**Coping with Workplace Stress by the Sri Lankan LGBTQ+ Community**

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**Abstract**

LGBTQ+ employees in Sri Lanka face workplace discrimination, as organizations lack adequate policies and practices to protect them from marginalization and vulnerability. Thus LGBTQ+ employees have to work under pressure and it affects their job satisfaction and performance. Sri Lankan LGBTQ+ studies are lacking due to challenges in finding respondents, overcoming social and cultural barriers, and gaining societal support. This study investigates workplace discrimination against LGBTQ+ employees in Sri Lanka, focusing on their feelings and perceptions. It also examines coping strategies for overcoming job stress and the best coping mechanisms for these employees. The research explores came out LGBTQ+ employees' experiences in Sri Lanka and potential solutions to workplace discrimination through a qualitative approach, interviewing eight respondents who experienced discrimination. The study findings reviled that LGBTQ+ employees are discriminated against in the workplace through social exclusion, sexual harassment, and hostile work settings. The research explored nine coping strategies practiced by the Sri Lankan LHBTQ+ employees and highlighted the four best strategies that were successful in Sri Lankan context. The studies’ findings provide significant insights for the organization's policymakers related to human resource management and scholars.

***Keywords:*** *Coping responses, Discrimination, LGBTQ+ employees, Sri Lanka, Workplace Stress*

**Introduction**

LGBTQ+ communities face discrimination in the workplace and society. Western countries like the US and Europe have friendly policies, making them more comfortable in the workplace. However, LGBTQ+ employees in Sri Lankan context suffer from mental problems due to the disdain they face. Organizations are striving to create inclusive environments for LGBTQ+ employees in developed nations, emphasizing the importance of non-discrimination policies to prevent discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression (Sears, Mallory, & Hunter, 2011). Sri Lanka faces less favorable treatment for LGBTQ+ individuals in organizations due to widespread discrimination, stigma, and lack of legal protection, resulting in significant workplace challenges for many (Ellawala, 2019).

Workplace stress involves individuals being challenged to complete tasks that may be impossible or impossible. Some perceive it as a threat to their well-being, while others simply accept these fluctuations (Khan, Chowdhury & Khan, 2020). Job stress negatively impacts employee performance, leading to unfavorable behavioral and perceptional work results. Exclusive turnover rates contribute to high-stress levels in the workplace. Chowdhury's (2021) report on Sri Lanka's LGBTIQ+ community highlights workplace challenges, including the stigma surrounding homosexual relationships. In a country like Sri Lanka, homosexual marriage is not illegally accepted clearly, and socially most people believe it is a crime, leading to many individuals remaining in the closet. This highlights the challenges faced by the LGBTIQ+ community in Sri Lanka. Thus sexual minority employees work under stress at the workplace in Sri Lankan context. Therefore, there is a practical gap between the job stress of LGBTQ+ employees in the Sri Lankan context and their coping responses.

The Supreme Court of Sri Lanka has approved a bill to decriminalize homosexuality, marking a historic development in the fight for gay rights (Reuters, 2023, May 10). This decision follows years of advocacy by LGBTQ+ rights activists, who aim to amend the country's law, which currently makes homosexuality punishable by jail time and fines. Scholars have studied job stress in global and Sri Lankan contexts, focusing on LGBTQ+ health, education, and discrimination. However, there is a lack of research on discrimination against LGBTQ+ employees, how they feel, what are the reasons for discrimination, their job stress, and coping strategies for LGBTQ+ employees in Sri Lanka. Thus, the researcher identified an empirical gap in the field of research related to job stress and coping strategies of the Sri Lankan LGBTQ+ community. Thus the researcher identified the research problem as how LGBTQ+ employees discriminate in the workplace and how they cope with workplace stress in Sri Lankan context.

This research study aims to support the LGBTQ+ community and oppose discrimination against sexual minorities in Sri Lanka. Accordingly, there were four objectives in the current study. The first objective was to explore the ways that LGBTQ+ employees are discriminated against at the workplace in Sri Lankan context. The second objective was to identify how LGBTQ+ employees feel when they are discriminated against at the workplace in Sri Lankan context. The third objective was to explore the perceptions of LGBTQ+ employees for being discriminated against at the workplace in the Sri Lankan context. The fourth objective was to explore the coping strategies to overcome the job stress of LGBTQ+ employees in Sri Lanka.

