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BELONGING TO SOCIETY: CHALLENGES FACED BY LGBTQIA+ MEMBERS ON GENDER DISCRIMINATION IN UBAY

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative, descriptive-exploratory study explored the lived experiences of LGBTQIA+ individuals facing gender discrimination and navigating social belonging in the rural municipality of Ubay, Bohol. Using purposive and quota sampling, fifteen (15) LGBTQIA+ residents across Barangays Biabas, Cagting, and Juagdan participated in semi-structured, one-on-one in-depth interviews. The verbatim transcripts were examined through thematic analysis. The findings revealed three overarching themes: (1) navigating daily microaggressions, school

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stigma, and protective self-concealment; (2) encountering systemic barriers, including family rejection, institutional hurdles, and conservative cultural norms; and (3) redefining societal belonging, cultivating inner strength, and demanding institutional inclusion. Participants routinely encountered verbal harassment, bullying, and social exclusion in schools, workplaces, and public spaces, which degraded self-confidence and compelled protective identity concealment. Deep-seated religious dogmas, domestic alienation, and the absence of functional reporting desks further entrenched structural marginalization. Nonetheless, participants demonstrated profound resilience and personal growth, conceptualizing true belonging not as passive conformity, but as living authentically while asserting rights to equal dignity and institutional protection. The study concludes that gender discrimination in rural Ubay is both an interpersonal and systemic challenge requiring coordinated multi-sectoral intervention. Key recommendations include enacting and strictly enforcing a municipal Anti-Discrimination Ordinance, operationalizing functional barangay protection desks, instituting gender-inclusive school policies, providing non-discriminatory healthcare services, and engaging families and religious leaders in community dialogues to foster sustainable acceptance, equality, and inclusion.

Keywords: *LGBTQIA+, Gender Discrimination, Social Belonging, Rural Communities, Ubay Bohol, Thematic Analysis*

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INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Gender discrimination plays a critical role in shaping the acceptance, dignity, and overall well-being of LGBTQIA+ members within local communities. This form of discrimination involves unfair treatment, unequal opportunities, and social barriers experienced by individuals due to their gender identity or sexual orientation (World Health Organization [WHO], 2024). A profound understanding of these challenges reveals that safe and supportive environments allow LGBTQIA+ individuals to build self-confidence, maintain mental well-being, and experience a true sense of belonging in society. Such understanding also promotes active community participation and highlights the collective responsibility of fostering equality and respect. By exploring these lived experiences, educators, community leaders, and local advocates can better support LGBTQIA+ members in overcoming systemic barriers and developing effective pathways toward genuine social inclusion.

Identifying and understanding these specific challenges is valuable because it can improve local policy, social support systems, and community acceptance. Although many LGBTQIA+ individuals actively seek spaces where they can live authentically, some still encounter intense challenges rooted in stereotypes, prejudice, and a lack of awareness about diverse gender identities and sexual orientations. While a supportive environment leads to better mental well-being and social integration, the lack of proper protection or awareness results in pervasive exclusion, severe bullying, and deep-seated rejection across schools, workplaces, and neighborhoods. Many individuals may experience a drastic drop in self-confidence or feel profoundly isolated from their own communities when local systems fail to protect them, which negatively affects their mental well-being and personal development.

According to Abesamis (2022) and Cruz and Torres (2023), LGBTQIA+ and transgender Filipinos continue to face exclusion, discrimination, and social stigma. However, existing research primarily focuses on urban settings, leaving a critical gap in understanding the unique rural realities of municipalities like Ubay, Bohol. This gap is further echoed globally by the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (2023) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (2024), both of which emphasize that while discrimination persists worldwide, there is an urgent need for localized research in rural and developing areas. To respond to this concern, local institutions, schools, and community leaders must implement inclusive programs that promote diversity and introduce strict anti-discrimination guidelines. Furthermore, LGBTQIA+ members must be given concrete opportunities to voice their challenges and actively participate in creating safer, more respectful spaces.

The Philippine context shows a similar pattern of uneven protection. The Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression, and Sex Characteristics (SOGIESC) Equality Bill has been described as having “languished in the Philippine Senate for about 20 years” (Alibudbud, 2023), and bills filed in the 20th Congress were listed as pending with the House Committee on Women and Gender Equality (House of Representatives of the Philippines, 2025). In the absence of a national law, local ordinances carry much of the burden of protection. United Nations Philippines (n.d.) reported that only 21 of the 1,634 cities and municipalities and six of the 81 provinces had anti-discrimination ordinances, leaving about 79.2% of Filipinos without such protection, although counts differ by source and date (Philippine Commission on Women [PCW], 2019). In Bohol, a provincial anti-discrimination ordinance was reported to have met opposition at its second and third readings and to have been blocked in December 2024 (The Bohol Tribune, 2024).

Local evidence on the experiences of LGBTQ+ Filipinos in Bohol is limited. The one Bohol-based study reviewed for this paper is quantitative: Polinar (2022) found generally good mental health and high grades among LGBTQ college students in the province, with emotional well-being scoring highest and social well-being lowest. That finding points to belonging as the area where students are most constrained, yet it does not describe how discrimination is lived day to day. A qualitative account of those daily experiences in rural Ubay is the contribution that the present study seeks to make.

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The primary goal of this study was to explore and understand the lived experiences of LGBTQIA+ members who have faced gender discrimination in Ubay, Bohol. It aimed to determine how these challenges, such as exclusion, bullying, and unfair treatment, contribute to their social well-being and to identify critical areas in local governance and community support that need immediate improvement. Through this research, stakeholders may discover effective, localized strategies that can enhance protection, respect, and institutional inclusion for the LGBTQIA+ community within the municipality.

Review of Related Literature

Theoretical Foundations

The theoretical foundation of this study draws primarily from frameworks that emphasize social identity, systemic environments, and the psychological impact of social exclusion. Erving Goffman's Stigma Theory (1963) serves as a primary lens, explaining how individuals marked as "different" by society experience prejudice and discrimination, directly degrading their self-esteem and interpersonal relationships. This is complemented by Henri Tajfel and John Turner's Social Identity Theory (1979), which highlights how in-group favoritism and out-group bias lead to systemic discrimination against marginalized minorities such as the LGBTQIA+ community. To understand how these social dynamics manifest in everyday life, George Herbert Mead's Symbolic Interaction Theory (1977) illustrates how personal identity and self-image are continuously negotiated and shaped through daily interactions within the local community.

These micro-level interactions are nested within broader systems. Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1977) maps how interconnected environments, spanning family, school, workplace, and the wider municipality, actively dictate the development and challenges of gender minorities. Ultimately, when these systems foster hostility rather than support, they disrupt the progression outlined in Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory (1943), which asserts that vital needs of love, acceptance, and belongingness must be met before individuals can achieve personal growth and self-actualization. Together, this theoretical cluster supports the investigation of how gender discrimination directly hinders the societal belonging of LGBTQIA+ residents in Ubay.

