

# Breaking the Silence: The Lived Experiences of the LGBTQ Inmates as Victims of Sexual Harassment

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## Abstract

LGBTQIA+ individuals (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, intersex, asexual) in jails often face heightened risks of sexual harassment—incidents that frequently go unreported, unaddressed, and unresolved due to fear, stigma, or systemic neglect. This qualitative study investigated the barriers that prevented LGBTQ persons deprived of liberty from reporting such abuses, drawing on their lived experiences to identify underlying patterns. Conducted at Pampanga Provincial Jail with five participants, the study utilized Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) through in-depth, open-ended interviews to capture each participant's narrative in their own terms. Thematic analysis revealed four key themes: (1) vulnerability to harassment due to sexual and gender identity, (2) silencing and suppression of LGBTQ victimhood, (3) coping through personal strength and spirituality, and (4) perceived safety and dignity inside correctional facilities. These findings offer a nuanced understanding of the emotional, cultural, and institutional factors that shaped participants' experiences and responses. The study underscores the urgent need for inclusive policies and trauma-informed support systems within jails, contributing to broader efforts to protect the rights, dignity, and welfare of LGBTQ individuals in the Philippine correctional system.

**Keywords:** LGBTQ; persons deprived of liberty; sexual harassment; phenomenology

## Introduction

### Background or Context:

The issue of sexual harassment continues to be a prevalent concern among people from different communities, including the community of LGBTQ or the “Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, Transgenders and Queers” minority, who are known for their vulnerabilities of enduring the interpersonal and intrapersonal problems revolving their sexual orientation, gender identity and expression known as “SOGIE” (Psychological Association of the Philippines, 2020). Although the Philippines has provided legal protections such as the Republic Act 7877 or the Anti-Sexual Harassment Act of 1995, Republic Act No 11313 or Safe Spaces Act, and its society becoming more aware of the community's struggles, they have been targeted for harassment due to their sexuality, stigmas and further discrimination.

In correctional institutions, persons deprived of liberty known as “PDLs”, can also be victims of sexual harassment within jails and prisons. In the study of Jenness (2021), as well as Marcellin and McCoy (2021), LGBTQ detainees in the United States have substantially elevated rates of sexual victimization in contrast to their cisgender counterparts. It is found that this vulnerability is frequently compounded by systemic concerns such as discrimination, stigma, and an absence of protective actions. Another study (Brooke et al., 2022) examines transgender women's coping mechanisms for mitigating or repelling sexual approaches, which vary from physical aggression to demonstrating dominance, or to flirty conduct meant for reducing conflict. According to Marcellin and McCoy (2021), numerous correctional facilities struggle to properly handle LGBTQ inmates' special needs, resulting in an environment that frequently ignores or even worsens their vulnerabilities. This problem is exacerbated by a lack of employee education on LGBTQ issues and insufficient reporting systems, which deter victims from coming forward because of worrying about punishment or doubt.

While international research has shed light on the experiences of LGBTQ individuals in correctional settings, there remains a notable gap when it comes to the Philippine context. Peer-reviewed studies that focus specifically on the challenges faced by LGBTQ persons deprived of liberty, particularly their vulnerability to sexual harassment and the barriers they face in reporting it, are extremely limited. Much of the current discourse comes from non-academic sources such as advocacy groups, NGO reports, or media coverage. As a result, there is little formal research documenting how these issues play out within Philippine jails and prisons. The lack of evidence creates a critical blind spot for policymakers and correctional administrators, making it difficult to design appropriate, responsive systems of protection. Given the reality that most Philippine correctional facilities are overcrowded and under-resourced, gaining a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of LGBTQ inmates is both timely and necessary to ensure their rights, dignity, and safety are upheld.

In response to this gap, the present study examined the lived experiences of five LGBTQ PDLs in Pampanga Provincial Jail who had encountered sexual harassment. Using an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) framework, the research aimed to explore the emotional, social, and institutional factors that influence whether victims choose to disclose or remain silent. By centering participant narratives and identifying key themes in their experiences, the study provides groundwork for improving institutional grievance mechanisms and fostering safer, more inclusive correctional environments in the Philippines.

### **Research Question or Problem Statement:**

This study aimed to explore the responses of the sexually harassed LGBTQ persons deprived of liberty in the Pampanga Provincial Jail (PPJ) collected from in-depth interviews as a qualitative approach. To explore these issues, this study examines the research questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of LGBTQ persons deprived of liberty who are victims of sexual harassment?
2. What are their coping mechanisms in response to being sexually harassed?

**Significance of the Study:**

This study focused on the lived experiences of sexual harassment among LGBTQ persons deprived of liberty at the Pampanga Provincial Jail. Despite growing awareness of sexual orientation and gender identity concerns, many individuals from the LGBTQ minority experience significant hurdles in reporting abuse. Its goal is to investigate and identify these elements to understand better the difficulties of sexual harassment encountered by LGBTQ inmates, ultimately leading to supporting the development of rules and measures to improve their rights and welfare.

**Scope and Delimitations:**

This study sought to gain insight into the lived experiences of LGBTQ inmates who have suffered sexual harassment inside jails to advocate for better security and grievance procedures in correctional institutions. It is confined to LGBTQ people, eliminating heterosexuals, and did not address any other types of discrimination, nor will it try to measure the frequency of sexual harassment. It included in-depth, open-ended interviews with the said specific respondents who have experienced sexual harassment to document their experiences and the difficulties of what they have endured. It targeted persons aged 21 to 59 from varied socioeconomic backgrounds within the provincial jail of Pampanga, to provide the liberty needed to address sensitive concerns.

**1. Review of Related Literature****1.1. Introduction to the Literature Review:**

The current study aims to conduct in-depth interviews on the lived experiences of LGBTQ persons deprived of liberty as victims of sexual harassment in PPJ as a phenomenological study. This review of related literature intends to investigate the frequency, challenges, and consequences of sexual harassment faced by LGBTQ people and males, offering insight into the complicated nature of tackling the matter in diverse cultural and institutional settings.

**1.2. The Prevalence and Vulnerability of LGBTQs to Sexual Harassment**

The issue of sexual harassment continues to be a prevalent concern among communities around the world, especially for the LGBTQ minority who are more vulnerable to such offenses. In a study by Schuyler et al. (2020), 80.7% of LGB and 83.9% of transgenders in the United States military have faced sexual harassment, which is primarily motivated by their sense of self and gender deviation from norms. Another factor would be power dynamics, bias, and gendered enforcement. Especially, transgender people who are viewed to be susceptible as a result of societal biases about power and gender roles (Brassel et al., 2019). Cultural stigmatization is also found to be a factor in their vulnerability to such cases of harassment and discrimination, which is highly influenced by power and gender roles as driven by society (Cubrich, 2020).

The victimization of sexual harassment towards people in the spectrum of sexuality and gender identity continues to be one of the relevant issues they face. Like for example, according to The Trevor Project (2024) in the United States, almost two-fifths (39%) of LGBTQ+ youths reported being forced to perform sexual acts they were reluctant to do. In a study by the Williams Institute at UCLA School of

Law (2023), a quarter (25.9%) of members of the said community were stated to have experienced workplace sexual harassment as a result of their gender identity and sexuality at some time in their employment. An increase in harassment has been observed by the European Union's Fundamental Rights Agency (Guillot & Coi, 2024), which indicated that more than half of the LGBTQ+ community in Europe faced harassment in their everyday lives in 2023, up from a rate of 37 percent in 2019. A private study in Japan by Hidaka (Kyodo News, 2020) showed that almost 40 percent of the 10,769 people in the minority also experienced sexual harassment, to which the author expressed his remarks for the government to "improve its support system that is designed to help sexual minorities and male victims, not only women". These high rates of sexual harassment are proven by research that urges authorities to create better systems to mitigate them.

### 1.3. Forms of Sexual Harassment

Dubey et al.'s (2021) research "Perception of Students Regarding Sexual Harassment" defines sexual harassment as unwelcome sexually motivated conduct displayed through physical, verbal, and nonverbal conduct.

Physical types of sexual harassment, including unwanted contact, groping, and sexual approaches, are common in both public and professional settings. Dubey et al. (2021) recognized physical harassment as a serious hazard, especially in public settings such as public transit, where females frequently suffer fear and nervousness as a result of the possibility of being physically harassed. Comparably, Qadir (2022) discovered that unwanted contact is frequent in work settings, with offenders using power dynamics to intimidate or compel victims, leaving them with long-term repercussions such as stress and decreased confidence. Cabeza-Monroy and Perea-Fernandez (2020) underline that physical harassment is frequently linked to institutional power inequalities, with recurrent undesired physical contact occurring in a humiliating or toxic setting, demanding clear proof to back up the act in question.