**Literature review**

**LGBTQ+ Community**

Sexual acts and romantic attractions are often categorized as homosexual or heterosexual based on the biological sex of the individuals involved (Perrotta, 2021). Homosexuality refers to the romantic or sexual attraction to people of the same gender. According to Bailey et al. (2016), there is no consensus among scientists about the exact causes of homosexuality. However, genetic, hormonal, and environmental factors, social and cultural influences, and early life experiences support same-sex attraction (Mustanski et al., 2005).

Cultural and societal differences exist in the experiences of homosexuals worldwide. While some countries have more social acceptance and legal protections, others are highly stigmatized and criminalized. Western countries have implemented laws and policies to protect LGBTQ+ rights, such as non-discrimination laws and same-sex relationships (Hua, Yang & Goldsen, 2019). However, discrimination and prejudice persist in some areas, leading to challenges such as employment, housing, and healthcare access (Valdiserri et al., 2019). LGBTQ+ communities in Western countries may also face rejection and discrimination within their families and communities, resulting in adverse mental health outcomes. In Sri Lanka, LGBTQ+ communities face significant challenges and marginalization, such as limited access to education, employment, and healthcare (KGNU, 2022).

Globally, the LGBTQ+ community faces social stigmatization, discrimination, and violence due to their sexual orientation (Smith, 2017). In Sri Lanka, homosexuality was illegal and punishable by up to 10 years in prison, dating back to British colonial rule (Sanders, 2009). This law has been used to discriminate against and harass homosexuals, and they may be rejected by families and communities. Despite these challenges, efforts are underway to promote the rights and acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community in Sri Lanka.

**Sexual minority groups in Sri Lanka**

According to LaViolette (2009), sexual Minority groups in Sri Lanka are estimated to be 19.6% of the country's total population. Following the conventions of recent mapping, it estimates up to 1,100,000 individuals. The country has also been recognized as a top travel destination in Asia, emerging by a gay-friendly travel website. Most of the companies in the country also offer tours as well as other services to individuals who are homosexuals. The country possesses a mixed attitude towards homosexuality.

Despite their sexuality, it is expected for the majority of men to marry during their adulthood. Veenstra (2011) mentioned that the Conservative government announced the creation of a law intending to ban discrimination based on sexual orientation.

It has been determined that about 43% of the sexual minorities in Sri Lanka have shown satisfaction with life at high levels. 64% of LGBT remain single and not dedicated to any relationship. 46% of LGBT people shared their related content openly through social media. Views of Sri Lankan related to homosexuality mainly during the ancient times. This can be witnessed in various pieces of archaeology, which also comprise homosexuality being present among the royal families (Steele et al., 2017). Individuals belonging to the sexual minority group in Sri Lanka reported being abused by the police. They also reported violence as well as sexual abuse. Most of the abuses were reported by transgender women. Several individuals belonging to the sexual minority groups reported that there was an object to extortion and bribery. This was done to avoid either torture or records of criminals. The abused individuals had very little or no access to medical care or even legal aid (Steele et al., 2017).

Waradas (2022) mentioned that these people are discriminated against primarily due to their desires for sexuality and their workplace identity. Despite all these, little research has been conducted on the stigmatization and prejudice they face. In certain societies, such people were dismissed from their workplaces in both private and public sectors. Veenstra (2011) also mentioned that Sri Lankan society still prefers treating sexual minority groups as a disease or a burden imported from Western countries. Marriage is considered holy and an essential part of Sri Lankans' lives. Individuals belonging to sexual minority groups are usually forced to get married against their desires and wishes. Wijayath (2018) explained that the LGBTIQ population in Sri Lanka is regularly the target of the country's authorities, particularly transgender people and gay men engaged in commercial sex work (Hoel et al., 2021).

**Challenges faced by sexual minority groups in the workplace**

According to Briddock (2016) and Hoel et al. (2021), organizations have improved their tolerance for diversity and inclusion, notably through formalizing policies against workplace discrimination. However, evidence indicates that prejudice is still ubiquitous in organizations and that laws are frequently ignored. In accordance with preliminary research findings, several researchers suspect LGBTQ workers faced the highest rate of discrimination at their place of work.