Table 1 summarizes how each theoretical perspective relates to the focus of the study and to the themes that emerged from the interviews. The perspectives served as interpretive guides in this study. The relationship between each perspective and the themes is shown in Table 1 and is discussed under each theme in the Results and Discussion section.

Table 1. Theoretical Perspectives and Their Relevance to the Study

Theoretical Perspective	Core Ideas	Relevance to the Study	Related Theme
Stigma Theory (Goffman, 1963)	Individuals marked as "different" by society experience prejudice and discrimination, degrading self-esteem and interpersonal relationships	Explains how daily stigma leads LGBTQIA+ members to experience interpersonal prejudice and to conceal their identities	Theme 1
Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979)	In-group favoritism and out-group bias lead to systemic discrimination against marginalized minorities	Explains how out-group bias produces the systemic marginalization of LGBTQIA+ members	Theme 2

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Theoretical Perspective	Core Ideas	Relevance to the Study	Related Theme
Symbolic Interaction Theory (Mead, 1977)	Personal identity and self-image are continuously negotiated and shaped through daily interactions within the community	Frames how everyday interactions in the local community shape the identity and self-image of LGBTQIA+ members	—
Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977)	Interconnected environments (family, school, workplace, and municipality) shape the development and challenges of gender minorities	Explains how unsupportive micro- and macro-systems constrain individual development	Theme 2
Hierarchy of Needs Theory (Maslow, 1943)	Needs of love, acceptance, and belongingness must be met before personal growth and self-actualization	Explains why hostile systems disrupt growth and why fulfilling belongingness needs is essential	Theme 3

Note. A dash (—) indicates that the perspective is not linked to a specific theme in the discussion of the findings.

Legal and Regulatory Context and the Sustainable Development Goals

The legal and institutional context for safeguarding human rights and gender equality in the Philippines establishes a clear mandate for protection yet exposes persistent systemic enforcement gaps. At the apex, Article II, Section 11 of the 1987 Philippine Constitution provides that the State values the dignity of every human person and guarantees full respect for human rights, a principle reinforced by the equal protection clause in Article III, Section 1 (Bill of Rights), which ensures that no individual is deprived of their rights due to prejudice. At the civil level, Republic Act No. 386, also known as the Civil Code of the Philippines (1949), mandates that every person must act with justice, give everyone their due, and observe honesty and good faith, serving as an enduring legal anchor for interpersonal respect.

More specialized protective mechanisms are found in Republic Act No. 7877 (Anti-Sexual Harassment Act of 1995), which outlaws sexual harassment in work, education, and training environments, and Republic Act No. 9710 (Magna Carta of Women, 2009), which actively promotes gender equality and the empowerment of marginalized sectors. Globally, these legal mandates align with the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5: Gender Equality, which calls for ending all forms of discrimination against women and girls, and SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities, which emphasizes the social, economic, and political inclusion of all individuals irrespective of sex, identity, or other status (United Nations, 2015). Furthermore, realizing these commitments depends heavily on SDG 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions, which obligates states to promote the rule of law and ensure equal access to justice for all.

However, despite these national and global frameworks mandating an inclusive society, the persistent socio-cultural and economic challenges faced by LGBTQIA+ individuals in local governments, such as the municipality of Ubay, Bohol, reveal a critical implementation deficit (Thoreson, 2017; United Nations Development Programme [UNDP] & United States Agency for International Development [USAID], 2014). In the absence of comprehensive national legislation such as the Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, Gender Expression, and Sex Characteristics (SOGIESC) Equality Bill, institutional protections remain uneven, highlighting a stark divergence between national statutory guarantees, international SDG benchmarks, and grassroots enforcement.

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Three further instruments bear more directly on the experiences described by the participants than the statutes above. Republic Act No. 11313 (Safe Spaces Act, 2019) penalizes misogynistic, transphobic, homophobic, and sexist slurs in streets, online, at work, and in schools, and requires local government units to establish Anti-Sexual Harassment desks in barangays and to train Punong Barangays (PCW, 2021). Republic Act No. 10627 (Anti-Bullying Act of 2013), together with its revised implementing rules, requires every public and private basic education school to adopt a standard anti-bullying policy and to designate a Learner Formation Officer, and its coverage extends to gender-based harassment and social exclusion (Department of Education [DepEd], 2025). DepEd Order No. 32, s. 2017 commits the Department to gender equality, gender sensitivity, non-discrimination, and human rights, and recognizes that LGBT children are at a higher risk of physical and psychological bullying (DepEd, 2017). Table 2 summarizes the legal and policy instruments discussed in this section and their relevance to the participants' accounts.

Table 2. Legal and Policy Instruments Relevant to the Participants' Experiences

Instrument	Provision Relevant to LGBTQIA+ Members	Relevance to the Participants' Accounts
1987 Constitution, Art. II, Sec. 11; Art. III, Sec. 1	Values the dignity of every human person; guarantees full respect for human rights; equal protection	Establishes the general mandate against prejudice-based deprivation of rights (all themes)
Civil Code (Republic Act No. 386, 1949)	Requires every person to act with justice, give everyone his or her due, and observe honesty and good faith	Legal anchor for interpersonal respect (Theme 1)
Anti-Sexual Harassment Act (Republic Act No. 7877, 1995)	Outlaws sexual harassment in work, education, and training environments	Addresses harassment in schools and workplaces, but not all forms of discrimination (Themes 1–2)
Magna Carta of Women (Republic Act No. 9710, 2009)	Promotes gender equality and the empowerment of marginalized sectors	Basis for gender-equality programs of local governments (Theme 2)
Safe Spaces Act (Republic Act No. 11313, 2019)	Penalizes homophobic and transphobic slurs in streets, online, at work, and in schools; requires barangay Anti-Sexual Harassment desks	Bears on verbal harassment (Theme 1) and on the absence of reporting avenues (Theme 2)
Anti-Bullying Act (Republic Act No. 10627, 2013) and revised implementing rules (DepEd, 2025)	Requires a standard anti-bullying policy and a Learner Formation Officer in every basic education school; covers gender-based harassment and social exclusion	Bears on school stigma and microaggressions (Theme 1)
DepEd Order No. 32, s. 2017	Commits DepEd to gender equality, gender sensitivity, and non-discrimination; recognizes higher risk of bullying for LGBT children	School-level policy basis for Theme 1 and for the education recommendation
SOGIESC Equality Bill	Proposed national anti-discrimination law; pending in the 20th Congress	Absence of national law places weight on local ordinances (Theme 3)

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Related Literature and Studies

The reviewed literature and studies provide strong empirical support regarding the multi-layered barriers to social belonging, particularly within provincial and rural landscapes. On a macro level, minority stress arising from societal hostility inflicts a heavy psychological toll (Frost & Meyer, 2023; Alibudbud, 2024), a burden compounded by conservative cultural and religious dogmas that often label queer identities as unnatural (Tatchell, 2025; Dela Cruz, 2026). This prejudice typically begins at home, where family rejection severely damages early self-confidence and leaves youth vulnerable to broader societal harms (Garcia, 2023; Watson, 2026; The Trevor Project, 2024). In institutional spheres, school-based bullying and restrictive gender policies stifle the academic and personal potential of queer youth (Formby, 2022; Tan, 2024; Hatchel, 2022), while workplace biases, unfair hiring practices, and unequal compensation restrict financial independence and job security (Orlando, 2026; Winslow-Majette, 2026; Ocampo, 2024; Drydakis, 2024; Philippine Financial & Inter-Industry Pride [PFIP], 2024).