Verbal types of sexual harassment, such as provocative suggestions, name-calling, and inappropriate jokes, are common in a variety of settings and have severe psychological consequences for victims. In a study of Muslim women, usual conduct such as whistling and disparaging comments was found to cause dismay, nervousness, and unease, frequently deterring victims from reporting their harassers in Indonesia (Amarnes et al., 2023). In the same way, verbal street harassment is viewed as a demonstration of superiority, with male harassers asserting authority over female victims via sexually explicit statements, maintaining power relations, and causing long-term psychological damage (Nitschke & Lam, 2020). Verbal sexual harassment, notably sexual insults and slurs, is especially common among teenagers, with males victimized more often, indicating the early development of power dynamics between genders (Rolfe & Schroeder, 2020).

Cabeza-Monroy and Perea-Fernandez (2020) referred to non-verbal sexual harassment as "physical, verbal, or non-verbal behaviors of a sexual nature that create an intimidating, hostile, or degrading environment, often through actions such as suggestive gestures, prolonged staring, or inappropriate body language". Adler et al. (2021) discovered that nonverbal harassment has a major influence on healthcare professionals, triggering psychological discomfort and poor mental state in circumstances where such activities go unaddressed. Gråstén & Kokkonen (2020) discovered that non-

verbal indications, such as unwelcome sexual gestures, intensified into verbal and physical harassment in schools and universities, demonstrating how non-verbal harassment frequently leads to greater serious forms of abuse. Furthermore, Yosep et al. (2023) discovered that nonverbal actions, such as improper glances, considerably influence nurses' psychological discomfort in mental institutions, demonstrating the damage that nonverbal harassment imposes in high-stress situations.

These results demonstrate that sexual harassment, in all of its forms—physical, verbal, and nonverbal—has a profound impact on victims, with public areas and institutional settings being high-risk contexts. Tackling these many forms of harassment necessitates an extensive awareness of how they arise across distinct interpersonal and institutional situations.

#### **1.4. Effects of Sexual Harassment**

Sexual harassment has an important and broad effect on victims, damaging both their psychological and emotional health. Victims frequently experience depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress symptoms, according to a study conducted by Marcos et al. (2023), which discovered that sexual harassment among teenagers has moderate impacts on integrating psychological disorders such as depression, anxiety, and bodily concerns. Additionally, Rihal et al. (2020) found that sexual harassment in medical facilities causes mental discomfort, difficulties communicating, and decreased cooperation, eventually compromising the treatment of patients.

It affects victims' self-esteem as well as their social connections. Cesario (2020) discovered that both male and female victims of sexual misconduct at work had lower self-worth, with those who were men regarded as having endured less, exacerbating their sense of seclusion and discrimination. Furthermore, Pinchevsky et al. (2019) pointed out the detrimental effects of sexual harassment on undergraduates, stating that those targeted by non-contact sexual harassment expressed concerns of intimidation and discomfort, which resulted in habits of avoidance and elevated social exclusion.

It also has long-term consequences for the victims' occupational careers, as well as their lives. Zeighami et al. (2021) discovered that Iranian nurses who had been victims of occupational harassment reported a "loss of individual and social identity," which had a detrimental effect on their mental wellness, physical health, and family connections. This is consistent with the results of Nuraida et al. (2023), who researched victims of sexual harassment on online platforms and reported that self-blame was a standard reaction, impeding victims' capacity to seek personal development and heal from trauma (Nuraida et al., 2023).

Finally, studies have found that sexual harassment has an impact on physical health. In the study by Kaufman et al. (2019), undergraduates who were harassed reported medical symptoms such as migraines, difficulty sleeping, and digestive issues, as well as psychological impacts including emotional weariness and greater drug usage. These combined impacts illustrate the severe damage caused by sexual harassment, ranging from acute emotional distress to long-term medical and social implications.



### 1.5. Sexual Harassment in the Philippines

In the Philippines, the government has created laws against these acts. They passed the Republic Act No. 7877, known as The Anti-Sexual Harassment Act of 1995, which provides the foundation of policies fighting sexual harassment with its definition as “committed by an employer, employee, manager, supervisor, agent of the employer, teacher, instructor, professor, coach, trainer, or any person who, having authority, influence or moral ascendancy over another in a work or training or education environment, demands, requests or otherwise requires any sexual favor from the other, regardless of whether the demand, request or requirement for submission is accepted or not by the object of said act.” This law was later updated with the Republic Act No. 11313 known as the Safe Spaces Act, which covered sexual harassment on the internet and addresses all types of gender-based sexual harassment such as cat-calling and any vulgar sexual conduct done against another. (Philippine Commission on Women, 2021).

However, despite the presence of our legal frameworks in combatting against them, there are still reported cases in the country. In a research conducted by Corpuz et al. (2023), it is found that young female people, particularly those aged 18 to 25, are more exposed to sexual harassment on congested public transit. The study highlights poor reporting rates due to a lack of knowledge and ineffective reporting methods. Another would be cases in the media industry, where colleagues and news agencies sexually harass female journalists. Still, they typically do not disclose the incidences for fear of reprisal and jeopardizing professional contacts (Ellao et al., 2021).

Aside from women, transgender women and men who have coitus with males experience discrimination when accessing HIV treatment in Manila. Practitioners expressed difficulties in supporting these persons' health requirements, indicating that prejudice and a lack of gender sensitivity remain in healthcare environments (Restar et al., 2020). In General Santos City, the tuna processing industry mainly targets male workers in sexual harassment who are marginalized because of their socioeconomic and migrant status. These men who frequently engage in physically strenuous work are at high risk of experiencing harassment while on the job. Unequal power dynamics, in addition to various factors like age, education, and migrant status, worsen their encounters with harassment, underscoring the need for policies that consider gender to tackle these systematic problems (Prieto-Carolino et al., 2021). They are also victimized in work settings, which is a neglected issue because of deep-rooted cultural beliefs that minimize male victimization. Those who are subject to harassment frequently encounter obstacles when it comes to reporting incidents since longstanding gender norms reinforce the idea that men are unlikely to be targeted. This negative stereotype hinders people from reporting and contributes to a culture of silence, enabling workplace harassment to continue (Paudel & Khanal, 2023).

The LGBTQ are also victimized, as there are cases notably showcasing them as one of the vulnerable groups to the said crime. In a podcast of UPLB Gender Center's GendER sessions, one of the three queer speakers talked about being harassed and sexually assaulted as a first-year student in a public university (Araguas, 2020). Sebrero (2024) conducted a study in Ozamis City, where the findings indicate that people belonging to the LGBTQ+ community are nonetheless subjected to emotional, sexual, and physical violence despite its low frequency. Another article showed the Supreme Court of

the Philippines reprimanded five lawyers after posting homophobic statements on social media (Pio, 2023)

Harassment can happen in a variety of spaces, including the place of employment, educational institutions, public areas, and on the internet, emphasizing the need for stronger enforcement of these laws and increased assistance for LGBTQ victims.

### **1.6. Inmates as Victims of Sexual Harassment**

Handling cases of sexual harassment in penal institutions, particularly among LGBTQ detainees, necessitates an integrated strategy that extends beyond law abidance. Despite federal mandates in the United States such as the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA), which penalizes sexual misconduct by correctional officers, research shows substantial differences in how these laws are implemented across states, leaving discrepancies in safeguarding for vulnerable groups like the LGBTQ (Kowalski et al., 2020).

Regarding the prevalence of such cases, sexual harassment in correctional facilities adversely impacts specific groups based on gender and sexual orientation. According to research, over 200,000 jailed people in the United States are sexually victimized each year, with women, individuals who identify as LGBTQ+, and juveniles being particularly susceptible (Synovec & Terry, 2023). Females are more likely to be sexually victimized than males, with 15.3% reporting more frequent and serious attacks (Caravaca-Sánchez et al., 2022). Furthermore, LGBTQ+ detainees are especially susceptible, with higher rates of sexual harassment and assault, emphasizing the demand for stronger institutional safeguards (Redcay et al., 2020).

There are studies showcasing the underreporting of such cases, which also show the complexity of barriers to reporting in institutional facilities. For instance, they face considerable prejudice in different settings, notably the justice system. These impediments contribute to underreporting of sexual harassment owing to concerns of unfair treatment and distrust in the system (Casey et al., 2019). LGBTQ inmates frequently encounter various challenges to reporting sexual harassment, such as fear of repercussions, humiliation, and stress about being falsely understood. These difficulties are exacerbated by institutional prejudices inside the penal system, making reporting unsafe for victims (Butler et al., 2023). They confront cultural prejudices and systemic impediments, such as a lack of understanding, legislative gaps, and administrative inefficiencies, that limit their capacity to file complaints of sexual harassment or pursue redress in correctional authorities (Li, 2022). They also report other barriers to receiving proper psychological help, limiting their capacity to report mistreatment. Institutional prejudice and a lack of awareness of their concerns within jails aggravate these issues (Donohue et al., 2021). As a consequence, sexual harassment in these situations frequently goes unreported, continuing a cycle of maltreatment and marginalization for this disadvantaged demographic.