Discrimination has been faced based on sexual orientation as well as the identity of gender. Most of the individuals belonging to how sexual minority groups in Sri Lanka come across discrimination as well as harassment during the times of their education. Thus, it has hampered or damaged the prospects of employment. Discrimination continues. Ozturk, Rumens, and Tatli (2020) mentioned that the continuation happens in access to their job and throughout the total employment cycle. Considering the extreme conditions, the employees of the sexual minority groups get bullied, robbed, mobbed as well as harassed sexually, physically, verbally, and assaulted.

According to Duncan et al. (2019), because of preconceived notions about how men and women should look and behave as well as perceived non-conformity to heteronormativity (the societal perception that to be heterosexual is "normal"), discrimination, harassment, and exclusion from the workforce frequently occur. Men and women viewed as being "feminine" or "masculine" in behavior or appearance experience discrimination or harassment frequently. Several cases were reported where workers who are gay, lesbian as well as bisexual were questioned that are invasive about their personal lives (Badgett, 2014).

There were also questions about belonging to the sexual minority group in Sri Lanka. They were also instances where the individuals belonging to the sexual minority groups of Sri Lanka had to prove their femininity or masculinity either to be accepted in the employment as well as to have their contributions towards the workplace from being valued. Ozturk et al. (2020) also mentioned that the presence of fear among these workforces about being discriminated against and being treated violently mostly makes them hide their real identity, and sometimes these women keep their sexual orientation a secret. Lesbian and gay respondents said they avoided discussing their personal lives or changing their partners’ names during workplace talks. This may result in severe anxiety as well as decreased productivity.

It was the transgender people who reported very high forms of discrimination. Most of the transgender mentioned that they were rejected from several job interviews because of their looks. Interviewers rejected them for their appearances (Badgett, 2014). Complexities and hardships faced at the place of work include not able to obtain identity documents reflecting their gender as well as the name, employers feeling reluctant to accept the workers by the way how they look and dress, they are also not encouraged to utilize bathrooms that are suitable for their gender as well as the rise of vulnerability to both bullying as well as harassment from the other workers at the workplace (Chua & Gilbert, 2015). Chua and Gilbert (2015) explained that workers who identify as transgender, especially transwomen, are frequently totally unwelcome in the workplace. This leaves them with few options for surviving in some nations, which typically means engaging in unsafe sex work that dramatically raises their risk of contracting HIV.

Wijayath (2018) stated that legislation alone could not stop discrimination. Workers do not always have access to legal remedies, even in states with progressive legislation, either because of high prices or lengthy legal processes. These various issues the workers face have made their work life very difficult. The detrimental effects of LGBT employment discrimination as well as harassment on employees' health and welfare, as well as their dedication to and contentment with their jobs, have been documented in several sources. Also, according to Mansh, Garcia, and Lunn (2015), Lesbian, homosexual, bisexual, and transgender (LGBTQ+) people continue to face discrimination and exploitation at work worldwide despite increased legal protection against it. Due to their sexual orientation or gender identity, they may be denied employment, dismissed, passed over for promotions, or given less desired assignments or pay (Smith, 2017). LGBT people also experience "informal" discrimination, such as being marginalized by coworkers, vandalism, heterosexist remarks or jokes, or even physical assault.

**Job stress of LGBTQ+ employees in Sri Lanka**

Smith (2017) stated that job stress is explained as physical and emotional responses harmful arise when the requirements of work do not align with the workers' capabilities, resources or needs. Stress incurred from a job can also cause poor health and injury. Sometimes, the concept of job stress is linked with challenges. However, all the concepts are not similar. It has been agreed by almost everyone that job stress is the result of interactions happening between the workers as well as the conditions of work. This stress related to work negatively affects an individual's performance, including the total well-being of both the body and mind.

Chua and Gilbert (2015) explained that job stress mainly occurs when the individual is not in the correct state of mind. The presence of mental instability increases the level of stress among individuals. It is the LGBTQ+ employees in Sri Lanka who face a high level of difficulties and problems. The presence of discrimination in the workplace can also be a reason for job stress. Chua and Gilbert (2015) also explained been harassed, abused, assaulted as well as challenged emotionally can be some of the causes of job stress. The presence of a toxic work environment can easily make things difficult for a person to work as the employees will feel insecure about their place of work.

Job stress can affect employees in various ways. This has the potential to make employees more prone towards mistakes, poor performance at work, issues related to mental health, and burnout, together with various conflicts at work (Smith, 2017). As the stress related to the job becomes unaddressed, higher prices are being paid by the company in terms of increased turnover rates, disengagement together, and absenteeism. Jib stress can negatively affect employees. Employees who have been affected by this will show reduced performance at work, and this will ultimately reduce the performance of the organization.