In rural settings specifically, such as the municipality of Ubay, these challenges are magnified. Geographic isolation and deep-seated traditional views trigger higher rates of social exclusion (Manalastas, 2022), daily verbal harassment in public areas limits freedom of movement (Ching, 2025; Woodford, 2023), and discriminatory environments in local healthcare facilities discourage individuals from seeking essential medical care (APCOM, 2024). While some grassroots barangays have attempted to implement protection desks, their efficacy remains hampered by inadequate staff training (Ildefonso, 2024), leaving marginalized and economically vulnerable trans individuals with scarce safety nets (Cleofas, 2022) and limited inclusive community spaces (Baams, 2025). These accumulated studies validate the urgent need to examine how daily discrimination restricts the fundamental right of LGBTQIA+ members to feel a true sense of belonging in their local community.

Minority Stress, Concealment, and Mental Health

Minority stress frameworks locate the mental health burden of LGBTQ+ people in social conditions and not in identity itself. Applying the distinction between distal and proximal stressors to the Philippines, Alibudbud (2023) argued that heteronormative norms, negative attitudes, and discrimination contribute to higher suicidal ideation, depression, anxiety, and stress among LGBTQ+ Filipinos. Concealment is a central proximal stressor. A meta-analysis of 193 studies found that the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral demands of concealing a sexual orientation were significantly associated with internalizing problems such as depression and anxiety, although the strength of the association depended on the sample and the measure used (Pachankis et al., 2020). This evidence connects Goffman's (1963) account of stigma management with contemporary findings: concealment can protect a person in the moment while carrying its own psychological cost.

Among Filipino sexual and gender minority university students, depression and stress were negatively associated with mental well-being (Berdida et al., 2026). The evidence is not uniform, however. Reyes et al. (2022) found that parental sexual orientation support and concealment did not significantly predict the risk of suicidality among Filipino bisexual youths, which suggests that the links among family response, concealment, and outcomes may differ across identities and settings.

School Environments and Child Protection Policy

School is where many of the accounts in the present study are located, and Philippine policy acknowledges the risk. The Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines [CHR] (2019) identified discriminatory school policies, bullying, and harassment among the problems facing LGBTQ children. It noted that the DepEd Child Protection Policy and the implementing rules of the Anti-Bullying Act were the only child protection policies that recognized sexual orientation and gender identity or expression as bases for bullying, but it found no proper monitoring of their implementation. The revised implementing rules extend the framework by requiring a standard anti-bullying policy and a Learner Formation Officer in every basic education school (DepEd, 2025). Taken together, these sources indicate that the policy architecture for protecting LGBTQ+ learners exists. The question raised by the participants' accounts is whether that architecture reaches the school level in a rural municipality.

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Family, Religion, and Conditional Acceptance

Family responses to LGBTQ+ children in the Philippines are often more layered than outright rejection. In a phenomenological study of ten parents of openly self-identified LGBTQIA+ youth, Macabangon et al. (2024) described families as generally accepting yet shaped by religious, cultural, and familial values, with one theme described as "acceptance with disaccord." A qualitative study of 25 self-identified members of the Filipino LGBTQ community found that coming out is closely tied to the presence and acceptance of non-heterosexual individuals within the family, and that a family's religious beliefs rejecting homosexuality act as obstacles (Domingo & Escobido, 2024). Religion also remains important to many LGBTQ Filipinos: a survey of 59 respondents showed that religiosity remains central to many of them despite church teaching (del Castillo et al., 2021). These findings complicate any assumption that LGBTQ+ Filipinos simply leave religion or that families simply reject them, and they help to explain why rejection that is grounded in religious belief can be felt so deeply.

Local Governance, Ordinances, and Protection Desks

Barangay Violence Against Women (VAW) desks are a longer-standing mechanism than the Anti-Sexual Harassment desks required by the Safe Spaces Act, and studies of how they function are instructive. In a survey of 105 desk officers and five officials in Calamba, desks existed, and the policy establishing them was enforced, but there was a lack of equipment and resources, no clear qualifications for officers, and no local orientation system (Consignado et al., 2022). An assessment of 30 barangays in Pasig City found that how well desks function depends on the local government's resources, capacity, and commitment (Umali, 2024). These studies concern VAW desks and not SOGIESC-based complaints specifically, but they show that the existence of a desk does not by itself ensure that it is equipped to receive complaints.

Beyond the barangay, the Philippine Commission on Women (2019) reported anti-discrimination ordinances in 25 local government units, including the Visayas cities of Bacolod, Cebu, and Mandaue, and recommended mechanisms to monitor, report, and record SOGIE-based discrimination and to provide redress. Counts of such ordinances differ by source and date and should be read as approximate (PCW, 2019; United Nations Philippines, n.d.). The Bohol provincial ordinance reported by The Bohol Tribune (2024) was described as a requirement for the Seal of Good Local Governance and met opposition at its second and third readings. As a report from a local newspaper, it is cited here as reported.

Rural Belonging and Resilience

Evidence from rural settings elsewhere points to both disadvantage and strength. In a United States survey, 49% of rural and small-town LGBTQ youth described their communities as unaccepting, compared with 26% of urban and suburban youth, and only 4% described their communities as very accepting (The Trevor Project, 2021). Because these are United States data, they are cited only as an indication that community acceptance varies by locale. A systematic review of the health and health care of rural sexual and gender minorities in the United Kingdom, United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand reported that rural LGBTIQ+ people face added barriers, while support networks, community, and online technologies act as facilitators of well-being (Nic Giolla Easpaig et al., 2022). Within Bohol, the low social well-being reported by Polinar (2022) is consistent with a concern for belonging, and good academic functioning alongside constrained belonging is not contradictory.

Synthesis and Research Gap

The literature reviewed describes the psychological cost of stigma and concealment, the existence and uneven implementation of school protections, the conditional character of family and religious acceptance, the uneven coverage of local ordinances, and the limited capacity of barangay-level desks. Much of this evidence is national, urban, quantitative, or drawn from other countries. The accounts of LGBTQIA+ residents of a rural Bohol municipality, in their own words, are the gap that the present study addresses. Table 4, in the Results and Discussion section, sets the participants' accounts alongside this literature.