### **1.7. Philosophical Framework:**

This study is grounded in existential phenomenology, a philosophical tradition that prioritizes the exploration of lived, embodied human experience within its real-world context. Rooted in the works of Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, existential phenomenology emphasizes the notion that

individuals do not exist in isolation, but are always already embedded in a web of social, cultural, and institutional relationships, which is a condition Heidegger termed being-in-the-world (*In-der-Welt-sein*). This idea is central to understanding how LGBTQ persons deprived of liberty experience sexual harassment: not merely as isolated incidents, but as deeply embodied encounters shaped by power dynamics, gender norms, and carceral structures.

This framework is particularly appropriate for the current study because it allows for an in-depth examination of how LGBTQ inmates interpret and make meaning of their experiences of harassment within the confined and often hostile environment of a correctional facility. By applying existential phenomenology, the study aims to uncover how these individuals experience emotions such as vulnerability, fear, shame, and silence in relation to their social positioning and bodily existence in jail. Their sense of self is not formed in a vacuum, as it is developed and challenged in interaction with institutional authority, fellow inmates, and cultural attitudes toward gender and sexuality.

Existential phenomenology also engages with the concept of authenticity and the struggle for self-definition under conditions of oppression. For LGBTQ inmates, experiences of harassment often result in a disruption of autonomy, a fracturing of identity, and a confrontation with existential isolation. These align with Heidegger's notion of thrownness, or the idea that individuals are "thrown" into circumstances not of their choosing and must navigate meaning within those limits. This study explores how participants manage their identity, safety, and dignity while being "thrown" into the rigid, often dehumanizing environment of incarceration.

Furthermore, this approach enables a nuanced understanding of how systemic forces—such as patriarchal power relations, institutional neglect, and stigma—are not abstract ideas, but are concretely lived and felt by individuals. Previous research applying this lens has shown how sexual harassment in institutional contexts is deeply tied to power hierarchies and gendered interactions, leading to feelings of objectification, erasure, and existential unease (Tenbrunsel et al., 2019; Asrar et al., 2019; Babulski, 2023). These insights resonate strongly with the experiences of LGBTQ inmates, whose identities often place them at the intersection of multiple forms of marginalization.

By adopting existential phenomenology as its philosophical foundation, this study does not merely describe incidents of harassment; it delves into the subjective, emotional, and existential dimensions of those experiences. This orientation allows the researcher to ask not only what happened, but how it was lived, like how participants make sense of being silenced, exposed, or affirmed within the carceral world. In doing so, the study offers a deeper and more humanizing account of sexual harassment than approaches grounded solely in behavioral or structural analysis.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Study Design:

This qualitative study used Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to explore the lived experiences of LGBTQ inmates at Pampanga Provincial Jail who had experienced sexual harassment. IPA was chosen for its strength in uncovering how individuals make sense of complex, personal experiences within their social and institutional contexts (Nulty et al., 2019). This approach allowed the



researcher to gather in-depth, first-person accounts through open-ended, semi-structured interviews—ideal for understanding identity, trauma, and resilience.

## **2.2. Study Participants**

Participants were LGBTQ inmates housed in both male and female dormitories at PPJ. All identified within the LGBTQ spectrum and had experienced sexual harassment during incarceration. The goal was to center voices from a population that is often marginalized and at heightened risk of abuse in correctional settings. The recruitment of respondents is based on the study's goal of understanding the lived experiences of a vulnerable population that is frequently disregarded, specifically in correctional contexts where power relations and social structures raise the risk of harassment.

## **2.3. Sample Size**

In qualitative research, a sample size of six to ten participants is often considered sufficient to uncover thematic patterns while remaining manageable for in-depth analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Although the original target for this study was six participants, which were aligned with the interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach, only five individuals were ultimately able to participate. This remained consistent with the IPA framework, which emphasizes the depth and richness of individual lived experiences over broad generalizability. Smaller sample sizes are particularly well-suited to phenomenological studies, allowing researchers to explore nuanced, personal insights in detail. The aim was to reach data saturation, where no new themes emerged, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the lived experiences of LGBTQ persons deprived of liberty at the Pampanga Provincial Jail. As White (2019) noted, smaller samples enhance interpretive depth, while Bartholomew et al. (2021) similarly argued that smaller participant groups often lead to more meaningful and accurate representations of participants' experiences. In contrast, larger samples may dilute the depth of individual perspectives, which is counterproductive in phenomenological inquiry.

## **2.4. Sampling Method**

The sampling method utilized that are suitable for this study was purposive sampling. According to Palinkas et al. (2013), purposive sampling is the identification and selection of a person or a group of people who are particularly educated about or experienced with a topic of interest. It also generates rich, thorough data by selecting participants with direct experience with the chosen issue of the study, which is critical for the interpretive phenomenological analysis approach, which aims to comprehend the interpretations people give to their experiences (Ames et al. 2019). In this case, it has specific qualifications that align closely with the objectives of the study, as well as be accustomed to its variables, which are LGBTQ inmates who have lived experiences of sexual harassment.

## **2.5. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria:**

The study aimed to have respondents that are similar to Villafuerte's study (2024), which was modified following the elements of the current research. They should be Filipinos, ranging from 21 to 59 years old, identify themselves self within the LGBTQ spectrum, and have experienced sexual harassment within correctional facilities in the Philippines.

However, inmates who have a history of violent or disruptive behavior, undergoing legal proceedings for sexual harassment, have trauma-related mental health conditions, or are perpetrators of sexual harassment were excluded to participate for the safety of the respondents and the researcher. The key reasons for the exclusion criteria are to avoid potential conflicts with judicial processes and ethical implications, to focus on the experiences of victims, to ensure the safety of both the researcher and the participants, as well as the integrity of the study.

To guarantee that the data is localized and to lessen the possible adverse effects of the interview on the participants, participants who are foreigners, are perpetrators of sexual harassment, have a history of violent or disruptive behavior, as well as trauma-related mental health conditions will not be permitted to participate.

## **2.6. Research Instrument**

The online interview was in three phases – background of participants, experiences of sexual harassment, and their coping mechanisms. The first phase focuses on obtaining information regarding the participants' identities, experiences as LGBTQ people, and time in prison. Developing trust and understanding their history is critical for structuring later talks about their harassment experiences. It also asks for any emotional disturbances, for the researcher to exclude participants who may have triggers of traumas. This data is essential to grasp how different demographic characteristics may impact respondents' experiences and interpretations of sexual harassment. The second phase concentrates on extracting thorough, yet polite, narratives of sexual harassment faced by the participants while in jail. Queries must be asked with attention and empathy, allowing respondents to communicate at their own pace. The last phase tries to investigate how respondents have dealt with the trauma of sexual harassment. It examines either internal (emotional and psychological) or external aspects (institutional or personal) of coping with such incidents.

The primary component of the study was the semi-structured interviews, as they are utilized to enable participants to speak about their personal experiences and perspectives in their own words. This technique is crucial to IPA since it investigates how people make meaning of their life events. The researcher was able to ask open-ended questions in the Filipino language to reduce the inconvenience of the interview, establish rapport, promote trust, and gain a thorough grasp of the accounts that encourage prolonged thought and comprehensive answers from respondents, resulting in rich qualitative data required for IPA.

## **2.7. Data Collection**

Since this is a phenomenological study, the major mode of data gathering was in-depth semi-structured interviews. This approach provides flexibility, allowing the researcher to delve deeply into the experiences the respondents had while adhering to a broad interview outline. This method is good for generating rich, comprehensive accounts, making it appropriate for phenomenological research that tries to comprehend persons' lived experiences (Moser & Korstjens, 2017).

The collection of data was done online via E-Dalaw, an alternative service that enables the person deprived of liberty to connect with his/her family through a supervised video call and chat, which

lessens the possible risks of the researcher in the study. In cooperation with the PPJ officers, the researcher requested for their assistance in giving her the list of LGBTQ inmates for the participants in the study, as well as permission to proceed her study in an online set-up. The recruitment of participants for this study will rigorously follow the rules established by the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology, assuring ethical processes and respect for the rights of the persons participating. The researcher will collaborate with the administration to acquire a pre-approved register of LGBTQ detainees who satisfy the inclusion requirements. This list will encompass the profiles of possible participants, including their age, gender identity, and LGBTQ status, assuring differentiation from their cisgender counterparts, in compliance with the BJMP's Comprehensive Operations Manual. Upon completion of the list, the researcher will collaborate with appointed institutional staff to locate and engage eligible subjects in a non-coercive manner. Qualified volunteers were informed about the study's aims.

