

## **Transforming Spaces, Welcoming Places: Transgender Women’s Inclusion in the Philippines’ BPO Industry**

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### **Abstract**

Despite signing multiple international human rights accords, the country does not always support lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) rights. The purpose of this research is to determine what factors contribute to make a transgender woman feel accepted, free, and safe at work in Metro Manila business process outsourcing (BPO) companies and how these factors can be used to enhance the companies’ current diversity and inclusion initiatives and policies, as outlined in the framework. Interviews with transgender women, human resource (HR) managers, transgender women groups, and government officials were conducted. Results showed that transgender women were accepted and encouraged to be “themselves” in BPOs. A gender-neutral bathroom and increased

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perks for LGBT employees protected them from discrimination. They felt free and had a voice at work since management supported them. Finally, they felt comfortable working in a professional setting with promised career progression, supervision, and protection through shuttle services, security personnel, and anti-discrimination laws. Building a gender-neutral washroom, allowing for a relaxed dress code, and forming support groups are just a few ways BPO companies can improve diversity and inclusion programs and make transgender women employees feel safe and accepted at work.

Keywords: BPO, acceptance, freedom, safety, transgender women, gender identity, sexual orientation

## **Introduction**

Employment discrimination results in exclusion and denial of equal opportunity to specific persons or groups based on individual identification. Within an organization, personal ideas, socioeconomic or racial background, and modes of expression often play roles in prejudice, with the LGBT community being one of the most attacked. Transgender is a subset of LGBT and an umbrella term for people whose gender identity does not match their biological sex (Castañeda, 2020; National LGBT Health Education Center, 2016;). Despite research showing no link between sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression (SOGIE) and professional performance, LGBT folks endure rampant discrimination. This causes psychological discomfort, health issues, decreased job satisfaction, increased absenteeism, and a tendency to quit compared to LGBT employees who do not suffer prejudice or fear it (Sears & Mallory, 2011). In fact, in the United States, many LGBT workers are people of color, younger, unemployed, in a lower income bracket, and experiencing a lower level of overall well-being (Movement Advancement Project, n.d.).

The Philippines is classified as a Zone 2 country which means sexual acts between LGBT are legal but no clear national employment policy exists, as evaluated using the Global Workplace Equality Index

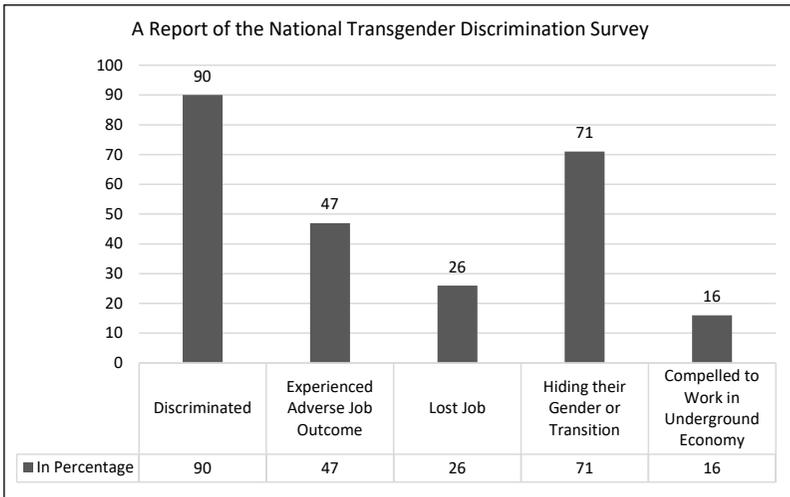
(Stonewall, 2018). In this religiously conservative country, there are no mechanisms or laws to protect LGBT persons from discrimination or penalize those who engage in such behavior. LGBT rights in the Philippines and other Southeast Asian nations are not illegal, but they are also not protected (Tang & Poudel, 2018).

In general, females face gender discrimination more frequently than males in private companies (Ali et al., 2011). According to Sears & Mallory (2011), such personnel exhibit decreased job satisfaction, motivation, dedication, and passion, while their stress levels increased. Females' disadvantage is not confined to feelings in the workplace; it also has an economic consequence (Madgavar et al., 2020). There isn't much difference when the female population is narrowed down to transgender women.

Even within the LGBT community, transgenders are frequently the most marginalized. The LGBT community faces challenges in employment on an individual and community level as they are often subject to discrimination and abuse. They experience discrimination starting from recruitment and even up to regular employment (UNDP & USAID, 2014). Filipino transwomen have a tough time finding productive employment and are frequently turned down for positions not because they lack the necessary credentials but because of their physical appearance. As a matter of fact, it was found that despite the high educational level in relation to the national average, the level of unemployment among transgender workers is high (Winter et al., 2007). Despite having college degrees, transgenders have resorted to finding employment in specialty sectors that have traditionally welcomed them, such as sex work, entertainment, fashion, and beauty, making them overqualified for such jobs (UNDP, Commission of Human Rights of the Philippines, 2018). Whereas other businesses do not readily embrace transwomen's sincerity in expressing their gender identity, the aforementioned industries provide a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to do so (Billing, 2018). According to UNDP et al., (2020), transgender women, along with lesbians and bisexuals, have remained invisible to policymakers in the Philippines as evidenced by the fact that they lack focused attention on their voices, priorities, and the absence of official statistics on SOGIE.

As a result of the low acceptance rate, transgender women found hope in BPO organizations where they may work and dress as women and use women’s names without fear of prejudice. In fact, the BPO industry has been constantly developing—from only 2,000 voice and non-voice call center workers in 2001 to 400,000 in 2010 and 700,000 in 2017 (David, 2014).

Figure 1. Depicts the forms of job discrimination against transgender persons.



Source: Grant, J. M. et al. (2011). Injustice at every turn: A report of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey

Generally, the BPO sector focuses on extensive, non-core services for customers who require extra help with specialized tasks (Agha & Kolawole, 2015). The Philippines is a popular source of inexpensive labor and excellent service for contact center organizations. Since the contact center sector began in the mid-2000s, hundreds of transgender people have entered it, frequently due to a lack of career opportunities (Billing, 2018). Due to the work’s anonymity, transwomen can freely explore their gender expression and identity.

The study aims to determine what makes a BPO company fit for transgender women employees.

### ***Research questions***

1. What makes a transgender woman working in a BPO company feel accepted, free, and safe?
2. How can a BPO company improve its existing diversity and inclusion initiatives for its transgender women employees?

### ***Significance of the study***

This study seeks to: provide a comprehensive assessment of transgender women's experiences when seeking and applying for employment in a BPO company; address gender-based challenges faced by transgender women working in BPO companies; examine and discover improvements to existing programs as well as new ones that BPO companies can use to promote diversity and inclusivity, and promote a healthy employer-employee relationship that embraces diversity.

### ***Scope and delimitation of the study***

The qualitative style of the study may have reduced the sample's representativeness of both the BPO business and transgender women in general. Acceptance, freedom, and safety are described as promoting LGBT rights, permitting open expression of gender identity, and protecting against employment discrimination, in that order. The study is influenced by transgender women's greater exposure to employment discrimination than transgender males, and participants were chosen based on a minimum relevant experience in their organization.