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Statement of the Problem

This study aimed to explore the challenges of LGBTQIA+ members regarding gender discrimination in Barangays Biabas, Cagting, and Juagdan in Ubay, Bohol, during calendar year 2026. It sought to understand how gender discrimination affects their sense of belonging in society, the challenges they encounter, and the insights they gain from these experiences.

Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. How do LGBTQIA+ members describe their experiences of gender discrimination in Ubay?
2. What challenges do LGBTQIA+ members encounter as they strive to belong and be accepted in society despite experiencing gender discrimination?
3. What realizations do LGBTQIA+ members gain from their experiences of gender discrimination regarding acceptance, equality, and inclusion in society?
4. Based on the findings of the study, what recommendations can be proposed to promote equality, respect, inclusion, and protection for LGBTQIA+ members in Ubay?

Objectives of the Study

This study aimed to explore and understand the lived experiences of LGBTQIA+ members who have faced gender discrimination in Ubay, Bohol.

Specifically, it sought to:

1. explore the daily lived experiences of LGBTQIA+ members in selected barangays of Ubay, Bohol, particularly in relation to gender discrimination and social belonging;
2. identify the specific structural, socio-cultural, familial, and personal challenges that LGBTQIA+ individuals encounter in navigating acceptance and inclusion within their communities;
3. understand the realizations, cognitive reflections, and shifts in perspective that LGBTQIA+ members develop from their experiences of discrimination and resilience; and
4. gather and analyze localized recommendations proposed by LGBTQIA+ participants to promote equality, acceptance, and genuine social inclusion in rural Ubay communities.

Significance of the Study

This research holds significant value for various stakeholders by providing a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of LGBTQIA+ members who face gender discrimination in Ubay. The findings of this study may contribute to the development of programs, interventions, and policies that promote equality, respect, inclusion, and protection for LGBTQIA+ individuals.

Municipal Social Welfare and Development Office (MSWDO). The findings of this study may provide the Municipal Social Welfare and Development Office (MSWDO) with valuable information about the lived experiences of LGBTQIA+ members in Ubay. This may help the office develop inclusive social welfare programs, counseling services, and community-based interventions that promote equality and protect the rights and well-being of LGBTQIA+ individuals.

Local Government Unit (LGU) of Ubay. The findings of this study may provide the Local Government Unit (LGU) of Ubay with relevant information that can serve as a basis for developing local policies, ordinances, and programs that promote gender equality, prevent discrimination, and create a more inclusive community for LGBTQIA+ members.

LGBTQIA+ Organizations. This study may provide LGBTQIA+ organizations with relevant information that can support awareness campaigns, educational programs, and initiatives aimed at reducing discrimination while promoting equality, acceptance, and inclusion.

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Community Members. The findings of this study may provide community members with a better understanding of the challenges of LGBTQIA+ individuals. This may help reduce prejudice, promote respect and acceptance, and encourage the creation of a more inclusive and discrimination-free community.

LGBTQIA+ Members. The findings of this study may provide LGBTQIA+ members with information that validates their experiences and raises awareness of the challenges they face. It may also encourage them to seek support, exercise their rights, and actively participate in promoting equality and inclusion within the community.

Researchers. This study may enhance the researchers' knowledge and understanding of the lived experiences of LGBTQIA+ members who face gender discrimination in Ubay. It may also help them develop their research skills and deepen their appreciation of issues concerning equality, respect, inclusion, and protection for LGBTQIA+ individuals.

Future Researchers. This study may serve as a valuable reference for future researchers who wish to conduct related studies on LGBTQIA+ experiences, gender discrimination, and social inclusion. It may also contribute to the existing body of knowledge and encourage further research in different communities and contexts.

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METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design, using descriptive and exploratory approaches. This approach was chosen to gain a deep and nuanced understanding of the participants' personal experiences, struggles, and perspectives regarding gender discrimination. The in-depth, semi-structured interviews allowed the researchers to capture rich, descriptive, and non-quantifiable data on how these discriminatory practices affect the participants' sense of belonging, acceptance, and social integration within their communities.

Qualitative inquiry was appropriate because the study sought the meanings that participants attach to their experiences and not the frequency of those experiences. Thematic analysis identifies patterns of meaning across a dataset and is suited to questions about experiences and perceptions (Braun & Clarke, 2021b). Because themes are patterns of shared meaning developed through interpretation and not simple summaries of topics, the credibility of the analysis depends on clearly reported analytic decisions (Braun & Clarke, 2021a, 2023; Byrne, 2022).

Research Environment

The research was conducted in Ubay, Bohol, specifically in the rural barangays of Biabas, Cagting, and Juagdan. These locations provided the cultural and contextual backdrop for the study. All data collection activities were carried out within these barangays, ensuring that the findings are grounded in the real-world experiences of LGBTQIA+ individuals living in these rural community environments during calendar year 2026.

Participants of the Study

The participants were fifteen (15) LGBTQIA+ members residing in the barangays of Biabas, Cagting, and Juagdan. To select the participants, the researchers employed purposive sampling combined with quota sampling. Purposive sampling ensured that only individuals who had directly experienced issues of gender discrimination were included, while quota sampling allotted a proportional number of participants to each barangay to guarantee balanced representation. In qualitative research, stratified random sampling is generally not used, as the goal of qualitative inquiry is not statistical generalization but deep, contextualized understanding. Participants were selected based on their self-identification as LGBTQIA+ members residing in the barangays, with no age restriction, provided they were willing to share their experiences and perspectives. This approach ensured diverse and meaningful insights into issues of belonging and discrimination.

The number of participants was consistent with in-depth qualitative inquiry, in which the richness and relevance of each account is prioritized over breadth. In thematic analysis, the adequacy of a sample is judged by the depth and relevance of the data and not by a fixed number (Braun & Clarke, 2021a).

Research Instrument

The primary data collection tool for this research was a semi-structured interview guide. The questions in the guide were carefully crafted to explore the participants' lived experiences of gender discrimination, the social challenges they face in their quest for societal acceptance, and the insights they have gained regarding equality and inclusion. The flexible nature of this instrument allowed the researchers to ask spontaneous follow-up questions to probe deeper into each participant's unique narrative and emotional journey.

Data-Gathering Procedure

The research followed a systematic process to ensure ethical standards and data validity, divided into three phases:

Phase 1. Securing Permission and Identifying Participants. First, a formal letter of permission was sent to the respective Barangay Captains of Biabas, Cagting, and Juagdan in Ubay, Bohol, to obtain official approval to conduct the study within their jurisdictions. After receiving approval, the researchers coordinated with local

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community leaders or trusted LGBTQIA+ representatives to identify and contact the 15 participants who fit the study's criteria.