According to research, workplace conditions or climate impact LGBTQ employees' mental health results. Among gay and lesbian employees, heterosexism in the workplace has been linked to psychological suffering, particularly depression. Gay, lesbian, and bisexual employees also deal with pressures related to their sexuality at work, such as coming-out anxiety or encounters with heterosexist prejudice. Marouf (2008) stated that lesbian and bisexual women's increased alcohol use has also been connected to workplace harassment. Without focusing on workplace experiences, recent research on minority stress has also connected psychological issues to LGBTQ folk's worse heart health, illustrating how accumulated stress can negatively impact an individual's physical and mental health.

Greater levels of work stress are probably a result of discrimination against LGBTI employees based on their sexual orientation. Stress is "a special relationship between the person and the environment that the person judges as exhausting or overwhelming his or her resources as well as harming his or her well-being," according to (Anderson & Kanters, 2015). Differentiating between societal and individual pressures is a typical practice. The former is connected to things that can happen to an individual personally, such as losing a job or a close relative. On the other hand, social stressors are aspects of the social environment, such as belonging to social groups that are stigmatized because of one's socioeconomic level, race or ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation (Toomey, 2021).

Adikaram and Liyanage (2021) explained that job stress is an essential factor affecting the productivity of the employees and the firm. Job stress is also a critical issue in the workplace. In recent studies, job stress is responsible for at least 50 to 60% of working days lost. This gradually reduced the overall performance of the firm. A worker who is stressed about his or her job is bound to make mistakes during work.

Marouf (2008) stated that the percentage of errors made could also rise. This can reduce the quality of work being done, ultimately reducing the overall work. Job stress can also disturb the working environment (Smith, 2017). The absence of a hostile working environment can demotivate the other employees and affect the firm's overall performance. Job stress results in poor decisions and not being up to the standards. The poor decisions the employees make affect the organization’s overall functioning. This also leads to increased expenses, additional costs, and reduced income the firm generates.

**Research Methods**

The present study adopted a qualitative research design. The objectives of the study were to explore the perception of LGBTQ+ employees in the Sri Lankan context. The interview method was applied in the current study to collect data. The researcher personally met respondents to collect data and had a discussion with them first. Once the researcher explained the objectives of the study and confirm that the researcher does not disclose any personal information about the respondents, the interview was conducted. The structured interview questionnaire included ten questions. The first five questions of the interview were designed to gather information of the respondents and make them feel comfortable answering the rest of the questions. From question number six to question number ten, the researcher asked about the discrimination that happens in the workplace, how the respondent feels about it, and how they overcome the situations. The researcher interviewed eight respondents who were victims of discrimination in the workplace. The researcher employed a data redundancy point to determine the sample size. Thematic analysis is a widely used data analysis technique for qualitative researchers to identify, analyze, and uncover patterns and themes in data, providing valuable insights into respondents' perspectives and facts (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Thematic analysis using Microsoft Excel was used to identify coping strategies and feelings of people regarding distal minority tensions.

**Analysis**

**Respondent profile**

The study asked participants to identify as LGBTQ+, have come out as LGBTQ+, work for any organization, and have experienced discrimination in the workplace. The respondents were all LGBTQ+, with four having master's degrees, two having bachelor's degrees, one diploma, and one high national diploma. The research found that all respondents had experienced discrimination in the workplace.

**Discrimination against LGBTQ+ at the workplace**

Figure 1: Discrimination against LGBTQ+ at workplace

Source: Thematic analysis results (2023)

As indicated in figure 4.1, the researcher identified three main themes under "discrimination against LGBTQ+ at the workplace. According to the thematic analysis, the researcher identified that LGBTQ+ workers experience a range of types of discrimination, from social exclusion to sexual harassment and hostile work settings, which may hinder their capacity to thrive and advance in the workplace. It emphasizes how important it is for businesses to have inclusive policies and procedures that forbid this kind of discrimination and foster a more varied and accepting workplace environment.

The first theme is "social isolation". According to the thematic analysis, LGBTQ+ workers experience a variety of forms of workplace discrimination. Several responders who mentioned being ignored, prohibited from blending with others, or given isolating jobs brought up the first issue of social isolation. This implies that LGBTQ+ workers might experience stigmatization, exclusion from job activities, and social isolation.