### ***Methodology***

Phenomenology was used to map the individuals' experiences. Phenomenology may characterize phenomena by concentrating on the shared experience of a group. Then, the data was condensed into abstract theories using a grounded theory technique. This guarantees that categories are created, trends are recognized, and all data is evaluated.

Purposive and snowball sampling was used to choose 19 key informants. Participants were chosen for their potential to supply “insightful” knowledge and linkages to important informants or prior participants.

To take part, 12 transgender women were chosen. They have all been working for at least six months before this study at BPO companies that were previous or current members of the IT and Business Process Association Philippines, the enabling association for the Philippines' information technology and business process management industry. Located in the Philippines' National Capital Region, these corporations also have diversity and inclusion policies.

Following the purposive sampling approach, three HR practitioners, three transgender association representatives, and one representative from the Department of Labor and Employment-Bureau of Working Conditions (DOLE-BWC) were recruited through expert sampling to view the study comprehensively. HR professionals aided in gathering viewpoints on retention, engagement, and employee problems in the organizations. The HR participants had at least two years of HR experience in a BPO setting and presently work for a recognized BPO business in Metro Manila with official diversity and inclusion policies in its code of conduct. The transgender association representatives have been active members for at least six months in organizations that have joined the Metro Manila Pride March at least once in the past five years. Finally, a representative of DOLE, which is concerned with legalities in employing transgender women, was hired to offer information on their expertise in managing workplace discrimination complaints and must have worked for the agency for at least six months.

Participants were given a personal data sheet and informed consent forms to establish their details, offer openness about the study, and gain permission to use their personal data. The interviews included semi-structured questions to guide and probe the exciting and vital topics that surfaced.

Invitations were sent via Messenger or SMS to confirm participants' availability and schedule. The interviews were conducted and recorded entirely on Zoom for no more than two hours.

Each individual interview was completely transcribed and summarized in a table. Content analysis and coding were used to identify common themes. The frequency and co-occurrence of specific phrases were assessed to provide an ordered summary of results. Thematic analysis was used to understand the data better and identify key features. Following that, the data were triangulated to provide a more accurate and valid estimate of qualitative outcomes for a certain concept.

## **Research Framework**

Over the years, there has still been a small chance of a transgender woman being hired by her dream company doing her dream job because, more often than not, being discriminated against, rejected, and threatened is still a part of their daily life at work. While transgender people do not feel comfortable talking about their sexual orientation and gender identity/expression, they feel compelled to come out and share who they really are to avoid being discriminated against, especially in a country like the Philippines that is significantly influenced by religious beliefs. Having limited options where they can utilize their competencies and educational credentials, transgender women usually run to BPO companies where they can freely express who they indeed are. Billing (2018) quoted Kate Montecarlo Cordova, a Senior Manager of a BPO company, “The biggest issue that transgender women face is economical. We are like any other women or men, and we have skill set.” she says. “But in the Philippines, many industries do not employ transgender women, so we end up working in a different industry to where our skills lie.”

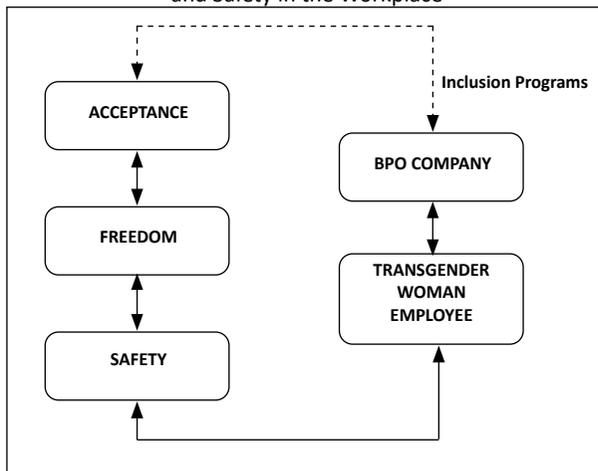
Call centers have become havens for gender-nonconforming people in the Philippines. It is a place where transgender women can experiment with their gender presentation and identity, such as adopting traditionally feminine names, taking on a “female voice,” or wearing women’s clothing while talking to customers (Talusán, 2016).

Although call centers offer a relatively LGBT-friendly environment, they often lack policies specific to transgender people’s needs, so they set up support groups within (Billing, 2018).

## Conceptual Framework

The experiences of acceptance, freedom, and safety of transgenders working in BPO companies is the study’s focus. On this ground, the research shall define how BPO companies can make this particular group of people feel more accepted, free, and safe in the workplace through their company policies following the law mandated by the government.

Figure 2: Transgender Women’s Experience of Acceptance, Freedom, and Safety in the Workplace



The image illustrates how acceptance, freedom, and safety in the workplace can be important factors considered by a transgender woman in employment. Each variable is related to factors that can make a transgender woman feel accepted, free, and safe in the workplace. The straight line depicts the connection between a transgender woman working in a BPO company and when they feel accepted, free, and safe. The dotted line assumes how a BPO company can provide these experiences to transgender women by improving their existing inclusion programs.

## Operational Definitions

1. **Sexual Orientation** refers to the direction of emotional, sexual attraction, or conduct. This can be toward people of

the same sex [homosexual orientation] or towards people of both genders [bisexual orientation] or toward people of the opposite sex [heterosexual orientation].

2. **Gender Identity** refers to the personal sense of identity as characterized, among others, by the manner of clothing, inclinations, and behavior concerning masculine or feminine conventions.
3. **Business Process Outsourcing Company** refers to a company whose non-core activity is delivered by a third-party using information technology
4. **Transgender Woman** refers to a person who is born male but identifies herself as a female
5. **Acceptance** refers to the act of supporting equal rights for the LGBT community and being comfortable with LGBT in all scenario
6. **Freedom** refers to the ability to be an openly transgender woman in the workplace by exploring their gender presentation and identity

## **Ethical Consideration**

The researchers affirm that no financial or commercial ties that might be viewed as creating a conflict of interest existed during the research's execution. The research study ensured voluntary participation: the purpose of the research was explained to the participants who gave informed consent prior to agreeing to be interviewed. The participants were free to withdraw their participation at any time. The research data remained confidential throughout the study and the researcher obtained the participants' permission to use the first name they provided in the research study.

## **Results and discussion**

### ***Participants***

There were 12 transgender participants in the study. Half of them are within the range of 26 to 30 years old (50%) Other participants are between 20 to 25 years old (25%), 31 to 35 years old (16.7%), and 36 to 40 years old (8.3%). Most of the participants are in Manila

(3%). Other participants are in Quezon City, Marikina, and Pasay with the same frequency (16.7%). While Rizal, Pasay, and Quezon Province have one participant each (8.3%). Almost half of the participants are Customer Service Representatives (41.7%). The rest are Senior Operations Manager, Engagement Specialist, Lead Quality Specialist, Health Care Associate, Senior HR Corporate, Master Trainer, and Sales Agent with the same frequency (8.3%).