Phase 2. Informed Consent and Interviews. Once the participants were selected, they were provided with an informed consent form written in a language they fully understood (English or Cebuano/Visayan). This form clearly explained the purpose and nature of the study, guaranteed strict confidentiality and the anonymity of their identities through pseudonyms, and confirmed that their participation was completely voluntary. Individual, one-on-one interviews were then scheduled at a convenient time and at a highly private location (such as a private room or quiet community space) within their respective barangays to ensure comfort and safety. Each interview was audio-recorded with the explicit verbal and written permission of the participant. The researchers followed the interview guide to maintain thematic consistency while allowing room for natural, conversational dialogue.

Phase 3. Transcription. Following the completion of all interviews, the audio recordings were transcribed verbatim.

Data Analysis

The transcribed data underwent thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns, core themes, and key insights related to the research questions. The findings from this qualitative analysis served as the foundation for drawing sound conclusions and proposing recommendations to promote equality, respect, and protection for the LGBTQIA+ community in Ubay. Participant excerpts are presented in the Results and Discussion section under the codes P1 to P8.

Ethical Considerations

The study observed ethical standards throughout. Official approval was sought from the Barangay Captains of Biabas, Cagting, and Juagdan before the participants were approached. Each participant was given an informed consent form written in a language he or she fully understood, which explained the purpose and nature of the study, guaranteed strict confidentiality and anonymity through pseudonyms, and confirmed that participation was completely voluntary. Interviews were held in private locations to ensure comfort and safety, and each interview was audio-recorded only with the explicit verbal and written permission of the participant. In reporting the results, participants are identified only by codes (P1 to P8). The authors declare no conflict of interest, as stated in the compliance section of this paper.

Research with LGBTQ+ participants carries the risk of unintended disclosure of sexual orientation or gender identity. The use of pseudonyms, private interview venues, and confidentiality assurances described above responds to that risk. The inclusion criteria placed no age restriction. The National Ethical Guidelines for Research Involving Human Participants treat minors as vulnerable participants and set assent requirements that vary by age (Philippine Health Research Ethics Board [PHREB], 2022). Requiring parental consent can also deter participation by LGBTQ+ adolescents who are not out. In a study of 60 youth aged 14 to 18, 37.6% reported that they would not have participated if parental or guardian consent had been required (Cwinn et al., 2021), and the ethical considerations for waiving parental consent in such research have been discussed in detail (Wasilewski, 2024).

Operational Definition of Terms

To ensure clarity and a common understanding of the key concepts used in this study, the following terms are operationally defined:

Belonging. The subjective feeling of being accepted, respected, valued, and integrated as an equal member within the social fabric of the community. In this study, it refers to how the LGBTQIA+ participants feel included or excluded by the residents and local institutions of Barangays Biabas, Cagting, and Juagdan.

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Challenges. The socio-cultural difficulties, emotional struggles, marginalization, and interpersonal barriers encountered by the participants. This study focuses on the obstacles they face while striving for societal acceptance and equal opportunities despite their gender identity.

Gender Discrimination. The unfair, biased, or hostile treatment, verbal harassment, social exclusion, or prejudice directed at individuals because of their non-heteronormative sexual orientation, gender identity, or expression (SOGIE). In this study, it constitutes the primary phenomenon being investigated.

LGBTQIA+ Members. The human participants of this study who self-identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual, or other diverse sexual orientations and gender identities, residing in the selected barangays of Ubay, Bohol.

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings, analysis, and interpretation of the qualitative data gathered from the LGBTQIA+ participants in the barangays of Biabas, Cagting, and Juagdan in Ubay, Bohol, regarding their experiences with gender discrimination and social belonging. Thematic analysis was utilized to identify recurring patterns, core meanings, and overarching insights embedded within the participants' responses. The analysis directly addresses the study's primary objectives: exploring how LGBTQIA+ members experience gender discrimination in rural communities, the specific social, familial, and institutional challenges they face, and the personal realizations they cultivate regarding equality, self-worth, and genuine social inclusion. Through a systematic examination of the qualitative responses, three major themes emerged that capture the multi-faceted reality of gender minorities navigating rural society. Table 3, presented after the three themes, summarizes how the themes relate to the research objectives, and Table 4 sets the themes alongside the related literature.

The three themes are: (1) navigating daily microaggressions, school stigma, and protective self-concealment; (2) encountering systemic barriers, namely family rejection, institutional hurdles, and cultural norms; and (3) redefining societal belonging, cultivating inner strength, and demanding institutional inclusion. Each theme is presented with representative excerpts from the participants, an interpretation of the responses, and a discussion of the theoretical and empirical literature that supports it.

Theme 1. Navigating Daily Microaggressions, School Stigma, and Protective Self-Concealment

The first theme highlights how LGBTQIA+ students encounter and manage daily manifestations of gender discrimination within the school environment. Participants frequently described facing verbal mockery, sarcastic comments, gossip, and subtle exclusion during classroom interactions, group activities, and informal peer conversations. These daily microaggressions contribute to emotional distress, anxiety, and a diminished sense of safety in school. To protect themselves from humiliation or harassment, students often adjust their participation in school activities, avoid certain spaces, or selectively conceal their gender expression.

Several participants described their everyday encounters with public stigma and protective coping behaviors. One participant shared:

> **P1:** *"When walking through the school hallways, some classmates whisper, laugh, or make sarcastic comments, which forces me to adjust my behavior just to avoid trouble."*

Another participant elaborated on the mental toll of perpetual vigilance:

> **P2:** *"Facing constant judgment makes me feel uncomfortable in school; sometimes I choose to skip activities or stay quiet just to shield myself from hurtful remarks."*

The responses indicate that LGBTQIA+ students operate under heightened vigilance within the school environment. Rather than feeling free to express themselves authentically, participants reported that they must continually calculate potential social risks. The prevalence of unprovoked microaggressions creates an atmosphere of conditional acceptance, where safety depends on minimizing visible non-conformity.

The participants' descriptions strongly support this theme through consistent references to verbal mockery, emotional fatigue, self-concealment, and altered participation in school routines. Their reflections illustrate how daily discrimination restricts the fundamental freedom of self-expression and engagement within the school setting.

Discussion

These findings align with Erving Goffman's (1963) Stigma Theory, which explains how individuals possessing socially disvalued identities experience continuous interpersonal prejudice and identity concealment. Furthermore, the qualitative accounts validate the empirical observations of Ching (2025) and Woodford (2023),

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who documented that daily verbal harassment and public stigma in rural municipalities compel gender minorities to adopt self-protective avoidance strategies.

The theme also resonates with the literature on concealment. The adjustments that P1 and P2 describe, adjusting one's behavior in hallways and skipping activities or staying quiet, are forms of protective concealment. Pachankis et al. (2020) found that the demands of concealment are significantly associated with internalizing problems, which suggests that these self-protective strategies are both a rational response to hostility and a source of strain. The participants' accounts also situate the problem in schools, which the CHR (2019) identified as sites of bullying and harassment of LGBTQ children, and which DepEd (2017) recognizes as an environment in which LGBT children are at a higher risk of bullying.