Respondent 01: *“They did not talk to me as usual.”*

Respondent 02: *“They always ignored me when it came to group activities.”*

Respondent 03: *“They tried to isolate me by giving me various tasks that required a lot of time.”*

Respondent 05: *“Also, they try to isolate me by providing another table for eating at work.”*

Respondent 06: *"Also, some employees at my workplace tried to prevent others from talking to me or supporting me.”*

Respondent 08: *“They ignore me every time I try to mingle with them.”*

Numerous respondents reported instances of inappropriate touching and assault, which is a second theme of “sexual harassment” that is very common. According to this theme, LGBTQ+ workers may be more likely to experience sexual harassment because of their gender identity or sexual orientation.

Respondent 03: *“And some people try to sexually assault me.”*

Respondent 04: *“They try to sexually harass us.”*

Respondent 05: *“They tried to sexually harass me with unwanted touching.”*

Respondent 08: *“Also, they do not invite me to their meetings and events.”*

The issue of a “hostile work environment” also emphasizes the negative effects of discrimination on the mental health of LGBTQ+ employees. Respondents claimed that they have experienced fighting, insults, and foul language. They also claim that they have been prevented from offering ideas at work. This implies that some organizations foster a toxic climate that harms LGBTQ+ employees' psychological well-being.

Respondent 01: *“Then they started joking with sexist words.”*

Respondent 02: *“They always try to make fun of my sexuality.”*

Respondent 04: *“Also reporting wrong information about us.”*

Respondent 06: *“They insulted me with bad words. They told me I was disgusting.”*

Respondent 07: *“They always try to pick fights with me. They talk down to me. They prevent me from presenting ideas at work. They also tried to physically torture me.”*

The themes identified from the responses include social isolation, sexual harassment, and a hostile work environment. Respondents cited instances of being excluded from group activities, given difficult tasks to complete alone, and being ignored or insulted. Many respondents also reported experiencing sexual harassment, ranging from unwanted touching to false rumors about their behavior. Additionally, several respondents noted that they felt they were working in a hostile environment, where colleagues picked fights and talked down to them.

**Personal feelings of LGBTQ+ employees about discrimination**

Figure 2: Personal feelings when facing discrimination

Source: Thematic analysis results (2023)

As indicated in figure 2, based on the answers provided by the respondents, the researcher identified the following themes: surprise, disappointment, helplessness, anger, hatred, disgust, and pity. These themes reflect the emotional responses of the respondents to discrimination based on gender identity or sexual orientation at the workplace. The most common theme expressed by the respondents is helplessness, suggesting a feeling of powerlessness in the face of discrimination. Other common themes include anger and disgust, indicating a strong negative emotional response to discrimination. Hate is also present in some responses, suggesting strong negative feelings towards those who discriminate. Finally, some respondents express surprise and pity, indicating a degree of shock and compassion towards those affected by discrimination.

Respondent 01 - *“I was very surprised when I realized that people can change like this.”*

Respondent 02 - *“I was very disappointed with the other employees.”*

Respondent 03 - *“I felt very helpless.”*

Respondent 04 - *“I was very angry at their actions.”*

Respondent 05 - *“I hated the other employees.”*

Respondent 06 - *“I felt a disgusting pity for them.”*

Respondent 07 - *“I felt very angry and disgusted with them.”*

Respondent 08 - *“I felt very helpless.”*

It is evident from the themes found that people react emotionally in different ways to workplace discrimination based on gender identity or sexual orientation. The surprise-related topic implies that some people might not have anticipated discrimination or might have been caught off guard by it. A feeling of disappointment and helplessness in the face of discrimination is a sign of despair and helplessness. Themes of rage, contempt, and disgust, on the other hand, point to a considerably stronger emotional reaction to prejudice, maybe signaling a desire for change or a readiness to take action against it. Finally, sympathy implies that some people might feel sad for those who discriminate, perhaps as a result of their narrow-mindedness. The recurring themes indicate that discrimination against people based on their gender identity or sexual orientation is a sensitive subject that causes a wide range of emotional responses in people.

**Reasons for discriminate against LGBTQ+ employees at the workplace**

Figure 3: Reasons for discrimination against LGBTQ+ employees at the workplace

Source: Thematic analysis results (2023)

According to the thematic analysis results the researcher identified five themes under the reasons for discrimination against LGBTQ+ employees in the workplace. The thematic analysis examines the various causes of employment discrimination towards LGBTQ+ individuals. The first theme emphasizes how some workers could be prejudiced because of their resistance to change and traditional upbringing, which may cause them to have a bad impression of LGBTQ+ persons.