Table 1. Sociodemographic Profile of the Transgender Participants

Sociodemographic	Frequency N = 12	Percentage
<b>Age</b>		
20-25	3	25%
26-30	6	50%
31-35	2	16.7%
36-40	1	8.3%
<b>Residence</b>		
Manila	3	25%
Quezon City	2	16.7%
Marikina	2	16.7%
Pasig	2	16.7%
Rizal	1	8.3%
Pasay	1	8.3%
Quezon Province	1	8.3%
<b>Occupation</b>		
Customer Service Representative	5	41.7%
Senior Operations Manager	1	8.3%
Engagement Specialist	1	8.3%
Lead Quality Specialist	1	8.3%
Health Care Associate	1	8.3%
Senior HR Corporate	1	8.3%
Master Trainer	1	8.3%
Sales Agent	1	8.3%
<b>Number of years working in the company</b>		

### ***HR Participants***

There are three HR participants in the study. One of the participants, Kat, is an HR manager handling training for newly hired employees. Her expertise includes employee relations, HR policies and programs. The second participant, Ramon, is an HR Consultant with expertise

in general HR management including employee relations and engagement. Lastly, Rosita is an HR People Director with management experience on attracting and retaining talents.

### ***Transgender Association Representatives***

There are three transgender association representatives. The first participant named Tam has been an active member of The Society of Transsexual Women of the Philippines (STRAP) since 2009. This is the pioneer transgender rights advocacy and support organization in the Philippines. The second is Tricia, who is one of the Board of Trustees of Ang Ladlad Party List, the first political party composed of LGBT Filipinos who will claim-and-reclaim the rights lost from centuries of homophobia, biphobia and transphobia and discrimination. She has been an active member since 2007. Lastly, Tinderela is the President of Decent Image of South Signal Association (DIOSSA), a non-profit and non-partisan organization, composed of individuals and groups in Taguig founded in 2011, dedicated to a broad-based, inclusive national movement for “gender and racial equality”.

After the thorough analysis of the data, themes were thus created which answer the research problems as stated in the first chapter of the paper.

### ***Research problem 1: What makes a transgender woman working in a BPO company feel accepted?***

Though initially treated as a last resort, transgender women have now come to view employment at BPO companies as a blessing in disguise—a sanctuary where they feel accepted, from the application process through hiring and working in the organization.

It is significant to note that transgender women participants also expressed different meanings of acceptance as reflected in the following response:

*They see you as you are. We experience what you experience, the rain, the sunlight, the hassle of traffic, diba? So that's what makes us normal. And once you enter the office, pare-pareho*

*tayo. Kapag pareho tayo, pareho din tayo ng rights dapat. Kung protektado ka ng company, protektado rin ako ng company” (They see you as you are. We experience what you experience, the rain, the sunlight, the hassle of traffic, right? So that’s what makes us normal. And once you enter the office, you’re all the same. When we are the same, we should have the same rights. If the company protects you, the company also protects me.) – Danica, 25-year-old transgender participant working as Senior HR Corporate since August 2016*

The themes generated for Problem 1 are as follows:

### *Theme 1. Recruitment and onboarding*

**1.1 Being invited for a job interview.** According to UNDP & ILO (2018), more than 60% of the respondents in Asian countries like China, Thailand, and Philippines had seen a job advertisement that explicitly excludes SOGIE and sex characteristics in the job requirement. Additionally, 21% of respondents in the Philippines believed that they were denied a job due to their sexual orientation. The International Labor Organization (2015) noted that many transgender respondents reported being rejected simply because of their appearance at the job interview stage. However, throughout their BPO recruitment journey, most respondents emphasized that they were never seen or treated differently in their job application stage. Anna, a 27-year-old transgender participant, has been working as a Customer Support Representative at her present company since June 2019. She stated that “in their application process, you’re all equal. No more, no less.”

This experience was echoed by the HR practitioners of BPO companies themselves. To make candidates feel welcome regardless of their SOGIE, they treat all candidates equally by making them undergo the usual hiring process. Rosita, an HR People Director, says “they’re free to dress... anything they want to wear as long as [it is] business-like.” This is supported by the study of Human Rights Campaign Foundation (n.d.) which noted that employers have a right to establish employee dress and grooming guidelines during work hours if they are reasonable and serve a legitimate business purpose. According to UNDP et al. (2020),

the imposition of dress codes is a common form of discrimination because they cannot freely express themselves. Hence, transgender women often choose to take up jobs that allow them to have freedom to dress even when that job is of a lower position than their skills and qualifications. For instance, the article by UNDP & USAID (2014) cites cases of transgender women who were informed by the recruitment officers that they will only be hired if they present themselves as males, that is why they need to cut their hair short, dress in men's clothes, and act masculine. Laya et al. (2016) also reported that for LGBT folks, work values are more important than questions of sexuality. As long as the LGBT employees work within company policies and are productive, sexuality is not an issue.

Although this has been the usual scenario for transgender women applying for BPO companies, the opposite happens when they try their luck at other industries, as noted by one of the transgender participants, Cathy:

*I tried to re-apply in hotel, airlines, but then, I was still rejected. I didn't make it because they wanted to cut my hair short. If they hire me, will it be OK to have a boy haircut and wear a male uniform? Of course not, because that's not me. So I went back to BPO. – Cathy, 23-year-old transgender participant working as Healthcare Associate since March 2019*

**1.2 Being encouraged to be yourself.** Flying Ketchup (2019) noted that for BPO companies in the Philippines, tolerance in opportunities and wages due to gender continues to evolve into acceptance and protection from discrimination. Such acceptance is felt when management encourages employees to be their authentic selves at work. Anna once felt obliged to wear men's clothing to feel accepted said, "No, it's OK even if you wear a dress, as long as it's decent." Ramon, an HR consultant, offers another perspective, stating "We encourage them. We give the floor for them to feel that they are one of us, and [that] we are proud of them." Similar experiences have been stated by the respondents in the study of David (2015) who mentioned they preferred jobs in the BPO industry as they can freely express themselves through the avatar that they make during calls. They can show trans-femininities at work and consider it as a "safe space for LGBTs".

Although encouraged, this never puts them in a position where they are required to come out, but they just do because they are open about it.

*I specifically introduced myself as a transwoman. And surprisingly, it felt good that they were amazed instead of uneasy, or that they felt uncomfortable? No, I didn't feel that. They were, wow, you are a transgender person we didn't know.*  
- Barbie, 30-year-old transgender participant working as a Master Trainer since July 2016

On the contrary, although they are proud of their gender identity when colleagues ask them, one of the transgender participants named Ingrid did not want to be outed by others but by herself, so it doesn't create controversies. De Guzman and Bingham (2017) supported that closeted homosexuals were directed towards talk and gossip to reveal their sexual orientation to avoid certainty.

*After they learn that I'm different, it's fun that they celebrate with you. It's amusing that they see you differently, but sometimes, it has negative implications. When it comes to boys, we can't avoid that when you're physically attractive they're like, "She's pretty!" but [to] those who know your truth, you become their pastime topic. Your gender becomes controversial. It seems like they're snatching my right to tell people.* – Ingrid, 26 year-old transgender participant working as Customer Service Officer and has been in her current company since February 2019

This seems to be supported by Leyerzapf et al. (2018), in which LGBT respondents expressed the wish to 'be themselves' through the ability to do and choose what they consider valuable while being socially acknowledged and respected for it. It was also shown in the study of UNDP & USAID (2014) that the Psychological Association of the Philippines and the international organizations such as American Psychiatric Association, American Psychological Association and British Psychological Society have aligned values that state and reinforce the idea that those who belong to the LGBT community are normal variants of human sexuality and must be respected for the diversity.

