

# Gender in Climate Change: Safeguarding LGBTQ+ Mental Health in the Philippine Climate Change Response From a Minority Stress Perspective

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Climate-related events unevenly affect society, worsening mental health disparities among vulnerable populations. This paper highlights that lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgender, queers, and other individuals identifying as sexual and gender minorities (LGBTQ+) could be considered a climate-vulnerable population in the Philippines, one of the most climate-vulnerable countries. As such, this paper elucidated that LGBTQ+ Filipinos can be marginalized in climate response efforts due to their sexual orientation and gender minority identities. According to the minority stress theory, discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals may predispose them to mental health problems. Thus, there is a need to institute an LGBTQ+ inclusive mental health response for climate-related events to address discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals and uphold their mental health.

**Key words:** Sexual and gender minorities, LGBT persons, Climate change, Health policy, Mental health, Philippines

## INTRODUCTION

In anticipation of the 27th Conference of the Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP27) in November 2022, a group of editors and academics from Africa simultaneously published an article in multiple journals calling on nations to support Africa and other vulnerable countries in addressing climate change's health consequences and social impacts [1]. In Asia, the Philippines is considered one of the most climate-vulnerable countries [2,3]. Globally, the Philippines is ranked as having the highest disas-

ter risk from extreme natural events and negative climate change impacts in the WorldRiskIndex 2022 [3]. It faces increasingly strong typhoons, leading to annual flooding in multiple localities among its regional divisions [2]. Likewise, it is threatened by rising sea levels, water salinization, and increasing ambient temperature, which can potentially lead to the displacement of coastal communities and food and water insecurity [2]. It responds to climate-related events by providing relief and support services to affected localities [2,4]. For instance, the government provides sleeping spaces and food aid at evacuation centers in preparation for strong typhoons. Likewise, it also provides livelihood and economic support as a means to recover in the aftermath of strong storms [4].

## MENTAL HEALTH AND VULNERABLE POPULATIONS IN THE CLIMATE CHANGE CRISIS IN THE PHILIPPINES

Climate-related events in the Philippines may lead to various mental health problems. These could range from climate-

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related anxiety to heightened suicide rates [2]. Climate-related events also unevenly affect society, worsening mental health disparities among vulnerable populations [2]. Thus, it is necessary to uphold the mental well-being of vulnerable people in climate-related mental health responses. Guinto and colleagues [2] identified various climate-vulnerable populations in the Philippines, such as indigenous communities and women, since they are often geographically isolated, displaced, and marginalized from society. While they identified a comprehensive list of climate-vulnerable populations, lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgender, queers, and other individuals identifying as sexual and gender minorities (LGBTQ+) could also be considered climate-vulnerable populations in the country.

Following the case study methodology suggested by Ebneyamini and Sadeghi Moghadam [5], cases were selected, gathered, analyzed, and reported to elucidate the situation of LGBTQ+ Filipinos in the climate change response. In doing so, reports from news agencies and non-government agencies were gathered and reviewed. These were then analyzed based on the minority stress theory by Meyer [6]. The minority stress theory highlights that the experience of prejudicial events, expectations of rejection, hiding and concealing one's sexual orientation, and gender minority identities due to social stigma are responsible for the higher rates of mental health problems among LGBTQ+ individuals [6,7].

### Cases of Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, Transgender, Queers, and Other Individuals Identifying as Sexual and Gender Minorities Individuals and Their Discrimination in the Climate Change Response in the Philippines

Drawing from the minority stress theory by Meyer [6], discriminatory behaviors towards LGBTQ+ Filipinos may heighten their risk for various mental health problems. This assumption is further supported by a review by Tan and Saw [7], which found that discrimination may worsen mental health disparities and poor mental health outcomes among LGBTQ+ Filipinos. While there is sparse epidemiological evidence on mental disorders in the Philippines, studies suggest that LGBTQ+ Filipinos have higher rates of suicide ideation [7], suicide attempts [7], depression [8], and stress than their heterosexual peers [8]. These higher rates of mental health problems have been consistently attributed to discrimination [7,8]. Moreover, these patterns of discrimination against LGBTQ+ Filipinos are apparent in relief efforts after climate-related events in the country [4,9,10].