Respondent 01: *"They fear to change and look at the world from a new perspective. They may have grown up in a traditional environment."*

Respondent 02: *"They are framed only in the traditional and religious environments of the country."*

The second theme raises the possibility that some individuals treat LGBTQ+ colleagues unfairly in order to conceal their own shortcomings and fears. Therefore, the second theme was “personal flaws and insecurity”.

Respondent 03: *"They try to cover flaws in their lives that they have in their life by insulting others."*

Respondent 06: *"They are trying to outsource the daily pressures of their lives to other people."*

The third theme focuses on how discrimination against LGBTQ+ employees has become accepted in society and how these employees lack legal protection, which encourages discriminators to defend their behavior. Therefore, the third theme was the “normalization of discrimination and lack of legal protection”.

Respondent 04: *"They are used to such misdeeds because of the normalization of their behavior in normal society. Also, the legal protection is not sufficient."*

Respondent 05: *"The majority of society does not accept us. Also, legal settings do not protect us from discrimination. Even if there are rules in organizations, they do not work well because discriminators justify their actions with reasons accepted by the organization. Also, when the evidence is not clear, we cannot take action against them."*

The fourth theme is that discrimination towards LGBTQ+ employees may be due to a lack of knowledge and exposure. Hence the fourth theme was lack of education and exposure.

Respondent 08: *"They are afraid to accept LGBTQ+ people because they have only learned negative things about us."*

The fifth element, which is that employees frequently fail to confront discriminatory behavior, shows that this failure contributes to the persistence of discrimination in the workplace. Thus the fifth theme is failure to challenge discriminatory behavior

Respondent 07: *"I believe situations like this happen because people don't challenge the discriminatory behavior of others."*

This thematic analysis illustrates a wide range of complicated causes, from individual weaknesses and insecurities to more systemic societal problems like the normalization of discrimination, that all lead to discrimination against LGBTQ+ employees.

**Coping strategies**

Figure 4: Coping strategies

Source: Thematic analysis results (2023)

The first coping strategy identified in the thematic analysis was "ignoring other people's behavior". According to this perspective, some people prefer to ignore discrimination and unjust treatment as a coping mechanism, either because they feel helpless to take action or because they do not want to interact with the negativity. This coping strategy might work in the short run, but over time it might also result in feelings of loneliness and low self-esteem.

Respondent 01:  *“It was very difficult at first. However, I learned how to tolerate other people's behavior. So I ignore them and their actions.”*

The second coping strategy was “making friends who are encouraging”. Asking for the understanding and support of others can be an effective strategy for overcoming prejudice and unfair treatment. This interpretation emphasizes the value of creating a solid support network and contends that those who have a network of dependable friends may be better able to deal with difficult conditions at work.

Respondent 01:  *“I found friends who accept me for who I am in society. So I try to have fun and go to parties. I go to the movies with my friends and do something that makes me forget the actions of other employees at work.”*

The third theme was “directly confronting the issue”. According to this understanding, confronting discrimination and unfair treatment head-on can be a successful strategy for resolving the issue and defending one's rights. This strategy, though, can be challenging and even dangerous, especially if the discrimination is perpetrated by superiors or coworkers who are in positions of authority.

Respondent 02: *“When they joke and I can't ignore them, I say something jokingly, which means they shouldn't do such things. And I let them know that I will not tolerate any discriminatory behavior or insults. I will complain to the organization. Also, I discus those with my friends.”*

“Seeking assistance online” was the fourth theme that identified by the researcher. This interpretation emphasizes how social media can help people connect with others who are going through similar things. Finding support and validation online through forums and communities can be helpful, but it's also wise to be aware of the possible risks involved with disclosing personal information online.

Respondent 03:*“I am writing posts on Facebook mentioning all the discrimination in the workplace. So people support me by giving their ideas and suggestions on how to ignore the discriminatory behavior of others.”*

The fifth theme was “participating in leisure activities”. Making time for enjoyable and relaxing activities can be a key factor in stress reduction. According to this perspective, incorporating play and amusement into one's regular activities might help one deal with the negative effects of prejudice and unfair treatment.