Tricia, a transgender association representative, also noted that employed transgender women were challenged by certain stigmas, which leads to hasty generalizations, discrimination, and harmful stereotypes such as being labeled as thieves by police officers.

**1.3 Being treated as a woman.** There may be local laws protecting female employees, but these do not cover transgender women, who were never considered biological women despite undergoing sexual reassignment and the like. While this is a problem locally, BPO companies, at the very least, still create a culture of accepting transgender women as women. This is because there are companies that do not acknowledge the gender preference of LGBTs. Some of job seeking transgender women are required to cut their hair and act manly to get a job. Some consider it as non-negotiable so they would just look for other jobs. However, there are other individuals who would hide their sexuality in order to get accepted (David, 2015).

In this study, there are companies that acknowledge and respect employees' preferences. For instance, Kat and Ramon who are HR Manager and HR Consultant respectively, have noted that they leave it up to the transgender woman applicant how they wish to be addressed.

*During the interview, I ask them and take note of it, so the next interviewer knows already how she wants to be called. Others want to be called miss, while others "beh," so it's not awkward. It really depends on them. – Kat*

Goldhammer et al. (2018) also reported that clinicians' best practices include avoiding assumptions about gender identities and asking for information about names and pronouns. Problems arose when some external company part-timers were not informed of the policies being implemented, as experienced by Danica and Erica who are both transgender participants, making them feel unaccepted for their gender identity. Danica recalls one instance of being referred to as "Sir" by a vendor/part-timer. Tricia, being a transgender association representative, holds that transgender women should be more understanding instead of being outright aggressive. She takes it upon herself to educate others on the importance of asking for somebody's preferred pronouns. Most LGBT folks cope with adversity, thrive, and develop increased self-efficacy and personal

resilience (Smith & Gray, 2009). This courage to take a stand against or challenge socially stigmatizing messages is seen as a direct indicator of personal hardiness.

**1.4 Feeling of belongingness.** One of the reasons why most respondents enjoyed their BPO employment was because their colleagues make them feel they belonged. “Because you’re a transwoman, they even take the initiative to ask you out during breaks or lunch,” says Fatima, one of the transgender participants of the study. However, some of her colleagues were not at ease around them, with some even daring to ask intriguing questions. Instead of being offended, however, she dealt with these people by attempting to shed some light on her gender identity.

*My supposed seatmate is a married man, around the 40s, but he requested for a seat swap with a friend because it is uneasy for him to be seated beside a trans. I felt a bit offended, but I understood because he's not fully educated. What's good is that you have a broad understanding of those who don't understand. Like “OK, I'm the one adjusting.” – Fatima, 29-year-old transgender participant who started working in January 2015 at her current company and is now a Lead Quality Analyst*

*I didn't really disclose I'm a transgender when I started. I realized they didn't see, so they were surprised. So that's when I expected questions from them. The way they throw their questions at you, sometimes it's below the belt, but you have to answer. So I guess, it's my job to answer and enlighten them. – Ingrid*

What also helped them feel accepted is that members of the LGBT community also assume high positions in the organization. According to the 40-year-old transgender participant working as Customer Service Representative since October 2018 named Kristine, the LGBT community in their company is very well-entertained by the management, where one member is a bisexual manager. As an HR consultant, Ramon shares that several management members such as directors, managers, and the vice president are LGBT. Meanwhile, in Rosita's organization, specific policies regarding representation in leadership positions are implemented: a gender target of precisely 40% men, 40% women, and 20% LGBT.

On top of these, they are loved and respected by their colleagues because they can establish themselves in their respective organizations through their performance.

*They never looked at me as a transgender woman, and they looked at me as someone who can deliver. So, I proved my skills, capability, and what I have delivered historically as a probationary employee or someone just starting in the industry. They gave me that chance. When they know that I am already prepared or equipped, they gave me the role. – Barbie*

HR professionals affirm this sentiment. “The thing I like about them is that they have the feeling that they have something extra to prove. That’s why they always try to differentiate themselves,” says Rosita. Colgan et al. (2007) noted that the ‘LGBT-friendly organization’ is a welcoming place in which LGBT people are not merely ‘tolerated’ but free to ‘come out of the closet,’ express their ‘true’ self and be proud of their ‘difference’.

## *Theme 2. Employee benefits*

**2.1 Having advanced healthcare coverage.** Danica and Lirra, both transgender participants, were amazed at their companies’ initiatives to support their health.

*...there is an allocation of cash that will support you for your transitioning period, which is really nice. May it be medication, may it be psychological help assistance. It’s a big deal because transitioning really is expensive. So, for the majority of sessions, they would pay for that. It’s included in your healthcare. – Danica.*

*They’re also advocating for LGBT benefits. We can already enroll our domestic partners as a beneficiary in our HMO. So whenever something happens to your partners, we can use the company’s benefits for health reasons.- Lirra, 35-year-old transgender participant working as Senior Operations in her current company in August 2007*

According to Gonzales and Henning-Smith (2017) people who identify as transgender or gender nonconforming experience challenges

to healthcare owing to a variety of factors, including health care discrimination, insurance regulations, employment, and public policy. The UNDP et al. (2020) study notes that limitations in access to health services for transgender women is mainly attributed to lack of awareness about the health issues experienced by the LGBT community. Particularly, transgender women reported difficulty in accessing healthcare, experiencing stigma and discrimination among medical facilities in the country. It was also noted in the study of UNDP & USAID (2014) that provisions for dealing with the psychosocial health needs of LGBT workers are limited because of the lack of those who respect SOGIE such as counselors who can address LGBT-related depression, anger, suicidal tendencies, and family acceptance issues. This is despite the findings of the study conducted by Sears and Mallory (2011) which reports stress and depression as adverse impacts of discrimination towards sexual orientation and gender identity of the LGBT community. Therefore, domestic partner benefits are essential for successful LGBT recruitment and retention. Soft benefit alternatives were found mainly at universities without domestic partner benefits and primarily offered goodwill gestures (Shrader, 2016).

**2.2 Undergoing an equal promotion process.** To be promoted in a BPO company, certain qualifications are required. Immediate supervisors provide training for those who did not get their desired role to increase their chances of getting it in the next promotion cycle. Sadly, competing against heterosexual employees had been a challenge for Lirra despite being the most qualified candidate.

*I was gunning for a promotion to a manager level. My immediate supervisor said that our director was not really impressed by me simply because my demeanor was too effeminate. The coaching went on saying you should be more neutral in terms of the way you present yourself so that they won't be taken aback by how strong your personality is. – Lirra.*

Kat, as an HR manager who has an expertise in employee relations, HR policies and programs, has witnessed this kind of complaint, which she shared that they handled carefully.

*She felt she was deprived of promotion, and then there's also some sort of harassment because she suddenly resigned. This*

*time, we handled it accordingly to know why. She was really hardworking, and she looked happy at work. So, she became honest when we assured her confidentiality. She mentioned that she's frequently being compared to straight guys, and when she didn't give in with what her manager wanted, she wouldn't be promoted. – Kat*

Contrary to this, other employees who work in the formal economy claim to have never experienced any problems with performance evaluations as revealed in a study by the International Labor Organization (2015).

**2.3 Adoption leave.** There are times when LGBT employees are already settled with their partners and are looking to start a family. One of the rare company benefits that Danica, a transgender participant, mentioned is the option of adoption leave.