Instances of discrimination against LGBTQ+ Filipinos have been immediately observed following typhoons and their subsequent relief efforts. Examples of discrimination can range from disregarding self-determined gender identity to overt denial of relief goods [4,9,10]. For example, a trans woman reported needing to use her name at birth instead of her preferred name to access typhoon-related relief efforts and social services [4]. Likewise, LGBTQ+ Filipino couples can be deprived of housing and food support since they are not recognized as families or a priority [4]. Thus, LGBTQ+ Filipinos can be marginalized in climate response efforts due to their sexual orientation and gender minority identities.

During the rehabilitation months after a typhoon, LGBTQ+ Filipinos, especially those from the lower and working class, continue to report instances of deprivation of livelihood support and resources [4,9]. For example, it was reported that a gay man was deprived of a fish cage because of his sexual orientation [4]. Hence, discriminatory behaviors towards LGBTQ+ Filipinos may last for months following climate-related events. For instance, long-term discrimination was highlighted by a trans woman who mentioned that there were no opportunities or even recognition of LGBTQ+ people during their 11-month stay in a temporary shelter [4].

Since the higher rates of mental health problems among LGBTQ+ Filipinos are consistently attributed to discrimination against them [7,8], there may be higher rates of mental problems among LGBTQ+ Filipinos during climate-related events and responses. These mental health problems are already evident in previous typhoon responses. For instance, a trans woman emphasized that the lack of opportunities and recognition of LGBTQ+ Filipinos in temporary shelters was not an easy experience [4]. In another report, a gay man further emphasized their difficulties since "many people were pushed to their limits because of the typhoon" [9]. Hence, there is a need to institute a climate response that is responsive and inclusive of the additional needs of LGBTQ+ Filipinos, including their mental health.

Concerns about the lack of LGBTQ+ inclusivity in the Philippines' climate-related response are also shared by young LGBTQ+ Filipinos [10]. As one of them narrated in an interview [10], "in the future, I'm almost sure that we will not be on the same level as heterosexuals when it comes to the priority of the government since we are still not recognized and given the same benefits." Thus, addressing discrimination against LGBTQ+ Filipinos amid climate and disaster response efforts is

necessary to avoid their marginalization, address their concerns, and reduce their risk of mental health problems.

### Towards an Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, Transgender, Queers, and Other Individuals Identifying as Sexual and Gender Minorities Inclusive Mental Health Response for Climate-related Events in the Philippines

Several measures can be instituted to address discrimination against LGBTQ+ Filipinos and uphold their mental health. First, as a start, disaster and typhoon responders can be trained to use gender-affirming language to avoid disregarding self-determined gender identity in relief efforts. Second, reports of discrimination against LGBTQ+ Filipinos during climate-related responses highlight their need for broad protection mechanisms [4,9,10]. Hence, the government should institute policies against sexuality and gender-based discrimination, including recognizing LGBTQ+ individuals and couples in housing and food support in climate-related events, disasters, and relief efforts. Third, LGBTQ+ Filipinos may be at higher risk for mental health problems following climate-related events and disasters due to discrimination based on their sexual orientation and gender minority identities [4]. Thus, mental health and psychosocial services for people who experienced discrimination following climate-related events can be established to support the heightened mental health needs of LGBTQ+ Filipinos. Lastly, research on LGBTQ+ vulnerabilities and inclusivity in the responses to climate change-related events should be strengthened to understand and deliver equitable relief efforts and mental health responses to climate-related events.

### Ethics Statement

The study does not necessitate ethical approval and consent forms since the data is publicly available and there was no human participant.

### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author has no conflicts of interest associated with the material presented in this paper.

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