The verbal harassment described by the participants may, depending on its content, fall within conduct that the Safe Spaces Act addresses, since the law penalizes homophobic and transphobic slurs in schools (PCW, 2021). Whether and how these protections are applied at the school level is not addressed by the data of this study. The CHR (2019) found no proper monitoring of implementation, and the revised anti-bullying rules place the responsibility for localized policies and referral on each school through the Learner Formation Officer (DepEd, 2025).

Overall, this theme reveals that school stigma and daily microaggressions pose persistent barriers to the well-being of LGBTQIA+ students. Mitigating these issues requires school leadership and educators to actively challenge discriminatory behaviors through awareness programs, inclusive policies, and visible anti-stigma initiatives within the school environment.

In relation to the first research question, the theme shows that LGBTQIA+ members describe gender discrimination as a daily experience, expressed through mockery, gossip, and subtle exclusion, to which they respond by adjusting their behavior, limiting their participation, or concealing their gender expression.

Theme 2. Encountering Systemic Barriers: Family Rejection, Institutional Hurdles, and Cultural Norms

The second theme focuses on the structural, institutional, and socio-cultural obstacles that impede LGBTQIA+ members from achieving full participation and socio-economic security. Participants reported encountering unsupportive family environments, restrictive hiring practices, and exclusion from barangay-level decision-making processes. These hurdles are heavily reinforced by deeply entrenched traditional beliefs, religious conservatism, and a lack of local awareness regarding gender diversity.

One participant explained the difficulty of securing equal opportunities and participation:

> **P3:** *"It is hard to actively participate in barangay programs or apply for local jobs when traditional beliefs make people view us as less capable or unnatural."*

Another participant emphasized the emotional weight of family rejection and domestic friction:

> **P4:** *"When the rejection comes from your own family because of religious beliefs, it hurts deeper than any comment from a stranger in the street."*

A third participant described the absence of protective institutional mechanisms at the local level:

> **P5:** *"We lack clear avenues to report discrimination or harassment in our barangay, so many of us just swallow the unfair treatment without seeking justice."*

These statements reveal that LGBTQIA+ individuals in rural settings face compounding systemic obstacles. Cultural and religious dogmas within close-knit rural communities magnify social isolation, while the absence of localized anti-discrimination enforcement leaves gender minorities without formal institutional protection in schools, workplaces, and local governance.

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The qualitative data strongly support this theme by illustrating the interplay between domestic rejection, institutional exclusion, and conservative cultural norms. The accounts demonstrate that systemic barriers extend beyond individual prejudice into structural inequality.

Discussion

These findings are supported by Tajfel and Turner's (1979) Social Identity Theory, which illustrates how out-group bias leads to systemic marginalization, and by Bronfenbrenner's (1977) Ecological Systems Theory, which demonstrates how unsupportive micro- and macro-systems constrain individual development. Additionally, these results confirm empirical findings by Manalastas (2022) and Alibudbud (2024), who observed that conservative cultural norms, family rejection, and weak barangay-level protection desks severely compromise the socio-economic security of rural Filipino LGBTQIA+ youth.

The family dimension of this theme is consistent with studies that describe family acceptance as conditional. Macabangon et al. (2024) described families as generally accepting yet shaped by religious and cultural values, and Domingo and Escobido (2024) found that a family's religious beliefs act as obstacles to coming out. Read alongside these studies, P4's statement that rejection from one's own family "hurts deeper than any comment from a stranger" suggests that the pain of family disapproval is tied to the closeness of the relationship. The literature also cautions against treating the family response as uniform: Reyes et al. (2022) did not find that parental support or concealment predicted suicidality risk among bisexual youths. The present study did not measure these outcomes, and its findings should therefore be read as describing the participants' experiences and not as testing such links.

P5's observation that participants "lack clear avenues to report discrimination or harassment" also bears on the mechanisms that already exist. The Safe Spaces Act requires barangays to establish Anti-Sexual Harassment desks (PCW, 2021), and studies of barangay VAW desks show that desks can exist while lacking equipment, resources, and clearly qualified officers (Consignado et al., 2022) and that their functioning depends on local capacity and commitment (Umali, 2024). The participants' accounts suggest that, in their barangays, such mechanisms are not experienced as available avenues for reporting discrimination. The data do not show whether a desk exists in these barangays, and this remains a question for the local government units concerned.

Overall, this theme illustrates that LGBTQIA+ members in Ubay face multi-layered structural barriers. Overcoming these challenges requires local government units and barangay councils to establish functional protection desks, gender-sensitivity training, and inclusive policy frameworks.

In relation to the second research question, the theme shows that the challenges LGBTQIA+ members encounter in striving to belong are not confined to individual prejudice. They arise from the combined effect of family rejection, restrictive institutional practices, the absence of reporting mechanisms, and entrenched cultural and religious norms.

Theme 3. Redefining Societal Belonging, Cultivating Inner Strength, and Demanding Institutional Inclusion

The third theme encapsulates the transformative realizations, psychological growth, and advocacy perspectives developed by LGBTQIA+ members through their experiences with adversity. Participants reflected on how navigating discrimination reshaped their understanding of equality and belonging, defining true inclusion as being accepted authentically without needing to hide their identity. Furthermore, participants highlighted the growth of personal resilience, self-worth, and a collective determination to demand concrete anti-discrimination policies and safe community spaces.

One participant expressed a fundamental realization regarding identity and authentic belonging:

> **P6:** *"I realized that belonging is not about changing who I am to fit in, but about living authentically while demanding equal respect and institutional protection."*

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Another participant highlighted the development of internal strength and self-worth:

> **P7:** *"Navigating judgment taught me to value myself first; people's prejudice cannot diminish my dignity, capabilities, or right to be treated equally."*

A third participant reflected on the urgent institutional changes required from municipal and barangay leaders:

> **P8:** *"Our local government needs to pass and strictly enforce an Anti-Discrimination Ordinance so that LGBTQIA+ members feel genuinely safe, respected, and included."*

The responses indicate an evolution in how LGBTQIA+ individuals conceptualize their position in society. Rather than internalizing stigma or accepting conditional tolerance, participants assert their right to equal citizenship. They recognize that personal resilience must be paired with structural advocacy to build a truly inclusive community.

The participants' quotes support this theme by consistently emphasizing authentic self-expression, internal dignity, and constructive recommendations for local policy reform. Their reflections demonstrate that enduring social adversity can foster proactive civic agency.