*If your partner wants to adopt, you will be given a month to know your baby. It's also for men and women. Transgenderers are also covered. – Danica.*

While employers may already offer enhanced pay for maternity and adoption leave, further thought should be given on whether such payments can be offered towards other forms of family-related leave to accommodate same-sex couples (Ryan & Arnold, 2018).

### *Theme 3. Engagement activities*

**3.1 Having pageants.** Beauty pageants, where transgender women are often frontrunners, are considered one of the most prestigious events in BPO companies. These events typically highlight the LGBT workforce and their acceptance. As an HR consultant, Ramon is aware and shares that their company even holds a monthly LGBT pageant.

These social activities are an extension of multicultural corporatism, in which corporate culture links a vision of racial and gender diversity to its existing relations of the ruling, allowing the management of racial and gender identities and conflicts to become the core component of the new corporate culture (David, 2015). For outsourcing companies, creating

a trans-segregated space is part of the more general incorporation of social diversity into corporate workplace culture.

**3.2 Celebrating Pride/Diversity Month.** BPO companies have always supported the annual Pride March, during which they parade floats to banner their belief that great work knows no gender. In preparation for this, most participants have been invited to join related activities, including summer bonds with categories for men, women, and, in the case of Erica, LGBT.

McLaren (2019) supported this finding, noting that participating in local LGBT-related events is a powerful way to show employees and prospective candidates that the company supports the community, for whom Pride Month is an opportunity to celebrate their identity and love.

#### *Theme 4: LGBT-friendly company policies*

Needless to say, company policies that directly support transgender women's welfare in the workplace are of utmost value. Without them, the participants would not feel like they have fundamental worker rights.

*You have invisible protection and laws and policies. When they're protecting you, it means they accept you, right? That kind of acceptance where you can really move and work like a normal person with basic rights. You are not just tolerated or loved because you are funny or have a good sense of fashion. – Danica.*

Ingrid also cited that they have policies against specifying gender, while Danica fronted that they were allowed to use more feminine nicknames even in email addresses and phone books. According to an ILO Pride Study (2015), many forward-thinking workplaces implement diversity policies to promote equality and diversity on all grounds. However, Christian (2017) noted that few organizations have transgender-inclusive anti-discrimination policies. According to UNDP et al. (2020), those who self-express openly as a member of the LBT community experienced discrimination, abuse, and other

harmful behavior. It was observed that 42% had experienced some degree of physical threat and 24% experienced it “frequently” or “sometimes”. Transgender women reported facing such threats more often than lesbian or bisexual women which poses a concern.

#### *Theme 5: Gender-neutral comfort rooms*

As a transgender employee, Hazel recounted an instance when they raised complaints regarding their security personnel’s mistreatment of transgender women because of their use of the washroom.

*They were the antagonists who limited the agents to enter the comfort room. So, when the director of the company knew about it, they quickly built a cubicle inside the CR (for transgender), both for male and female. – Hazel, 23-year-old transgender participant working as Customer Support Representative and has been in her present company since October 2018*

Accessible gender-neutral restrooms, together with the availability of LGBT training, scholarships, and events, have the most significant room for improvement, as reported by Jacobson et al., (2017). Coupled with advocacy and policy implementation, creating gender-neutral washrooms can promote safer, more positive school environments (Davies et al., 2019).

#### ***Research problem 2: What makes a transgender woman working in a BPO company feel free?***

No matter how the LGBT community pushes for equal rights, they are still subject to discrimination because no law protects them, with transgender women remaining the most discriminated workforce.

Transgender women participants can openly express their gender identification as long as they obey the code of conduct, as enunciated in the following themes:

### *Theme 1: Having a voice*

Since LGBT workers are unlikely to be well-represented in government structures or employment organizations, their particular interests are rarely reflected in social dialogue or collective agreements, according to the ILO (2015) and Fletcher and Everly (2019), who also noted that providing a voice is considered an LGBT-friendly HR management practice. Therefore, being heard and listened to impacts the freedom of transwomen participants. Lirra reiterates that this freedom comes with following company rules.

*Just because you want freedom, it doesn't mean you can say whatever you want to say. There are still rules and etiquette expected of you. For me, being able to express yourself, your opinion through your clothes, your behavior without being judged or discriminated [against]. – Lirra.*

### *Theme 2: Supportive management*

The management, who sets the culture of freedom within the company, plays a vital role in transwomen employees' capacity for self-expression. Erica, a 26-year-old transgender participant working as Engagement Specialist since April 2015, says they provide feedback, listen to their employees, and boost their morale. This is affirmed by Cathy who mentions its limitations for transwomen managers themselves. According to her, there is also a strong need to look respectable if you are part of management. To improve support at the organizational level, leaders can consider creating safe harbor acts, forming LGBT support groups, and publicly declaring their organization a safe, equal, and inviting environment (Hollis & McCalla, 2013).

### *Theme 3: Openness to gender expression*

Another limitation for transwomen employees is being required to wear traditional men's clothing. However, in the BPO industry, most participants can wear their preferred clothing. Cathy says that she can even wear a denim skirt every Friday, which she finds fulfilling and indicative of freedom. Additionally, BPO companies allow their employees to adopt traditionally feminine names, use a "female voice",

or wear women's clothing while talking to customers. This then offers the LGBT community freedom to fully express themselves. On the flip side, companies still had dress codes from which transgender employees were not exempted. This meant that the participants were still expected to maintain a professional appearance regardless of sexual appearance, as stated by Rosita. Transgender associations share the same sentiment. Of this, Tricia says, "...we remind them not to be OA (over-acting)... sometimes it's hard to mediate. They will say it is self-expression, but again, there's a difference."

A study by Reddy-Best (2017) reports that unwritten dress codes in work environments did not always allow for the expression of sexual identity in appearance and that negotiations around such expression impacted comfort and confidence levels. According to UNDP (2018), gendered policies prevent transgender people from accessing facilities (such as comfort rooms) or wearing a uniform based on their gender identity, rather than their sex assigned at birth. These regulations must be equally applied to all employees with consistency in application and monitoring. This should also allow employees flexibility to choose their clothing style as long as it conforms with the said regulations.

#### *Theme 4: Being allowed to wear make-up*

Wearing makeup at work is not an issue at BPO companies. "What they care about more is you report to work, and you do your job," explains Fatima, a transgender participant. The popularity of make-up among trans women is not surprising, for make-up is sometimes used as an armor against mistreatment for not subscribing to traditional expectations (Erisis, 2017).

#### ***Research problem 3: What makes a transgender woman working in a BPO company feel safe?***

While the participants did not feel threatened by work policies, their colleagues made them uneasy. In fact, safety is felt by the employees in several ways:

## *Theme 1: Professional working environment*

**1.1 Career development.** Beyond earning money, the prospect of career development, in which employees are treated as valuable assets worth investing in, is a source of safety for Ingrid.

*If you feel the company is not safe for you, you will not grow as a person, I guess. And you will feel there's something wrong because even if you're earning, it's nothing if you're not growing. – Ingrid.*

According to Billing (2018), employers often overlook transgender women for promotion and career progression. Despite this, very little has been written about bisexual and transgender career development (Gedro, 2009). There are limited resources to help transgender people make career development decisions, suggesting a future direction for HR development research. According to UNDP et al. (2020), LGBT women in the Philippines are commonly found in low-wage jobs with short term or temporary contracts. That is why they often mix their full-time work with freelancing to make ends meet.