Respondent 01:  *“I go to the movies with my friends and do something that makes me forget the actions of other employees at work.”*

Respondent 03: *“I read novels and watch movies to clear my mind from the stressful environment. And I go to events where I can have fun with other people.”*

Respondent 04: – *“I go to parties and drink alcohol to forget everything. And I pretend I don't hear what they say and I ignore their behavior in the workplace.”*

The researcher identified “seeking counseling and mentoring” as the sixth coping strategy that practice by LGBTQ+ employees. Getting the professional guidance of counselors or mentors can be a useful method to work through the emotional effects of prejudice and create coping mechanisms. This interpretation emphasizes the value of enlisting the assistance of professionals when necessary and recognizes that asking for assistance is a show of strength rather than weakness.

Respondent 05: *“In the workplace, there is a mentoring process. So I attended counseling. Also, I complain about the discriminatory behavior of other employees.”*

“Educating people about the LGBTQ community” was the seventh strategy that suggested by the respondents. According to this view, actively educating others about the LGBTQ community can help fight prejudice and foster a more accepting workplace environment. Sharing one's experiences and encouraging empathy and understanding can be effective ways to bring about change.

Respondent 06:*“I tried to explain and educate others about the LGBTQ community. They tried to discriminate against me but I supported them in their activities. Therefore, they accepted me as I am and started supporting me. So I can simply say that I am trying to change the environment.”*

“Fighting back against discriminatory behavior” was the eights coping response that identified on the current study. This view emphasizes the value of speaking out for oneself and tackling discrimination head-on. Even though taking a stand against unfair treatment can be challenging and risky, it can also be empowering.

Respondent 07: *“I explain to others that discriminatory behavior is not acceptable in the organization. And I complained against them because they behaved violently against me. I openly discuss how I feel about discriminatory practices when they try to fight me.”*

The last strategy that the researcher identified is “Building positive relationships with coworkers.” Developing great ties with coworkers helps foster a more encouraging and positive work environment. This interpretation places emphasis on the significance of developing solid relationships with coworkers. This might entail actively looking for chances for connection and collaboration as well as figuring out how to foster mutual respect and trust.

Respondent 08 – *“I waited for the right opportunity and started helping them when they needed me. Then I tried my best to be friendly with them. I also went to see movies and attended parties with other sexual minority people.”*

**Best Strategies**

Figure 5: Best coping strategies

Source: Thematic analysis results (2023)

Figure 5 indicates the identified best practices. Respondent 01 uses a combination of coping strategies, including ignoring negative behaviors and talking to friends about problems. Respondent 02 also tries to stay calm and not react to unfair treatment, but sometimes resorts to direct confrontation. They also have a support system in the form of friends at work. Respondent 3 focuses on job skills and being able to work alone. Respondent 4 tries to avoid difficult situations but also resorts to direct confrontation when necessary and has allies for support. Respondent 05 emphasizes the importance of confidence and control in overcoming discrimination. Respondent 06 also suggests ignoring until the limit is crossed and then raising your voice. Respondent 07 prioritizes having supportive friends and ignoring unnecessary stressors. Finally, Respondent 08 highlights the importance of changing the workplace environment until one finds a supportive one. Accordingly, there were four best strategies suggested by the respondents, as indicated in figure 5.

The first best practice was support Systems. Having support systems in place is a good approach to relax and defuse tense circumstances. This could include close friends, relatives, or coworkers who provide moral support, direction, and encouragement. Having a network of dependable people might make one feel more stable and comfortable amid trying circumstances.

Respondent 01: “*However, I talk about all my problems with my friends.”*

Respondent 02: *“Also, I made some friends who support me at the workplace.”*

Respondent 07: *“The best way is to make friends who understand us. Also, ignoring unnecessary burdens is the best way to deal with stressful situations.”*

The second best practice was “job skills and confidence building”. Developing job skills and boosting self-confidence are additional strategies for managing stress. Attending trainings, workshops, or seminars to acquire fresh approaches to problem-solving and decision-making may be necessary. People might feel more capable and equipped to manage difficult situations by improving their skills and knowledge.

Respondent 03: *“I improved my job skills. I am multi-talented. And I became someone who gets things done correctly and quickly. And I got used to working alone at work.”*

The third best practice was “Direct Confrontation.” Confronting an issue head-on might occasionally be the most effective approach to relieve tension. This could entail having uncomfortable discussions with coworkers or bosses, dealing with conflicts head-on, or acting assertively to make one's needs known. People might feel more in control of their environment and experience less anxiety by being proactive.