Discussion

These findings align with Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy of Needs Theory, illustrating that fulfilling love and belongingness needs is essential for personal growth and self-actualization. Furthermore, these realizations mirror the empirical conclusions of Baams (2025) and Ildefonso (2024), who emphasized that empowering gender minorities through inclusive policies, safe community spaces, and formal legal protection is essential for converting social tolerance into genuine equality.

P8's call for an Anti-Discrimination Ordinance is consistent with the policy context. The national SOGIESC Equality Bill remained pending (House of Representatives of the Philippines, 2025); only 21 of 1,634 cities and municipalities and six of 81 provinces were reported to have ordinances (United Nations Philippines, n.d.), and a provincial ordinance in Bohol was reported to have been blocked in December 2024 (The Bohol Tribune, 2024). The PCW (2019) also recommended mechanisms to monitor, report, and record SOGIE-based discrimination and to provide redress, which parallels the participants' concern for functional avenues of complaint. Given the uneven count of ordinances across sources, these figures are indicative and not exact.

The theme further shows resilience alongside constrained belonging. Polinar (2022) reported generally good mental health and high grades among LGBTQ college students in Bohol, with social well-being the lowest domain. The present participants' accounts are compatible with that pattern: P7 describes valuing oneself despite prejudice, while P6 defines belonging as living authentically and not as changing oneself. Reviews of rural LGBTQ+ health similarly describe support networks and community as facilitators of well-being (Nic Giolla Easpaig et al., 2022). The comparison with United States rural data (The Trevor Project, 2021) is indicative only.

Overall, this theme demonstrates that LGBTQIA+ members in Ubay possess remarkable resilience and a clear vision for social inclusion. By translating these community insights into actionable municipal policies and local support programs, local stakeholders can guarantee equality, dignity, and a true sense of belonging for all residents.

In relation to the third research question, the theme shows that the realizations participants gain are both personal and civic. Personally, they come to define belonging as living authentically and to value themselves despite prejudice. Civically, they call on local government to enact and enforce protective policy, which also reflects the localized recommendations sought by the fourth research question.

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Integrated Discussion of the Themes in Relation to the Research Objectives

Taken together, the three themes address the research questions that guided the study. Theme 1 describes how LGBTQIA+ members experience gender discrimination in their daily lives, particularly in school (Research Question 1); Theme 2 identifies the structural, familial, institutional, and cultural challenges they encounter (Research Question 2); and Theme 3 captures the realizations they gain and the institutional changes they call for (Research Questions 3 and 4). The recommendations of the study build on all three themes and are presented in the final section. Table 3 summarizes these relationships.

Table 3. Relationship of the Themes to the Research Objectives

Research Objective	Theme	Central Meaning	Theoretical and Empirical Support
Objective 1: Explore the daily lived experiences of LGBTQIA+ members in relation to gender discrimination and social belonging	Theme 1	Daily microaggressions, school stigma, and protective self-concealment	Stigma Theory (Goffman, 1963); Ching (2025); Woodford (2023)
Objective 2: Identify the structural, socio-cultural, familial, and personal challenges	Theme 2	Family rejection, institutional hurdles, and conservative cultural norms that compound one another	Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979); Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977); Manalastas (2022); Alibudbud (2024)
Objective 3: Understand the realizations and shifts in perspective gained from discrimination and resilience	Theme 3	Redefined belonging, inner strength, and demand for institutional inclusion	Hierarchy of Needs Theory (Maslow, 1943); Baams (2025); Ildefonso (2024)
Objective 4: Gather and analyze localized recommendations proposed by participants	Themes 2–3	Participants' calls for functional protection desks, an Anti-Discrimination Ordinance, and inclusive policies and community spaces	Addressed in the Conclusions and Recommendations

Read together, the themes show that the daily microaggressions and school stigma experienced by participants (Theme 1) are reinforced by family rejection, institutional hurdles, and conservative cultural norms (Theme 2), and that participants respond by developing resilience and a clear vision of belonging as living authentically while asserting rights to equal dignity and institutional protection (Theme 3). This is consistent with the conclusion of the study that gender discrimination in rural Ubay is both an interpersonal and a systemic challenge.

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Table 4. Integration of the Themes with the Related Literature

Theme	Participants' Accounts	Related Literature	Convergence or Nuance
Theme 1	Whispering, sarcasm, and exclusion at school; adjusting behavior, skipping activities, staying quiet	Concealment and mental health (Pachankis et al., 2020); school bullying (CHR, 2019; DepEd, 2017)	Concealment protects in the moment but carries a psychological cost; school protections exist but implementation was found unmonitored
Theme 2	Family rejection rooted in religion; lack of reporting avenues; traditional beliefs limiting participation	Conditional acceptance (Macabangon et al., 2024; Domingo & Escobido, 2024); barangay desks (Consignado et al., 2022; Umali, 2024)	Family response may be layered and not uniform; desks can exist without adequate resources, and the present data do not show whether desks exist locally
Theme 3	Belonging as living authentically; valuing oneself; call for an Anti-Discrimination Ordinance	Ordinance coverage (PCW, 2019; United Nations Philippines, n.d.; The Bohol Tribune, 2024); Bohol students (Polinar, 2022)	Local ordinances are the main available protection; resilience and constrained belonging can coexist

Table 4 shows that the participants' accounts converge with the literature on the costs of concealment, the gap between school policy and practice, the layered character of family and religious acceptance, and the weakness of local reporting mechanisms and ordinances. The comparison also shows where the present data add local detail and where they stop. For example, the accounts describe the experience of lacking avenues to report but do not establish whether a desk exists in the barangays concerned.

Implications of the Findings

For schools and educators, the findings point to the school environment as a primary site of daily microaggressions and protective self-concealment. School leadership and educators are therefore called upon to challenge discriminatory behaviors through awareness programs, inclusive policies, and visible anti-stigma initiatives.

For local government units and barangay councils, the findings indicate that the absence of clear avenues for reporting discrimination leaves LGBTQIA+ members without formal institutional protection. Functional protection desks, gender-sensitivity training, and inclusive policy frameworks respond directly to the barriers that participants described, and the participants' own call for an Anti-Discrimination Ordinance reinforces this direction.

For the wider community and for LGBTQIA+ members themselves, the findings show that resilience and advocacy are already present among participants, and that translating these community insights into actionable municipal policies and local support programs can help guarantee equality, dignity, and a true sense of belonging for all residents.

Limitations of the Study

The findings should be read in light of several limits. The study was conducted in three barangays of one municipality with fifteen participants who self-identified as LGBTQIA+. As in other qualitative inquiry, its purpose was deep, contextualized understanding and not statistical generalization, so the themes describe the experiences of these participants and may be transferable to similar rural settings only with care. Eight participant excerpts (P1 to P8) are presented, and the themes rest on the full set of interviews. The accounts are self-reported, and the study did not gather the perspectives of family members, school officials, barangay officials, or health

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workers, whose roles the participants describe. The comparisons with national and international literature are interpretive and do not test hypotheses.