**1.2 Guidance by supervisors.** Anna, one of the transgender participants, mentions that “no one's going to put me in danger because our supervisor guides all of us.” By definition, people managers should be invested in the care and well-being of those who work for them. They are also responsible for maintaining respect and professionalism within their team, fortified by implementing its policies against discrimination and harassment.

**1.3 Care from colleagues.** Aside from supervisors, colleagues consistently make the participants feel cared for, even becoming like family.

*You're comfortable going to the office. You will have casual interaction. They even treat us like a girl, so I feel safe, and you'll feel the care of everyone you work with. They're friendly. – Georgina, 27-year-old transgender participant working as Sales Agent at her current company since December 2017*

Webster et al. (2017) noted that supportive workplace relationships were strongly related to work attitudes and strain. However, focusing

on LGBT-supportive environments revealed a stronger association with disclosure and perceived discrimination than other forms of support. Furthermore, a supportive and inclusive environment contributes to positive social change within the workplace by promoting anti-discrimination policies for transgender employees which ultimately results to increasing job satisfaction and reducing turnover as reported by the study of Christian (2017).

### *Theme 2: Company-initiated security measures*

**2.1 Shuttle service.** Even outside the workplace, the participants can feel safe because their companies provide shuttle services. According to Anna, some team leaders would even drive their employees in their personal vehicles, aside from reaching out to check in on their safety.

**2.2 Written policy.** LGBT individuals experience sexual harassment in the workplace and discrimination occurs widely mainly because they are commonly associated with professions such as prostitution (UNDP & USAID, 2014). According to UNDP & ILO (2018), about 30% of the respondents in the Philippines reported being harassed, bullied, or discriminated against in the workplace by making fun, sharing rumors, and making comments about how LGBT co-workers dress, behave, and speak.

As a transgender employee, Danica shares that policies in written form offer the unique benefit of formal protection against discrimination, creating a “safety net” for whenever something goes wrong. As an HR consultant, Ramon adds that their company also includes an anti-discrimination clause in their handbook, which is internationally certified.

*We protect them by enforcing those anti-discriminatory actions. That's part of the orientation. We even encourage them that if they are harassed, sexually harassed or assaulted, whoever did that to them, we give them our contact number or branch site where they can file their concern because we don't want that to happen. – Ramon.*

**2.2.1 Online assistance app.** Danica and Barbie mentioned a specific technological advancement that accelerates assistance procedures.

*...they would send you help if you need help. Not sure financially, but they would know your location and send you to use when it comes to disaster. It's not active. Now and then, it prompts, so if you need help or assistance, you can press a particular button. – Danica.*

**2.3 Deployment of security personnel.** The presence of security personnel is a straightforward way to ensure safety, limiting entry in the workplace to employees exclusively. Security is one of Kristine's company's first topics discussed during training and HR discussions. However, some participants, such as Anna and Gem, have also felt discrimination and decreased safety from these personnel themselves.

*The guard in the lobby used to inspect everyone, but when it's my turn, he didn't check me. He mentioned I could go straight, so I asked why. Then he said, he might have touched something different – Anna*

*Based on my experience, some guards approach you like you stole something. I felt degraded because it sounded like we couldn't go there when they could have asked us more nicely. It felt that you're being discriminated against. – Gem, 34-year-old transgender participant working as a Customer Service Representative in her current company since September 2018*

Safety measures such as security personnel at employees' pickup and drop-off points, partnerships with taxi companies, and shuttle services are recommended by Domingo-Cabarrubias (2012). According to ILO Pride Study (2016), if workplaces want to promote equality and diversity, they must implement diversity and inclusive policies within their organization. This is also reflected in the study by Grenier and Hixson-Vulpe (n.d.) which reported that formal policy is needed to outline the organization's position and employees' expected behavior within the workplace and such formal policy is widely accessible to all. This should also include trainings for diversity and inclusion implementation for all employees.

Fortunately, many organizations have adopted policies that support LGBT employees, offer same-sex benefits, create employee resource

groups for LGBT employees and allies, and invite same-sex couples to company-wide events (Ragins and Cornwell, 2001).

***Research problem 4: How can a BPO company improve its existing diversity and inclusion initiatives for its transgender women employees?***

The sole existing Philippine law that specifically caters to the LGBT community is Republic Act 11313 or the Safe Spaces Act. The act defines gender-based sexual harassment in various settings and provides protective measures and penalties. In addition, sexist remarks, often the subject of grievances raised at Dindo's company, are covered by the act. Dindo is a DOLE-BWC Representative.

It is essential for transgender women participants that their companies' diversity and inclusion initiatives make them feel accepted, free and safe in the workplace. Some have expressed that their companies should continue doing what they have in place, though Gem acknowledges that these initiatives are not perfect. Some participants also gave suggestions on what needed to be done.

*Theme 1: Start doing*

**1.1 Involving the transgender community.** Barbie, a transgender participant, says company-wide events can still be improved by boosting the involvement and empowerment of the transgender community. One way to do this, says one of the transgender participants Lirra, is to have more allies in leadership positions. Speaking from the management side, Ramon says that the deliberate avoidance of profiling while hiring contributes to feelings of acceptance. Such inclusive approaches positively affect job satisfaction and affective commitment in LGBT employees (Hur, 2020).

**1.2 Educating the workforce.** Transgender women are evident in BPO companies, dominating operations and management. Barbie and Ingrid note, though, that sensitivity and awareness programs still leave much to be desired.

*... Some people can't control themselves, so there wouldn't be any embarrassment if they knew how to treat and deal with the LGBTQ+ community. There wouldn't be putting on the spot of a person because of his or her gender. – Barbie.*

Tricia says that SOGIE 101 helps explain the differences between gay, bisexual, transsexual, and transgender. Dindo agrees that education is always considered when creating laws. This is also evident in the study of Eliason, Dibble, and Robertson (2011) which reported that formal education on LGBT issues is needed to prevent further rise cases of discrimination.

**1.2.1 Outsourced employees.** Outsourced employees were reported to have the most frequent cases of making transgender employees feel uneasy at work due to ignorance.

*Those are being outsourced too because they're not actually employees of our company. They should also be informed of what our company is advocating for because they're working for our company, right? – Lirra.*

Cathy zeroes in on security personnel's role in controlling the entry of outsiders at work.

*They are very open to letting outsiders in. What if they are just disguising as an applicant? – Cathy.*

Grenier and Hixson-Vulpe (n.d.) emphasize a holistic approach to ensuring diversity and inclusivity at work. To do this, policy reviews, education on proper language, and detailed instructions on supporting discrimination victims must be enacted.

**1.3 Providing a better benefits package.** Lirra suggests the inclusion of transition medications such as androgens in HMO coverage, an action that has already been adopted by other companies such as Google. HIV/AIDS-related drugs and transition-related costs may also constitute an LGBT-specific benefits package (Grenier & Hixson-Vulpe, n.d.).