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The study is undertaken under the thorough supervision of her research adviser, whose experience guarantees strict adherence to methodology and ethical standards. The researcher has adequately prepared by examining related literature, meeting with experts in the field, and participating in discussions on ethical research techniques. A key component of criminology training mandated under RA 11131, which prepares aspiring criminologists for career prospects in corrections and law enforcement, is prior on-the-job training (OJT) in jail facilities, which supports the readiness of an undergraduate researcher to conduct this sensitive study. Furthermore, coordination with experts, such as psychologists and correctional personnel, guarantees that the study was executed with the highest degree of sensitivity and respect for the participants. A psychologist was available during the gathering of data to ensure the mental well-being of both the investigator and the respondents, offering immediate support if necessary.

The collection of data was recorded with the permission of participants. The researcher was assisted with the research adviser, with the psychologist ready on standby for psychological debriefing and guidance purposes. The estimated time of each interview will last around 15 to 30 minutes, depending on the manner of the participant's response. Prior to the actual interview, the researcher will seek a practice interview with her research adviser to review appropriate and inappropriate conduct during the interview.

At the commencement of the session, the researcher informed the participants that they may withdraw from the study at any moment should they experience discomfort. Subsequent to data collection, it was transcribed and organized for analysis.

## **2.8. Analysis of Data**

Audio recordings were transcribed and translated into English, then validated by a communications professor. NVivo software was used to conduct a thematic analysis of the data. This involved identifying recurring patterns, clustering them into themes, and interpreting the meanings behind participant narratives. The goal was not just to describe experiences but to understand how participants interpreted and coped with them, in line with IPA methodology (Noble & Smith, 2013).

## **2.9. Ethical Considerations**

### **Conflict of Interest**

The researcher took precautions to avoid, if not eliminate, any potential conflicts of interest when performing this research. The researcher has no financial interests or links with firms that could influence its conclusions. To uphold the rigor of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), the researcher engaged in bracketing, which is the process of consciously setting aside personal beliefs, assumptions, and prior knowledge of the topic. Reflective journaling and ongoing consultation with a qualitative research advisor were used to ensure that the researcher's interpretations remained grounded in the participants' lived experiences rather than preconceived notions. This practice helped maintain the phenomenological commitment to understand the world as experienced by the participants themselves.

### **Use of Interview Guide**

The researcher designed a three-phase interview guide to gather information from participants. The guide was reviewed by three experts: a qualitative research specialist, a psychometrician, and a guidance counselor, to ensure its validity and reliability in collecting data for this study.

### **Enlistment**

The phenomenological study will first undergo review and approval by the university's Ethics Research Review Committee (ERC) and the academic department of the college before the collection of data begins. Upon approval, the researcher will prepare a formal request letter addressed to the provincial administrator, the governor of Pampanga, and the Warden of the PPJ. This letter will seek permission to conduct in-depth online interviews with LGBTQ persons deprived of liberty in the male and female dormitories via the E-Dalaw platform.

To identify suitable respondents, the researcher will coordinate with the PPJ administration, requesting access to the profiles of inmates under their jurisdiction. In adherence to Section 34, Sub-section 4 of the BJMP's Comprehensive Operations Manual—which mandates the segregation of LGBTQ inmates to prevent abuse—this list was filtered to focus on LGBTQ individuals housed separately from cisgender inmates. Jail staff will assist in locating respondents who meet the study's inclusion criteria.

A purposive sampling method was used to identify potential participants who met the inclusion criteria, which are individuals who identified as LGBTQ and were persons deprived of liberty at Pampanga Provincial Jail. Among this pre-screened group of eligible participants, a fishbowl draw was employed as a fair and non-biased method to select five final participants from those who consented to be involved. This approach ensured ethical selection while maintaining voluntariness and confidentiality. Following this, the Informed Consent Form (ICF) was delivered to the onsite jail officers for dissemination. Participants were given ample time to review the form, which will include details about the study and their rights. If a participant declines to participate, an alternate respondent was chosen through another draw.

To ensure clarity and understanding, the researcher prepared a presentation of the informed consent written in Filipino. Additionally, the researcher's contact details were provided to the jail officers so that participants can seek clarification or ask questions before signing the ICF. The researcher will ask participants about their demographic information, experiences of sexual harassment, and coping mechanisms, ensuring the study is conducted ethically and in alignment with BJMP guidelines.

### **Informed Consent**

Before data collection, subjects must be provided with informed consent. This step entails describing the study's goal, methods, risks, and benefits to respondents, as well as informing them that their participation is entirely voluntary and that they can withdraw at any moment with no consequences. Those who withdraw will no longer be a part of the study. Ensuring participants' confidentiality and identity is crucial, particularly considering the delicate state of the matter in question. To guarantee confidentiality approaches such as anonymous identities and safe data storage were adopted (Peter, 2015).

### **Voluntary Participation**

After consenting to participate, which is completely optional, participants are invited to schedule their interviews at a convenient time for themselves, the jail administrators, and the interviewer. Each interview is expected to last between 30 and 60 minutes. Throughout the process, respondents were informed that they have the option to end the interview at any time if they feel uncomfortable or are experiencing mental distress. The researcher will monitor nonverbal cues that suggest discomfort, and if any are noted, respondents were promptly advised of their choice to skip a question or proceed to the next one, ensuring their comfort. They will also be able to take a break if needed. Additionally, the researcher will ask individuals if they require assistance from a mental health specialist. Any respondent's decision to withdraw during or after the interview was fully respected. Those who wish to withdraw can do so without facing any penalties or future obligations.

### **Vulnerability and Risks**

This research recognizes that LGBTQ inmates, especially those in penology institutions, are a vulnerable demographic because of their disadvantaged status and institutional power dynamics, which frequently heighten the dangers of sexual harassment. Their susceptibility stems from many circumstances, including social stigma, isolation as a minority in a correctional facility, and their



restricted capacity to report or pursue redress for harassment. Furthermore, prisons' hierarchical structure and lack of proper structural protections make them more vulnerable to abuse.

Considering the individuals' vulnerability informed consent is critical. All participants were adults (aged 21 to 59), guaranteeing that they are legally capable of giving complete permission without the requirement for third-party clearance. To uphold their autonomy and preserve their well-being, the consent procedure was fully described, highlighting the voluntary nature of involvement and the opportunity to withdraw at any point. The researcher will make certain that those taking part are fully aware of the study's scope, possible risks, and the confidentiality procedures established to safeguard their identity and personal information.

In addition, consent to participate was carefully handled to avoid compulsion, particularly in the power-imbalance situation of a prison. Recognizing the sensitive nature of their experiences and their disadvantaged situation, respondents were guaranteed that their involvement or reluctance will have no impact on their treatment in the penal institution. The consent procedure was intended to empower subjects by making certain their choice to participate in the study is fully informed and voluntary. In writing the report, real names of the participants, their quotations, or any identifiable information will not be disclosed.

### **Criteria for Withdrawal**

Participants may withdraw from the study at any time without incurring any penalties or consequences. This may occur if they experience emotional or psychological distress during the interview, believe that their privacy is at risk, or no longer desire to share their experiences for any reason. Furthermore, the researcher retains the right to exclude a respondent from the study if they show behavior that impedes the data collection process, which includes giving inaccurate or inconsistent information, demonstrating signs of coercion or undue influence, or not complying with the study protocols. The researcher will promptly dispose of any collected data upon withdrawal, unless the individual involved expressly consents to its use. This guarantees that participants uphold ethical standards and respect their autonomy while maintaining complete control over their input to the research.

### **Privacy and Confidentiality of Data**

The fundamental ethical issue in this study is to respect respondents' privacy and ensure the confidentiality of all acquired data. To accomplish this, the researcher must present a thorough proposal to the institution's Ethics Research Review Committee (ERC) that describes the study's aims, methodologies, and any ethical issues. The ethics committee will assess the proposal and give recommendations to ensure the study meets recognized ethical requirements.

The researcher will follow the Data Privacy Act of 2012, making strict efforts to protect personal information. To preserve the privacy of participants, all information were private before analysis, with any personal details removed. The researcher will have exclusive access to the raw data, which were safely preserved via password security and encrypted cloud-based storage. Information was saved on Google Drive and available exclusively to the researcher using a protected educational email account.