Directions for Future Research

The findings may serve as a baseline for further work. Studies in other municipalities of Bohol and the Visayas would show whether the themes are shared or specific to Biabas, Cagting, and Juagdan. Studies that include school officials, barangay officials, parents, and religious leaders could compare how each group understands the same circumstances. Assessments of whether barangay desks and school reporting mechanisms are functional, and whether they receive SOGIESC-related complaints, would address a question that the present data raise but cannot answer. Mixed-methods studies could combine the participants' accounts with measures of well-being, and evaluations of local ordinances, where they exist, could document their effects.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of Findings

Based on the responses of the participants, the following findings were drawn:

Enduring Verbal Harassment, Bullying, and Social Exclusion. The findings revealed that LGBTQIA+ members in Ubay frequently experience verbal harassment, bullying, and exclusion in schools, workplaces, and public spaces. These negative encounters diminish their self-confidence and contribute to emotional struggles such as sadness, anxiety, and fear. Many participants cope by concealing their identity or avoiding judgmental environments, which restricts their freedom of expression. Overall, the findings emphasize that discrimination directly undermines mental well-being and prevents individuals from fully participating in society.

Confronting Structural Barriers, Cultural Biases, and Institutional Neglect. The findings showed that participants encounter structural and cultural obstacles that perpetuate discrimination. Participants reported challenges such as biased treatment from community leaders, lack of inclusive policies, and cultural stereotypes that label LGBTQIA+ identities as unacceptable. Weak enforcement of protective laws and limited institutional support further intensify these struggles. These barriers discourage LGBTQIA+ members from asserting their rights and reinforce systemic inequality. Overall, the study highlights that addressing both institutional neglect and cultural prejudice is essential to promote equality and inclusion in Ubay.

Developing Awareness, Advocacy, and Collective Realizations. The findings revealed that, despite discrimination, LGBTQIA+ members cultivate resilience and a deeper awareness of the importance of equality and acceptance. Participants recognized that genuine belonging requires both personal courage and collective advocacy. They emphasized the need for continuous education, awareness campaigns, and stronger community leadership to challenge stereotypes and foster inclusivity. These realizations reflect the participants' understanding that sustainable social change depends on both individual empowerment and institutional commitment. Overall, the findings suggest that strengthening advocacy efforts and community participation can promote a safer and more inclusive environment for LGBTQIA+ members in Ubay.

Conclusions

The study concludes that gender discrimination in Ubay significantly affects the lived experiences of LGBTQIA+ members. Specifically, the following conclusions are drawn from the findings:

1. Discrimination manifests in schools, workplaces, healthcare, and public spaces, leading to emotional distress and loss of confidence.
2. Challenges such as unfair policies, cultural conservatism, and lack of legal protection hinder equality and inclusion.
3. Despite these barriers, LGBTQIA+ members show resilience and recognize the importance of acceptance and belonging.

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4. Discrimination is both a personal and a systemic issue that requires collective action. Theories such as Stigma Theory and Social Identity Theory explain how prejudice and exclusion shape identity and belonging, and the literature likewise supports that discrimination weakens mental health, limits opportunities, and reinforces inequality. Therefore, promoting equality, respect, and inclusion is essential for the well-being and social integration of LGBTQIA+ individuals in Ubay.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and the conclusions of the study, the recommendations are the following:

1. **Education Programs.** Schools under the K to 12 Curriculum, particularly in the HUMSS strand, should adopt inclusive policies, awareness campaigns, and counseling services to ensure safe and supportive learning environments for LGBTQIA+ students, consistent with the revised anti-bullying rules (DepEd, 2025).
2. **Community Interventions.** Local government units and organizations should establish community-based programs that promote acceptance and inclusion. Awareness drives, seminars, and support groups can help reduce prejudice and stereotypes. These initiatives will strengthen social cohesion and protect LGBTQIA+ rights.
3. **Policy Development.** The LGU of Ubay should pass ordinances that protect LGBTQIA+ members from discrimination in education, employment, and healthcare, and local government units and barangay councils should establish functional protection desks and gender-sensitivity training. Policies must ensure equal opportunities and safe spaces for all individuals regardless of gender identity. This will foster a more inclusive and respectful society.
4. **Healthcare Support.** Health centers should provide non-discriminatory services and train staff to respect diverse identities. Accessible counseling and medical support must be offered to LGBTQIA+ individuals without fear of judgment. This will improve both physical and mental well-being in the community.
5. **Family and Religious Engagement.** Programs should encourage families and religious leaders to support LGBTQIA+ members through dialogue and education. Promoting acceptance at home and in faith communities will reduce isolation and rejection. This will help LGBTQIA+ individuals feel valued and included in society.
6. **Future Researchers.** Future researchers are encouraged to use this study as a reference for related studies on LGBTQIA+ experiences, gender discrimination, and social inclusion in different communities and contexts. Such studies may also contribute to the existing body of knowledge and encourage further research.

Rationale for the Recommendations

The recommendations follow from the themes of the study and from the policy context reviewed in the Introduction. The first recommendation, on education programs, responds to Theme 1. Participants described mockery, gossip, and exclusion in school, and the CHR (2019) and DepEd (2017) recognize the school as a site of bullying of LGBTQ children. The revised anti-bullying rules already require a standard policy and a Learner Formation Officer in each school (DepEd, 2025), so the recommendation concerns making those mechanisms visible and trusted by LGBTQIA+ learners.

The second and third recommendations, on community interventions and policy development, respond mainly to Theme 2 and Theme 3. Participants reported the lack of clear avenues to report discrimination and called for an Anti-Discrimination Ordinance. In the absence of a national law (House of Representatives of the Philippines, 2025), local ordinances and functional desks are the levels at which protection can be provided, and the PCW (2019) recommended monitoring, reporting, and redress mechanisms. Because the Safe Spaces Act already requires barangay desks (PCW, 2021), the recommendation to establish functional protection desks with gender-sensitivity training is framed as making existing mandates workable for SOGIESC-related complaints.

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The fourth and fifth recommendations, on healthcare support and on family and religious engagement, respond to the participants' and the literature's accounts of discriminatory environments and conditional acceptance. Studies show that family and religious values shape how acceptance is given (Domingo & Escobido, 2024; Macabangon et al., 2024) and that religion remains central to many LGBTQ Filipinos (del Castillo et al., 2021). Dialogue and education with families and religious leaders therefore engage values that participants and their families already hold. The sixth recommendation follows from the limits stated above and invites the further work outlined under Directions for Future Research.

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COMPLIANCE WITH ETHICAL STANDARDS

Disclosure of Conflict of Interest

The authors of this manuscript certify that the substance of this research is free of conflicts of interest. We attest that this investigation was carried out impartially, without any financial or personal ties that may have influenced how the findings were presented or how the results were interpreted. We also commit to promptly disclosing any conflicts of interest that may arise in the future.

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