**1.4 Constructing a gender-neutral washroom.** Dindo cites the construction of gender-neutral washrooms as a challenge.

*...regarding washrooms or restrooms, those are being asked for the longest time that we can't provide simply because we don't have a legal basis yet. Not like the PWD that it's already required. – Dindo*

On this, Cathy, as a transgender participant, expresses concern over the lack of a gender-neutral washroom at work, noting that other BPO companies already have one. In contrast, Kat considers the idea discriminatory, believing that transgender women should instead be allowed to use existing ladies' washrooms rather than build a separate washroom to accommodate transgender people. In contrast, according to Davies, Vipond, and King (2019), the creation of gender-neutral washrooms would eventually create a safer and more positive environments for transgender folks. As reflected in the study by Cavanagh (2010), if communities do not have gender-neutral washrooms, the intersection of public washrooms and gender becomes an avenue for harassment of queer folk, often attacked for using the 'wrong' restroom.

**1.5 Allowing relaxed dress code.** Lirra, a transgender participant, advocates for more clarity on what makes a professional look, the current definition of which hinders her freedom of self-expression. Ramon, HR consultant, posits that dress codes should serve more to guide employees than oblige them to dress formally, possibly by showing examples. As a transgender association representative, Tam describes their organization as having transwomen employees who are given proper assistance regarding restrictive dress code policies through letters and resource speakers to the employees' organizations. According to David (2015), employers have a right to establish employee dress and grooming guidelines during work hours if they serve a legitimate business purpose, such as maintaining a particular image around customers and competitors. In some BPO companies that allow gendered dress codes, the administrators prescribe make up and clothing that are still "neat" and professional (David, 2015).

**1.6 Providing more shuttle services.** BPO companies are highly active during mid and night shifts. This poses a higher risk to the safety of employees traveling to and from work. Anna, a transgender participant, suggests an increase in shuttle services to address this.

However, many BPOs would have limited or no direct access to 24-hour road and rail transport (Regidor, 2007). They have since resorted to taxis for transportation services.

**1.7 LGBT-specific policies.** As a transgender participant, Lirra hopes for more specific LGBT policies to combat persistent microaggressions in the workplace. Dindo proposes that labor codes be strengthened since “companies always claim to be unaware of regulations or city ordinances.” Studies say that policies must be easily accessible through all communications and reflect sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression as invalid grounds for discrimination (Grenier & Hixson-Vulpe, n.d.).

**1.8 Forming of support groups.** When one personally experiences discrimination, one may be afraid to speak out. Support groups help the individual by guiding the reporting of the incident to authorities.

*I think it's a program called lifeline.... It's not just for transgender but everybody. If they feel like they are being discriminated against but don't want to report it to the manager or HR, they can go to another person and ask what to do.... If there are instances like that, we have a safe person who you could go to. So that's a group of people. So they can go to appeal... to somebody that's safe, and really listening. So it's as good as being heard. In a sense, that's how we protect them. – Rosita*

According to Githens and Aragon (2009), LGBT employee groups are vital as they provide the proper environment for social support and a platform where employees can advocate for changes within their workplace. Additionally, Grenier and Hixson-Vulpe (n.d.) report the more extensive existence of employee resource groups, voluntary and employee-led collectives with shared interests, backgrounds, or demographics. Employee resource groups provide safe spaces for people to meet, provide support, converse on SOGIE-related issues, and work to end homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia. Ramon acknowledges the presence of such groups, which are management-sponsored, in their company. Tam, member of a transgender association, views support groups as vital for equipping transgender employees with the tools they need and empowering them to speak out whenever needed.

## *Theme 2: Stop doing*

**2.1 Giving special treatment.** Despite feeling overwhelmed at work, Barbie, a transgender participant, prefers not to be given special treatment simply due to her gender. She voices concern for heterosexual folks, whom she does not wish to feel restricted by such treatment. Regarding this, Donaldson and Vacha-Haase (2016) suggest LGBT-focused training to avoid tension between providing equal care and showing “favoritism,” which may come across as unprofessional.

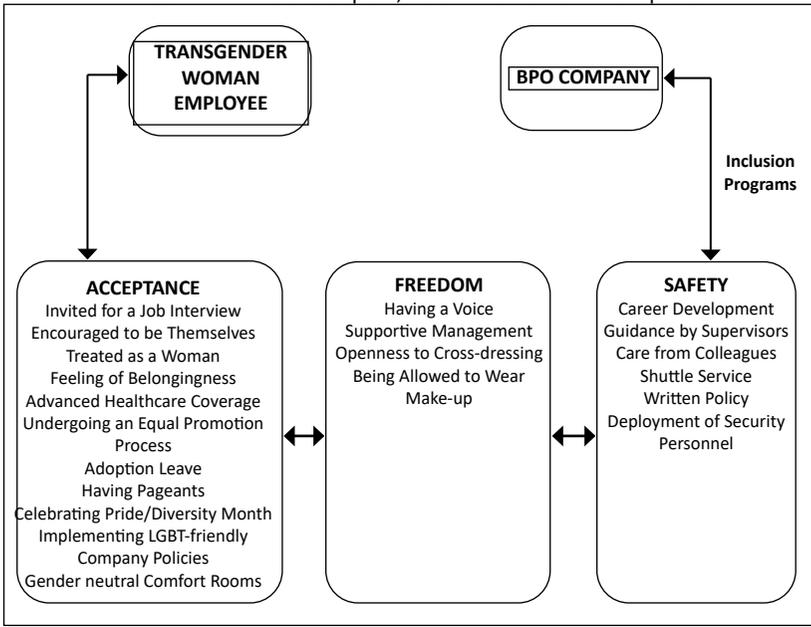
**2.2 Untimely address of complaints.** Hazel and Ingrid, as transgender participants, commented on the promptness of the companies’ response to complaints. Because these are handled equally, actions may take longer, but there are no irregularities, says Hazel. According to UNDP & ILO (2018), around 30% of LGBT worker respondents in the study have reported complaints of workplace harassment, bullying, and discrimination. These complaints have only reached the immediate supervisor or the human resources department. Because of this, only few are satisfied with the complaint system in the workplace where they cannot freely report incidences where they feel unsafe and discriminated.

Employers are not only responsible for preventing harassment but are also liable for such instances suffered by their employees. Thus, a diverse, accepting workforce can be built by establishing a solid ethos and enforcing clear policies. DOLE-BWC even opens their social media so that employees may reach them as fast as possible.

*Usually, we have awareness, inspection, and education. The inspectors are discussing the labor standards. There are press releases on Facebook. If you open our social media, every regional office has websites, Facebook, and a dedicated email to raise your concern. Just to inform also the general public, especially the stakeholders, the employers, and the employees. – Dindo.*

The findings of the research were integrated into an elaborated conceptual framework as seen below:

Figure 3: What makes a transgender woman working in BPO companies in metro manila feel accepted, free and safe in the workplace?



Transgender women working in the BPO company feel accepted due to their feeling of belongingness and equality starting from interview hiring process until the time of their employment. HR professionals state that they want to make their applicants feel welcome regardless of their sexual orientation. This has been proven true as transgender women participants themselves have similar experiences. They emphasized that when they are invited for an interview, they are treated equally throughout the application process. It has also been added that transgender participants feel encouraged to be their authentic selves at work as long as they follow company regulations and dress professionally. Additionally, most respondents in the study mentioned that they wanted a sense of belongingness which they found in BPO companies. They also shared their observation that transgender women commonly assume high positions in such companies. This is particularly backed up by HR professionals who shared that they ensure that there are policies regarding representation in leadership positions and they are committed to maintain it. On the contrary, one transgender participant does not

feel that open in expressing her gender at the workplace for the fear of being outed by workmates and becoming a center of gossip. One of the participants mentioned that she had experienced an unequal promotion process because of her personality and demeanor. An HR personnel from another company witnessed the same complaint; however, most transgender women participants disclosed they have transgender-inclusive anti-discrimination company policies that support their welfare in the workplace.