Respondent 05 – *“Being confident is more important. Being in control of the situation helped me overcome discrimination situations.”*

The final best practice was “change Workplace Environment.” The actual workplace environment is a significant component that might affect a person's degree of stress. People's feelings at work can significantly change by fostering a peaceful and encouraging company culture. Introducing programs like routine team-building activities, remodeling the workspace for enhanced comfort, or providing flexible work arrangements to support work-life balance are some examples of how to do this. People can feel more at ease and focused on their tasks by creating a friendly and happy work atmosphere.

Respondent 08: *“Ignoring the behavior of other people is the most suitable way. However, if it still stresses us we should change the workplace. I found the best people to work with. I changed workplaces several times until I found a workplace that had the best environment that supported LGBTQ+ employees.”*

**Discussion**

The researchers identified that discrimination against LGBTQ+ people in the workplace in Sri Lanka happens in the form of social isolation, sexual harassment, and a hostile work environment. Suriyasarn (2016) conducted a study related to the discrimination and marginalization of Thai employees. This study suggested that LGBT employees in Thailand are facing social isolation, sexual harassment, and a hostile work environment. Agreeing with these findings, the research done by Mattheis et al. (2022) also suggested that social isolation and sexual harassment happen to sexual minorities in the workplace. Thus, the current study's findings support the existing literature. Surprise, disappointment, helplessness, anger, hatred, disgust, and pity were identified as the feelings of the LGBTQ+ employees due to workplace discrimination. These findings support the empirical findings of Ricker Jr (2023) and Kjærnes (2019). The researcher identified four causes as the reasons for discrimination against LGBTQ+ employees at the workplace in Sri Lanka. Fear of change and traditional upbringing, personal flaws and insecurity, normalization of discrimination and lack of legal protection, lack of education and exposure, and failure to challenge discriminatory behavior were those reasons. Murphy et al. (2021) and Patel and Feng (2021) also discuss some of these reasons in their studies.

The researcher identified nine coping responses of the LGBTQ+ employees in the Sri Lankan context against workplace discrimination. The current study's findings support the existing literature related to the coping responses of LGBTQ+ employees. For example, Liyanage and Adikaram (2019) explained that LGBT employees tend to ignore other employees’ behavior and Chung, Williams, and Dispenza (2009) mentioned that LGBTQ+ employees should find supportive friends against discrimination and seek support through social media. Also, Haarr and Morash (2013) mentioned that some LGBTQ+ employees face discrimination by confronting the issue directly. Some LGBTQ+ people Engage in recreational activities (Hill & Gunderson, 2015), and some of them try to Educate others about the LGBTQ community (Liyanage & Adikaram, 2019). Moreover, Shih, Young, and Bucher (2013) mentioned that fighting back against discriminatory behavior is a suitable coping strategy. Building positive relationships with coworkers was also suggested as the best coping strategy by Eliason, Streed Jr., and Henne (2018). Thus, the current study's findings support the existing literature.

The researcher identified workplace discrimination against LGBTQ+ employees, their personal feelings, and reasons for discrimination. Respondents used nine coping strategies to cope with minority stressors and job stress and suggested four best practices for success. These findings contribute to the existing literature on LGBTQ+ workplace discrimination.

**Conclusion**

Most of the LGBTQ+ employees in Sri Lanka face workplace discrimination when they came out. Thus, they work with stress, which affects their productivity and mental health. However, some LGBTQ+ employees follow several coping strategies to overcome the discriminatory actions of other employees. In this study, the researcher identified how LGBTQ+ employees are discriminated against in the workplace in Sri Lanka and how they feel about the discrimination. Moreover, the causes of the discrimination were also revealed in the study. Finally, the researcher explored nine coping responses before determining the best-coping responses. These findings provide significant practical and empirical implications. Sri Lankan organizations can identify the causes of discrimination against gender identity and set up policies and practices to avoid discrimination at the workplace. Moreover, LGBTQ+ individuals benefit from this study because they can identify the reasons for being discriminated against and avoid them. Also, they will be able to identify the best coping strategies for discrimination at work. Moreover, scholars can obtain ideas related to the discrimination against Sri Lankan LGBTQ+ employees and focus on studying the problems related to LGBTQ+ employees at the workplace.

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