future generations of LGBTQ+ employees, I believe there should be thorough orientations that explicitly promote acceptance and inclusivity. Institutions should actively work to ensure equality and equity in the workplace rather than being passively supportive." (Participant 4)

"To better support future generations of LGBTQ+ employees, it is essential to strengthen policies and societal norms that empower and value them. These efforts should aim to mitigate violence and discrimination, ensuring their protection and equal treatment." (Participant 5)

"For future generations of LGBTQ+ employees, I believe they should always stay true to themselves, adapt to their environment, and interact with others respectfully." (Participant 7)

"For future generations of LGBTQ+ employees, fostering inclusivity must involve emphasizing respect, dignity, and human rights. Truly inclusive environments require understanding the unique challenges faced by diverse communities and integrating that understanding into workplace practices." (Participant 9)

Supporting future generations of LGBTQ+ employees requires more than just a commitment to equality; it demands a holistic approach that encompasses education, active inclusivity, and institutional responsibility. Research shows that workplaces with inclusive cultures not only foster higher employee engagement and well-being but also improve productivity and innovation. This is because LGBTQ+ employees who feel respected

and valued are more likely to be fully engaged, contributing their best work. Educating employees and leadership about LGBTQ+ issues through training and awareness initiatives can dismantle biases and encourage respectful communication. This foundational understanding creates a more accepting environment that benefits all employees, regardless of their identity.

Equally important is the role of organizations in establishing clear, proactive policies that go beyond passive support. Implementing comprehensive anti-discrimination policies, providing LGBTQ+ resources, and offering mentorship or affinity groups can empower LGBTQ+ employees and help them navigate potential challenges in the workplace (Parker et al., 2024). Additionally, fostering an environment that actively promotes diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) sends a strong message that organizations are committed to protecting the rights of all workers, not merely offering symbolic gestures. By investing in these practices, institutions can create workplaces where LGBTQ+ individuals feel safe, valued, and encouraged to be their authentic selves, contributing to both personal fulfillment and organizational success (Fletcher et al., 2021).

This is supported by the Minority Stress Theory, developed by Alan H. Meyer, which posits that LGBTQ+ individuals experience chronic stress due to societal stigma, discrimination, and the pressure to conceal their identity, negatively impacting their mental health and well-being (Schmitz et al., 2020). Creating inclusive and supportive workplace environments with clear anti-discrimination policies and active education helps mitigate these stressors by reducing the environmental triggers of minority stress. Providing resources, mentorship, and a culture of respect allows LGBTQ+ employees to feel safer and more empowered, thus reducing the psychological burden caused by the ongoing stress of navigating a predominantly heteronormative environment (Sayers-Brown et al., 2024). By addressing these stressors, organizations can help protect LGBTQ+ employees from the harmful effects of minority stress, improving both their well-being and their productivity at work.

The implications of fostering inclusive workplace environments for LGBTQ+ employees are far-reaching, both for individual well-being and organizational success. Organizations that actively implement anti-discrimination policies provide targeted support systems and promote inclusive practices not only reduce the harmful effects of minority stress but also enhance employee morale, engagement, and retention. By prioritizing inclusivity, employers create a culture where all employees can bring their authentic selves to work, leading to greater creativity, collaboration, and productivity. Moreover, organizations that are seen as LGBTQ+ friendly attract top talent from diverse backgrounds, contributing to a more innovative and competitive workforce. Ultimately, the commitment to inclusivity benefits both the mental health of LGBTQ+ employees and the overall performance of the organization, demonstrating that fostering diversity is not only a moral imperative but also a strategic business decision.

CONCLUSIONS

The study found that achieving a truly inclusive workplace requires addressing not only discrimination but also subtle biases like micro aggressions, which affect employee well-being and productivity. An inclusive environment boosts engagement and job satisfaction, particularly for LGBTQ+ employees. While many organizations have anti-discrimination policies, additional provisions, such as gender-neutral facilities and transition support, are needed. Effective policy enforcement, training, and support networks are essential, as is prioritizing mental health and stress management, especially for marginalized groups. To support future LGBTQ+ workers, companies should focus on training, clear policies, and a commitment to inclusivity for a creative, productive workplace.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To support LGBTQ+ employees, organizations must address subtle biases like microaggressions and create an inclusive environment where all employees feel respected and valued. This can boost engagement, well-being, and job satisfaction, particularly for LGBTQ+ individuals. Companies should implement specific measures such as support for transitions, gender-neutral facilities, and ongoing education while ensuring

effective policy enforcement and career development opportunities. Prioritizing mental health, stress management, and leadership support will foster a productive and inclusive workplace, while mentorship and clear diversity policies can help nurture the next generation of LGBTQ+ workers.

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The authors declare that they consented to the publication of this study.

Authors' contributions

All the authors took part in literature review, analysis, and manuscript writing equally

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