Google Drive's encryption protects data during transit and storage, while two-factor authentication and frequent backups add to the security. The audio recordings of interviews were saved on Google Drive, with transcripts prepared and securely archived. To ensure the data's confidentiality and integrity, further security mechanisms were implemented, such as restricted file access, frequent audits of permissions granted to files, and restriction of illegal sharing. Respondents' information will not be utilized or accessed without their permission, and all data were managed securely and ethically.

### **Minimization of Risks**

In this research, LGBTQ inmates will share their experiences of sexual harassment, a sensitive topic that may cause discomfort and distress. The vulnerabilities faced by this minority, such as societal shame and fear of retaliation, increase the risks involved. To address potential unease, the researcher will clearly explain the study's objectives, methods, and the option to withdraw without consequences. The informed consent procedure will focus on voluntary participation and consider power dynamics in correctional facilities. During interviews, the researcher was attentive to nonverbal signals of discomfort, allowing participants to skip questions or take breaks. Mental health support was provided, and referrals will only be made with individual consent. Participants with a history of severe emotional issues will not be included to safeguard their well-being. Individual information was erased upon analysis to ensure confidentiality throughout the study. Subjects' mental health was focused on to make sure ethical guidelines are followed during the research.

### **Benefit Considerations of the Study**

There are no direct benefits for participants. The research on LGBTQ inmates' experiences with sexual harassment in jails has numerous substantial advantages. Its primary goal is to highlight the voices of a disadvantaged and generally overlooked minority, thus enabling society to gain a better understanding of their specific issues and vulnerabilities. By investigating their lived experiences, the study hopes to inform policy reforms and enhance institutional procedures within penal systems, thereby improving the safety and well-being of those who identify as LGBTQ. Additionally, the results could assist mental health experts and support agencies in establishing targeted treatments for LGBTQ inmates who have been harassed.

### **Incentive of Compensation**

The research will offer inmates tokens other than money to acknowledge their time and input, following ethical guidelines to prevent coercion. Respondents were rewarded with extra food items or hygiene products worth 500 pesos, valued in the correctional environment, to show appreciation and avoid pressure. Moreover, psychological assistance was provided before and after interviews, delivering emotional support and mental health resources as necessary. This mix of practical and emotional aid aims to create a secure, respectful setting that prioritizes respondents' well-being and upholds their voluntary engagement. Jail officers and correctional administrators were compensated as well with food, for their aid in making this study possible.

### **Collaborative Study Terms of Reference**

The researcher paid for all of the expenditures associated with the present research. She did not receive funding or assistance from any organization for her study.

### **Community Considerations**

Subjects in the research were LGBTQ individuals deprived of liberty detained in the male and female dorms of the PPJ. The researcher acknowledged the profound disadvantage of this demographic within the penal institution and emphasizes the importance of cultural sensitivity in addressing sexual harassment. The researcher will ensure that the data collection method is impartial and sensitive to the cultural and social dynamics of the jail, as well as the unique experiences of LGBTQ individuals in this environment. Building trust with participants was a key goal, with the researcher dedicating time to understanding their experiences of harassment, beliefs, and emotions, along with their coping mechanisms.

On top of that, the researcher had preliminary training, including discussions with mental health experts, guidance counselors, and the research adviser, to make sure that all contacts are carried out with empathy and cultural understanding. Measures were taken to create a comfortable environment for interviews, reducing discomfort or distress while preserving their dignity and privacy within the confines of the penal institution.

### **Participant Debriefing**

Respondents were informally debriefed throughout every interview to check on their welfare and explain any concerns raised. The researcher and an accompanying psychologist reviewed the primary topics and allow respondents to ask questions, share comments, or expound on their experiences. This cooperative strategy ensured that participants may receive professional psychological help during and after the debriefing. The psychologist also analyzed respondents' emotional states, provided prompt psychological assistance or additional referrals if necessary and with the participant's agreement. A secure and relaxed setting were maintained consistently to ensure that they feel encouraged. Participants will also be provided with the researcher's contact information and informed that they can cancel their participation in this research at any point with no penalty.

### **Establishing Trust**

To uphold trustworthiness in this research, various methods from Lincoln and Guba's (1988) model were used, emphasizing dependability, credibility, transferability, and confirmability.

Dependability were ensured through a comprehensive audit trail, recording all research decisions made throughout the data collection and analysis process. Peer debriefing were also conducted, where coworkers were scrutinize the identified themes and coding to maintain coherence and dependability in the data interpretation, following the recommendation of Zeighami et al. (2022).

Extensive interaction with participants is essential to establish trust and facilitate comprehensive data collection. Utilizing member checking involves presenting the analyzed data to participants to

validate the findings and accurately represent their lived experiences. This methodology, recommended by Tenbrunsel et al. (2019), enhances the alignment of research outcomes with the participants' narratives, ensuring credibility.

To guarantee transferability, detailed descriptions were provided, offering elaborate accounts of the participant's experiences and the research environment. This aids in assessing the applicability of the findings to similar settings, as outlined by Hardt et al. (2022).

A reflexive journal was kept to monitor the researcher's biases and assumptions. Additionally, an external data audit was conducted by reviewers to ensure that the conclusions are grounded in participants' experiences and not influenced by researcher bias, as proposed by Vargas et al. (2020).

### **Data Retention**

All data obtained throughout the study, particularly the respondents' personal information, were utilized only for this study. The data, interview recordings, and transcripts were saved in a Google Drive account that only the researcher has access to. The data were utilized for any other purpose or disclosed without the respondent's explicit consent. The data was saved in Google Drive and erased after four years.

### **Validity and Reliability of Data**

The validity of this study is ensured through bracketing, where the researcher sets aside personal biases and preconceptions to address the respondents' experiences with sexual harassment openly and impartially. This guarantees that the conclusions are grounded in the respondents' actual lived experiences. Member checking enhances reliability by having respondents review and confirm the accuracy of the themes and interpretations based on their responses. Additionally, a peer review system was implemented, allowing other educators to assess the study's methods and analysis, thus ensuring quality and minimizing bias.

### **Documentation**

It included the procedures of data collection, including the request letters, consent forms, and pictures of the researcher gathering information from agencies and quality assurance approaches.

### **Institutional Review**

The researcher was actively engaged in crafting a comprehensive letter for review by the ethics committee, detailing our research protocol, and ensuring strict adherence to ethical standards and regulations. Throughout this process, she will maintain a proactive approach, addressing potential ethical concerns raised during the review and incorporating necessary modifications to the study protocol to mitigate these concerns effectively. Her commitment to transparency and integrity guides her in detailing every aspect of her study methodology, participant recruitment procedures, informed consent protocols, and measures to safeguard participants' rights and welfare. This letter serves as a crucial document, demonstrating her dedication to upholding the highest ethical principles in all facets of her

work, and actively engaging with the ethics committee to seek their approval and value their insights in ensuring the ethical integrity of her research endeavors.

## Continuous Monitoring

Throughout the research process, the researcher actively monitor ethical considerations, with a specific focus on data handling and analysis. Any ethical issues that emerge receive prompt attention and resolution to maintain the study's integrity and conduct. Unnecessary data not pertinent to the study is not used and deducted accordingly.

## 3. Findings

The study explored the lived experiences of five (5) LGBTQ inmates who have encountered sexual harassment, focusing on how they made sense of the abuse, the internal and external challenges they faced, and the mechanisms they employed to cope and heal. Through in-depth interviews conducted via the E-Dalaw platform, the researcher successfully gathered the participants' narratives concerning the sensitive phenomenon of sexual harassment in and outside correctional facilities.

After the interviews, the data were transcribed, organized, and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2012) six-step thematic analysis approach. From the deep and personal reflections of the participants, four major themes emerged that encapsulate their interpretative meaning-making of the phenomenon. These themes are: (1) Vulnerability to Harassment Due to Sexual and Gender Identity; (2) Silencing and Suppression of LGBTQ Victimhood; (3) Coping Through Personal Strength and Spirituality; and (4) Perceived Safety and Dignity Inside Correctional Facilities.

## Background of the Participants

The participants of this study were five self-identified LGBTQ individuals detained at Pampanga Provincial Jail in the Philippines who have experienced sexual harassment either prior to or during their detention. All participants were Filipino and ranged in age from 32 to 43 years old. Their identities included gay males (n=3), a bisexual male (n=1), and a lesbian female (n=1). None of the participants identified as transgender, though some expressed gender nonconformity.

**Table 1** *Demographic Profile of Participants*

Pseudonym	Age	Sex assigned by Birth	Sexual Orientation	Gender Identity
P1	42	Male	Gay	Male
P2	32	Male	Gay	Male
P3	33	Male	Gay	Male
P4	43	Male	Bisexual	Male



P5	38	Female	Lesbian	Female
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At the time of the interview, all participants had served various lengths of incarceration and were selected based on their willingness and emotional readiness to discuss their experiences. They were chosen through purposive sampling, meeting the eligibility criteria of being members of the LGBTQ community and having experienced sexual harassment.