Transgender women working in a BPO company feel free mainly because they feel the sense of openness in expressing their gender identity in the workplace as long as they uphold company policies. Some transgender participants working in different companies affirmed that they have an avenue for management to listen to their feedback and set culture of freedom. However HR personnel mentioned that they strictly intend to maintain professionalism regardless of sexual appearance by reminding employees of the companies' dress code. BPO companies allow its employees to wear their preferred clothing without directing them to wear something masculine or feminine.

Transgender women in a BPO company feel safe because of the work environment and existence of company policies. BPO companies offer an open environment from supervisors and colleagues who offer to guide them. Transgender participants also mentioned that written policies that offer protection against discrimination make them feel safe at work. HR personnel reflect this, saying that anti-discrimination is actually stated in their company handbooks. Many businesses have policies in place that support LGBT workers, provide same-sex benefits, establish employee resource groups for LGBT workers and allies, and welcome same-sex couples to events held by the firm as a whole.

BPO companies can further improve their existing diversity and inclusion initiatives by starting to involve the transgender community, educating the workforce, improving company inclusion initiatives (benefits package, gender-neutral washroom, dress code, shuttle services, policies, and support groups). The lack of gender-neutral washroom continues to be a concern for transgender women and

the DOLE-BWC's representative said their lack of response was because they currently do not have legal basis for it. This was further counterargued by one of the transgender participants who claimed that creating gender-neutral washroom exclusively for LGBT folks is discriminatory. Transgender women should instead be allowed to use the ladies' washroom as they are identified as women. Providing clearer and more accessible information about dress codes is one of the suggestions that transgender participants, HR personnel, and transgender association representatives all agreed upon. Providing proper assistance on dress codes gives employees a clearer view on the company's need to maintain a particular image in accordance to its values. One transgender participant hopes for more specific LGBT policies to be explored to at least minimize microaggressions in the workplace by which the DOLE-BWC representative shared the strengthening of labor codes to be easily accessible to all.

The researcher has theorized the following assumptions based on the framed questions:

- Being accepted, free and safe in the workplace positively contributes to transgender women's feeling of inclusion in a BPO company
- The feeling of inclusion in the workplace affects how transgender women enjoy their working environment
- Full acceptance, freedom, and safety make transgender women employees stay longer and perform at their best in a BPO company
- BPO companies with a low level of enforcement of non-discrimination labor standards have a lower chance of engaging their transgender women employees

BPO firms with existing diversity and inclusion programs can make transgender women feel accepted by inviting them to job interviews, encouraging them to be their authentic selves, treating them as women, making them feel they belong, giving them equal chances for promotion, providing advanced healthcare coverage, allowing adoption leave, engaging them in pageants and pride/diversity month celebrations, and implementing LGBT-friendly company policies. Transgender women, on the other hand, may fully experience independence by having a voice in the workplace that is backed by management that allows them to exercise gender expression and wear

make-up. Similarly, safety may be felt through promises of professional advancement, supervisor guidance, concern from coworkers, the provision of shuttle services, and protection at work through written policies and security staff.

## **Conclusion and recommendations**

1. Transgender women are accepted in BPO businesses both before and throughout their employment. Simple invites best exemplify the former to job interviews, accompanied by encouragement to present their true self. This sows the germ of equality that will grow into employment, where employees will have equal opportunities for advancement and healthcare coverage as their counterparts. Additionally, specialized programs such as pageants, Pride month events, and LGBT protection measures reinforce this sense of inclusion.
2. Transgender women feel liberated at work when they can express their concerns and receive practical support from management in feedback and authorization to wear make-up and women's attire as per corporate policy.
3. Transgender female employees feel safe when their supervisors and coworkers support their professional advancement. Shuttle services, anti-discrimination policies, and security staff all help transsexual women feel secure at work.
4. Transgender participation may strengthen existing diversity and inclusion programs by training employees, improving benefit packages, providing more gender-neutral washrooms, relaxing dress codes, and offering more shuttle services. Contrarily, employers should avoid favoring transgender women employees and dismissing their grievances.

Trans women. According to the findings, transgender women should thoroughly investigate their applications to BPO companies, and grasp their fundamental rights. Transgender women should be completely aware of their company's code of behavior and monitor and report any instances of discrimination to HR or their line supervisors. Therefore, management is encouraged to strengthen inclusion policies while exercising their right to a peaceful workplace.

**HR practitioners.** To provide a safe working environment for their workers' SOGIE, they should be well-versed in the labor code and DOLE directives. HR professionals should examine current rules and update them to cover all employees. The organization should also involve third-party contractors and outsourced staff in orientations on internal inclusion rules to ensure they treat all employees equally and humanely. Also, HR professionals could engage with government agencies or LGBT groups to host refresher training on gender sensitivity and awareness.

**Transgender women's groups.** They should be more sympathetic and attentive to transgender employees' needs. They might also provide advice on dealing with discrimination in the workplace.

**Future industrial relations researchers.** Transgender women working in BPO businesses outside Metro Manila should be educated on workplace acceptance, independence, and safety. This study may also inspire research on lesbians, homosexuals, and bisexuals. The study might be expanded to include additional participants and other variables that impact the job experience of LGBT folks.

**DOLE.** It is advised to talk to BPO HR professionals about their excellent diversity and inclusion initiatives and how they may be included in national labor laws or the Safe Spaces Act to make it industry-wide. It is proposed that the DOLE establish uniform, objective company-wide rules as a temporary substitute for the anti-discrimination statute.

**Philippine Congress.** It is recommended that the legislative branch investigates and passes the anti-discrimination bill to provide equal protection to members of the LGBT community.

**International Labor Organization.** Work with local and international LGBT organizations to identify workplace LGBT problems and build a policy framework that addresses them without anti-discrimination legislation.

**Business owners and top executives.** It is advised that all business owners and/or senior management realize the benefits of workplace diversity and inclusion.

**Trade unions.** Ensure all workers have access to gender-neutral restrooms and other facilities and normal family benefits that encompass LGBT employees by including them in their contract.

**Mass media.** It is advised that research be made publicly available on all channels to reach both local and global audiences. Communication tactics regarding the LGBT community can help individuals shape their opinions and treat the group better. The mainstream media should work more closely with LGBT groups to simplify relatable content.

**Academe.** Educators should be advised that discriminatory activities in the school setting should be prohibited to promote respect for all forms of gender identity or expression. An inclusionary curriculum that highlights the LGBT community's contributions to history and worth in today's society should be discussed as well.

**Church organizations.** It is suggested that churches engage in open dialogue with LGBT groups and individuals to understand their needs better and establish a ministry based on respect and love.

Finally, everyone should accept everyone's sexual orientation, gender identity, and/or expression. Equal rights are a fundamental requirement that has yet to be fully satisfied.

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