All participants had encountered sexual harassment prior to incarceration (n=5), with none of them reporting to have continued abuse or threats within the correctional setting. All also reported no incidents of harassment inside the facility and spoke positively of their current treatment in jail (n=5). The severity and context of their experiences varied, including incidents of coercion during social gatherings, childhood abuse, partner violence, and attempted sexual assault by relatives.

**Table 2 Major Themes and Subthemes**

THEMES	SUBTHEMES AND CATEGORIES	% (n=5)
<b>Vulnerability to Harassment Due to Sexual and Gender Identity</b>	Assumptions about LGBTQ availability for sex	5 (100%)
	Targeting of “feminine” or non-masculine traits	2 (40%)
	Harassment by known individuals (friends, partners, relatives)	4 (80%)
<b>Silencing and Suppression of LGBTQ Victimhood</b>	Fear of judgment and stigma	5 (100%)
	Suppression of traumatic memories	2 (40%)
<b>Coping Through Personal Strength and Spirituality</b>	Affirming self-worth and identity	4 (80%)
	Resistance to further abuse	5 (100%)
<b>Perceived Safety and Dignity Inside Correctional Facilities</b>	Positive treatment by jail management	4 (80%)
	Participation in organized activities and programs	3 (60%)
	Experiences of equality and support in current facility	3 (60%)

## Vulnerability to Harassment Due to Sexual and Gender Identity

People whose sexual or gender identities do not align with dominant social norms often face a higher risk of harassment as their existence challenges what society deems acceptable. This heightened vulnerability is tied to systemic stigma that portrays non-heteronormative identities as abnormal, immoral, or less valid. As a result, these individuals are often seen as less deserving of respect, protection, or control over their own bodies. Harassment can be physical, but it also shows up in psychological and symbolic ways that reinforces power structures that aim to suppress or erase their identities. This kind of environment limits self-expression, fuels fear around being open, and makes people less likely to seek help, all of which deepens isolation and increases the risk of harm.

### *Subtheme 1: Assumptions about LGBTQ availability for sex*

LGBTQ inmates often face the harmful stereotype that their identity makes them automatically sexually available. This belief is rooted in broader societal biases that wrongly link queerness with promiscuity or deviance—biases that become even more intense in the rigid, hyper-masculine environment of prison. Those who are openly gay or present in more feminine ways are especially vulnerable, often becoming targets of unwanted attention or sexual coercion, as others assume they're willing or eager participants, regardless of their actual consent.

*"Akala nila lahat ng bakla ay ganon... hinihila ka na sa kanila, hahawakan ka. 'Susuntukin kita pag ayaw mo magpa-hipo' (They think all gays are like that... they pull you towards them, touch you. I'll punch you if you don't let me touch you)," (P2).*

*"They would say things like, 'Ano pa daw yung mission mo sa mundo kung nagbakla ka pa at ayaw mo lang pala rin? (What's the point of being gay if you're going to refuse anyway)," (P2).*

Another victim also shared how being openly gay often made people assume he was constantly available for sex. In drinking sessions with male peers, these assumptions became more explicit.

*"Pag halimbawang nag-good time kami... minsan na pag may utos ka ng mga boss ko... nakakaranas na ako ng lahat ng mga hindi kanais-nais na gawin ng lalaki. Tulad ng kanyang ari, nandiyan na papakain sa'yo, lahat. Name the price po' (If we're out having a good time... sometimes when I'm following orders from my bosses... I experience all the unpleasant things men do. Like their penis—it's just there, ready to be served to you. Everything. Name the price)," (P1).*

Depending on the situation, he might be paid or expected to pay, reinforcing the idea that his sexuality came with transactional expectations. Over time, these repeated experiences shaped how P1 saw himself.

*"So bilang gay ka, dun pa lang po na nahahanap yung kaligayahan. Sa iyot... iba't ibang lalaki na lang po. Parang maging happy na po. 'Di bale na ("So as a gay person, that's*

where you find happiness. In sex... just different men. As long as I'm happy, it's fine already)," (P1).

Caught between coercion and internalized stereotypes, he learned to accept these encounters as part of what it meant to be gay, highlighting how social and cultural contexts can distort personal identity and consent.

These assumptions not only normalize harassment but also make it harder for LGBTQ inmates to refuse advances or seek help. The threat of violence, isolation, or being cut off from essential support systems leads many to comply out of fear or survival. In such settings, consent becomes blurred, and identity is weaponized against them, reinforcing a cycle of vulnerability and abuse.

### ***Subtheme 2: Targeting of "feminine" or non-masculine traits***

Participants consistently shared that their experiences of sexual harassment were often linked not just to their sexual identity but to how they expressed their gender. Those who appeared more "feminine" or deviated from traditional masculine norms were frequently targeted. Effeminate traits such as a soft voice, particular ways of walking or speaking, or simply being openly gay, were perceived by others as signs of sexual availability or submissiveness, which becomes their vulnerability and it can be used to justify their abuse.

*"Siguro dahil siguro sa... siguro dahil babae ako. Ganoon. Nawala din sa pinasok din ng di magandang spirit yung utak ng tito ko kaya siguro nagawa niya (Maybe it was because I was a girl... maybe something dark took over my uncle's mind, which is why he did what he did)," (P5).*

These statements reflect how femininity, in any form, can be read as an invitation for abuse, and how stereotypes about gay men being promiscuous or always consenting make it even harder for them to be protected. For queer people, it's not just about being different; it's about being visibly outside the gender expectations imposed by others.

### ***Subtheme 3: Harassment by known individuals (friends, partners, relatives)***

A recurring pattern in the accounts of LGBTQ inmates was the experience of harassment by individuals they already knew—such as friends, romantic partners, or even relatives. This type of abuse often involved emotional manipulation or coercion, and was harder to resist or report due to the personal ties involved. Some participants shared that people they initially trusted for protection or companionship eventually took advantage of that closeness, pressuring them into unwanted sexual or romantic encounters. The betrayal deepened the harm, as it blurred the line between affection and abuse, leaving them more vulnerable in a setting where social dynamics already posed significant risks. This highlights how relational proximity does not guarantee safety, and in fact, can sometimes enable more insidious forms of harassment.

One of them shared that the abuse she experienced came from her own family. At just 18 years old, she was harassed by her uncle, with whom she lived at the time. The incident happened suddenly while they were alone in the house.

*“Hindi ko po inaasahan na ganoon ko yung gagawin niya sa akin... pero nakatakbo po ako... hindi na tuloy yung balak niya (I didn’t expect him to do that to me... but I was able to run away... he didn’t get to carry out what he planned),” (P5).*

Another shared experiences of repeated sexual harassment by individuals he personally knew and once trusted. One involved a lesbian friend who coerced him into non-consensual intimacy for more than five times.

*“Di ko lang alam tomboy siya pero naging kami na rin. Yung nangyaring pagharas niya, kaibigan ko na siya (I didn’t know she was a tomboy, but we ended up together. Even though she harassed me, she’s now my friend),” (P4).*

These stories show that abuse isn’t always loud or violent—sometimes it hides behind closeness, making it harder to name, report, or heal from.

### **Silencing and Suppression of LGBTQ Victimhood**

Some of the participants experience silencing and suppression when they try to speak out about abuse, even before incarceration. In their own homes or communities, disclosing harassment often feels unsafe due to fear of judgment, disbelief, or blame. Some were ignored or dismissed when they hinted at what happened, while others chose to stay silent entirely, sensing that speaking up would only lead to more harm or shame. For those who were abused by people close to them like family or friends, the fear of disrupting relationships or facing backlash added another layer of pressure to stay quiet. This silence protects the abuser and isolates the victim, reinforcing the idea that their pain do not matter or should not be voiced out.

#### ***Subtheme 1: Fear of judgment and stigma***

Participants consistently described a deep sense of fear and shame in response to their experiences of sexual abuse, which became primary barriers to disclosure. This emotional burden was compounded by internalized stigma and the perceived judgment of others. One of them recalled intense distress and fear of not being taken seriously due to her father’s past as a police officer.

*“Gusto ko naman sabihan kaso natatakot ako... ‘pag sinabi ko ay di, ‘ba’t pa aasikasuhin yan? ‘Wag na! (I wanted to tell someone, but I was scared because my father, who was a policeman, once killed someone. So I thought, ‘If I speak up, will they even take it seriously? Might as well not say anything),” (P3).*

Another participant had fear kept him from resisting or speaking up, which is closely tied to internalized stigma and the invalidation of his own experience. Even though he later maintained contact with the person who harmed him, he never openly addressed or processed it, likely because of that fear and shame.

*“Sobra takot pa ako from it. Tapos wala pa ako magawa kung nangyari na. Natapos na naming ginawa, nangyari na (I was still very scared because of it. And I couldn’t do anything. It had already happened. What we did was already done),” (P4)*

A participant also shared that even years later, she had told no one—not even close family or friends about her abuse, due to deep-seated shame and cultural discomfort.

*“Even my family, wala pa akong sinabihan. Isa po kasi akong Muslim, ayaw ko po magbukas yung isip ko (Even my family. I haven’t told anyone. It’s because I’m Muslim, I feel uncomfortable opening up about it),” (P5)*

These narratives highlight how stigma, fear of judgment, and cultural pressures often silence LGBTQ victims of abuse. When those around them are seen as unlikely to believe or support them, victims may choose silence over speaking out, which can complicate healing and reinforce feelings of isolation.

### ***Subtheme 2: Suppression of traumatic memories***

Queer survivors of detention often internalized their pain, choosing silence over disclosure to avoid further harm, judgment, or burdening others. One of the accounts revealed how trauma was not only endured but deeply silenced. She describes frequent sexual coercion and abuse within a male-dominated detention facility, but instead of reporting it, she kept everything to herself and broke down only in private.

*“Wala. Kumbaga sinasarilihan ko na lang. Tapos pagkatapos, ‘pag umalis na po sila, iyak na lang ako (Nothing. I just kept it to myself. Then afterward, when they left, I’d just cry),” (P2).*

She finally shared her experience during the interview, describing a feeling of emotional release from finally being heard.

*“Sa inyo ko pa lang po nasabi ‘to... maluwap na din po na sa inyo ko po nasasabi ‘to (I’m only telling this to you now... It’s a relief that I get to say it to you),” (P2).*

Similarly, another participant spoke of difficult past experiences but chose not to reveal details, especially to her family. She feared making life heavier for people already carrying their own burdens.

*“Ayoko po talagang ikuwento lahat... Ayokong mag-alala pa sila. Ang hirap na nga ng buhay namin, tapos dagdagan ko pa ng bigat na dala ko (I really don’t want to tell everything... I don’t want them to worry. Our life is already hard, and I don’t want to add my burdens to it),” (P5).*

Both narratives reveal a common pattern of survival through suppression. When queer individuals are denied safety or emotional support, silence becomes a shield, even when it deepens the wound.



## Coping Through Personal Strength and Spirituality

In the harsh conditions of confinement, queer individuals often lose access to safety, dignity, and support. While inside, they face normalized violence, coercion, and neglect. For many, survival depends not on the protection of the system but on their own capacity to endure and protect themselves. These forms of coping are not new, as they begin outside prison walls. They enter detention already skilled in drawing strength from within, relying on emotional resilience, setting boundaries, and holding onto their sense of self through faith or spirituality. These inner tools, shaped by years of navigating rejection, abuse, and social exclusion, become critical inside. Rather than passive endurance, this form of coping reflects a practiced and powerful response to adversity that predates incarceration.

### *Subtheme 1: Affirming self-worth and identity*

Despite their vulnerability within correctional facilities, some of the queer participants demonstrate remarkable strength in affirming their identity and maintaining their self-worth. This affirmation acts not only as a coping mechanism, but also as a quiet form of resistance against sexual violence, and everyday dehumanization.

One of the testimonies illustrated how affirming one's identity becomes an act of resistance within a system that imposes silence and violence. Despite recurring abuse, she maintains asserting boundaries even when coerced.

*"Nirerespeto ko po yung sarili ko (I respect myself)," (P2).*

Her reflection also revealed the psychological cost of dehumanization as a gay man, and the strength required to retain self-worth.

*"Parang nasisira kami, dapat irespeto ko sarili ko tapos trato sa akin walang respeto (It feels like we're being broken, I should be respecting myself but others don't)," (P2).*

Another echoes this self-affirmation as protective:

*"Siguro self-respect. Kaya naman mag-umpisa kung paano mo makakayanin (Maybe self-respect. That's how you begin to endure)," (P3).*

By grounding recovery in personal dignity and shared disclosure, both participants demonstrate how identity affirmation functions as a coping strategy amid gender-based violence.

### *Subtheme 2: Resistance to further abuse*

Participants engaged in varied strategies to protect themselves from further sexual abuse by asserting boundaries, changing their physical appearance, or finding strength in spirituality. A respondent illustrated her resistance by refusing to fully engage in coerced sexual acts, even when pressured,

*“Ngayon, hahawakan ko lang... pero ‘yung magtalik, ayoko (Now, I’ll let myself touch it... but when it comes to sex, I refuse),” (P2).*

Another expressed intense anger toward one of his abusers, which reflected both trauma and a defensive stance to deter future abuse:

*“Gusto ko pa nga pagsusuntukin eh (I even wanted to punch him),” (P4)*

*“Nagpataba ako (I put on weight),” (P4)*

In contrast, another respondent turned to religious devotion as a way to rebuild a sense of control and morality:

*“Pinokus ko po yung sarili ko sa paglilingkod sa Diyos, para maitama ko po lahat ng pagkakamali ko at ilugar ko rin yung sarili ko sa tama (I focused myself on serving God, to correct all my mistakes and place myself in what is right),” (P1)*

### **Perceived Safety and Dignity Inside Correctional Facilities**

This theme explores how LGBTQ+ deprived of liberty (PDLs) navigate their sense of safety and dignity within the correctional environment. Despite institutional structures meant to ensure order and rehabilitation, participants revealed that safety is often negotiated informally through personal strategies, relationships, or affiliation with religious groups. Dignity, meanwhile, is not granted uniformly, but is shaped by how individuals assert their identity, manage stigma, and resist dehumanization. The following subthemes highlight both the risks and the acts of agency that influence their experiences of being safe and respected behind bars.

#### ***Subtheme 1: Positive treatment by jail management***

Respondents reported differing levels of support and engagement from jail authorities, with some describing a generally respectful and orderly environment that promoted dignity and participation in correctional life. In particular, some individuals cited institutional practices that empowered LGBTQ+ inmates through roles in community activities, religious service, and access to health-related programs.

One of the respondents reflected on how he and others like him were entrusted with responsibilities inside the facility,

*“Yung mga katulad ko po na gay, kanya-kanya po kami mga pribilehiyo. Gaya po ng mga trabaho sa iba’t-ibang selda, binigyan kami ng karapatan para makatulong din sa jail, (Those of us who are gay are given individual privileges, like work in various cells—we’re given the right to help inside the jail),” (P1).*

He also praised the quality of jail management and emphasized a sense of fairness among inmates,

*“Maganda po pamamalakad. Napakaganda po ng patakbo nila. Halos pantay-pantay po yung mga inmates (The management here is good. The way they run things is excellent. All inmates are treated almost equally),” (P1).*

Despite the general absence of sexual harassment in their experiences, P3 emphasized the positive, almost "royal" treatment that she and other LGBTQ individuals received within the facility:

*“So far, wala po kasi good thing naman po dito secure po kami dito, like a princess, Ma'am, mga bading po dito like a princess. Wala naman. Wala naman. So far, Ma'am, (So far, there have been no issues. The good thing here is that we are secure, like princesses, Ma'am. The gay inmates are treated like princesses. No problems so far),” (P3)*

However, this positive treatment was not consistent across all accounts. One of them, in contrast, reported a lack of institutional support or engagement when asked about any LGBTQ-specific activities, to which he responded,

*“Wala, (None),” (P4)*

This contrast highlights the variability of experiences even within the same institutional framework, suggesting that perceived dignity and safety often hinge on specific contexts or staff attitudes.

### ***Subtheme 2: Participation in organized activities and programs***

Participation in organized activities and programs emerged as a vital coping mechanism for the inmates, fostering a sense of purpose, community, and safety. These initiatives were seen as opportunities for personal development and a way to create a structured routine, which is often lacking in the chaotic environment of the correctional facility. The participants highlighted that, through their involvement in these programs, they not only gained new skills and knowledge but also found a sense of stability and mental peace.

An inmate reflected on the significance of engaging in religious ministry as a method of personal transformation and healing. He noted that upon his incarceration, he chose to immerse himself in spiritual activities, particularly joining the ministry, in order to make amends for past mistakes and to lead a life that was more aligned with his values:

*“...pinokus ko po yung sarili ko sa paglilingkod sa Diyos. Sumama po ako sa ministry. Sa ministry po, sumama po ako para mai-tama ko po lahat ng pagkakamali ko at ilugar ko rin yung sarili ko ilang gay yung sa tama, (I focused on serving God. I joined the ministry to correct all my mistakes and to position myself, as a gay person, in the right place),” (P1).*

For the others, the organized activities at the Pampanga Provincial Jail were notably supportive. They emphasized the positive impact of these programs, especially in terms of LGBTQ-focused

initiatives. They highlighted the educational activities, such as HIV awareness programs, as key resources that helped foster a sense of safety and belonging:

*“Minsan po may pumunta po dito about sa LGBT! For example yung tawag dito? For example is yung transferable disease. About sa seksual, ganun. About po kung transferable, ganun. Inaano din po kami, ni-rerelate din po sa amin. Or kailangan mga lesbian, ganyan. Pero okay naman po, naeenjoy po kami. Okay naman po yung pamunuhan ng PPJ, provincial jail. Ayos naman po yung pamamalalakad ng PPJ. For example is for mga regarding about sa... issue about sa lesbian. Nairerelay naman po sa mga lesbian, (Sometimes, people come here to talk about LGBT issues. For example, about transferable diseases, like sexually transmitted infections. They explain this to us, and it is related to us. It’s necessary for lesbians, too. But it’s okay, we enjoy it. The management of the PPJ is fine. The operations of PPJ are good. For example, when it comes to issues about lesbians, they relay it to us here. It’s communicated well to the lesbians),” (P5)*

*“Nakakatulong naman po especially sa Provincial Jail. Nagpapa-ano po sila ng activities sa mga LGBT. For example yung HIV... yung sex life about sa mga bading, (It’s helpful here, especially in the Provincial Jail. They hold activities for the LGBT. For example, about HIV, and sexual health for gays),” (P3)*

#### 4. Discussion

In this study, the researcher sought to explore the experiences of LGBTQ inmates in Philippine correctional facilities, specifically focusing on how they cope from their traumas, navigate their sexual and gender identity, and manage the challenges related to their vulnerability, safety, and dignity within the jail system. Through in-depth interviews, the researcher aimed to capture the nuances of LGBTQ inmates’ lived experiences in order to shed light on how they interact with the environment of corrections, as well as the personal and institutional factors that influence their survival and well-being.

Participants revealed that their sexual orientation and gender expression exposed them to targeted harassment, often even before incarceration. This vulnerability was worsened by societal assumptions about LGBTQ individuals being sexually available or promiscuous. One participant shared how people assumed that “all gays are like that,” using threats and physical force to coerce compliance: *“Susuntukin kita pag ayaw mo magpa-hipo”* (I’ll punch you if you don’t let me touch you). Others recounted how they were coerced during drinking sessions, with sexual advances being framed as obligatory, expected, or even transactional.

This stereotyping particularly endangered those who displayed “feminine” traits. Two respondents described being targeted precisely because of how they looked or acted. For one of them, her identity as a lesbian was sexualized by her own uncle: “Maybe it was because I was a girl...” Such narratives mirror systemic patterns in which effeminate or gender-nonconforming individuals are more likely to be harassed due to perceived submissiveness or deviance (Phillips et al., 2020), (Brown & Jenness, 2020).

Furthermore, many of the assaults occurred within trusted relationships like family, friends, even romantic partners, which added emotional confusion and betrayal to the trauma. Another participant, for instance, was harassed by a lesbian friend who later became his partner: “Even though she harassed me, she’s now my friend.” These blurred relational lines reveal the added complexity LGBTQ individuals face in identifying, naming, or resisting abuse, especially in societies where same-sex dynamics are often misunderstood or dismissed (Arum et al., 2022).

In the theme of Silencing and Suppression of LGBTQ Victimhood, silence was a dominant response among participants. Many chose not to disclose their abuse due to fears of judgment, disbelief, or backlash from families and communities. Some suppressed traumatic memories to avoid reliving the pain or disturbing family dynamics. This is consistent with findings from Donohue et al. (2021), who documented widespread emotional suppression among LGBTQ inmates due to stigma and lack of institutional support.

These narratives also reflect Stroebe and Schut’s (2001) dual process model of grief, where victims alternate between confronting trauma and avoiding distress to cope—a cycle often misunderstood in traditional linear models of healing. Like grieving pet owners who oscillate between mourning and functioning (Arizmendi & O’Connor, 2015), LGBTQ victims of abuse may retreat into silence as a form of survival, not weakness.

The role of religious and cultural pressures was particularly evident in cases where participants feared bringing shame to their family or violating religious norms. One inmate shared that their father's background in law enforcement made them too afraid to speak up. Another expressed discomfort talking about the experience due to their religious background. Such internalized fears further limited disclosure and demonstrate how intersectional identities complicate the expression of victimhood (Thomas & Glazzard, 2024).

Despite these adversities, participants employed personal and spiritual resources to cope. Affirming their identity, setting emotional boundaries, and engaging in faith-based activities were among the most common strategies in the theme of Coping Through Personal Strength and Spirituality. These align with findings that religious engagement and identity affirmation serve as essential forms of coping in prison settings (Bergmann et al., 2024), (Said & Butler, 2023).

Some participants resisted further abuse through direct action such as refusing advances or adjusting physical appearance, while others turned to spiritual service and prayer. One inmate described using service to God as a way of healing and correcting past mistakes, while others emphasized prayer and devotion as sources of inner strength. This reflects the diverse yet purposeful strategies that LGBTQ inmates use to regain control over their bodies and narratives. These coping mechanisms mirror findings in studies of incarcerated populations, where resilience often manifests through moral reorientation and spiritual rebirth (Luke et al., 2020).

Unexpectedly, participants generally reported feeling safe and respected inside the correctional facility, particularly within Pampanga Provincial Jail in the theme of Perceived Safety and Dignity Inside Correctional Facilities. They cited positive treatment from jail management, inclusion in religious and community programs, and access to gender-sensitive resources as key to their sense of dignity.



These findings are consistent with emerging evidence that certain institutions through proper training and inclusive practices, can offer relatively affirming environments for LGBTQ inmates (Li, 2021).

However, experiences were not uniform. Some inmates still noted a lack of engagement or support, highlighting that institutional safety often depends on localized practices, individual staff attitudes, and the presence (or absence) of meaningful programs. This variation is echoed in research showing that institutional policy and lived practice often diverge, especially where LGBTQ-specific training is lacking (Thomas & Glazzard, 2024).

Despite this, the inmates' narratives demonstrated that safety is not solely a matter of institutional control but is also shaped by individual agency, resilience, and participation in rehabilitative programs. These findings echo literature that supports the role of faith-based, health-focused, and peer-supported initiatives in fostering dignity and reducing recidivism (Srivastava et al., 2022).

This study has some limitations worth noting. Since interviews were done online, it was difficult to build trust, read body language, and understand their statements with a faulty microphone, which might have limited how open participants felt. The sample was also small and mostly from one facility, so the findings don't represent the full range of LGBTQ inmate experiences across the country. Some respondent may have held back or shaped their answers because of the sensitive nature of the topics, especially with cultural pressures around religion, family, and identity. Finally, the results reflect a specific time and place, as things in jails can change, and future research should look at different settings and use other methods to get a broader view.

## **5. Conclusion**

This study explored the experiences of LGBTQ persons deprived of liberty in Philippine correctional facilities, highlighting how they cope with trauma, navigate their identities, and manage the risks to their safety, dignity, and well-being. Findings reveal that LGBTQ inmates face layered challenges—harassment rooted in gender expression, abuse from trusted individuals, emotional silencing, and inconsistent institutional support. These struggles are often made worse by societal stereotypes and cultural pressures that discourage disclosure and reinforce isolation.

Despite this, participants showed remarkable resilience, drawing on personal strength, boundary-setting, and spiritual practices to survive incarceration. In some cases, particularly at Pampanga Provincial Jail, supportive environments and inclusive programs gave inmates a sense of safety and recognition. Still, such positive experiences are the exception, not the norm, and highlight how much depends on local policies, staff attitudes, and access to resources.

Given these realities, there is an urgent need for concrete reforms. The Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP) should develop and implement mandatory training modules for jail officers that address SOGIESC (Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression, and Sex Characteristics) awareness, trauma-informed care, and the prevention of sexual violence. LGBTQ rights and protections must also be clearly integrated into BJMP policies to ensure consistent, system-wide implementation. Establishing peer-support networks and ensuring access to mental health services should also be prioritized.

To deepen understanding, future research should adopt a mixed-methods or longitudinal approach. Quantitative data can map broader trends, while long-term follow-up can track how identity, coping strategies, and institutional conditions evolve over time. Expanding research beyond one facility and capturing more diverse backgrounds, including socioeconomic status, religion, and education, will help build a fuller picture of the needs and strengths of LGBTQ persons in custody. These insights are essential for designing policies and programs that promote not just survival, but dignity and rehabilitation.

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