Coping Responses and Subjective Well-Being of LGBTQIA+ Communities in Northern Philippines

Christian Nichol L. Subrino[1], Jasper Kim M. Rabago[2]

[1]Balatong Integrated School, Laoag City, Ilocos Norte

[2]Mariano Marcos State University

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the coping mechanisms and subjective well-being of LGBTQIA+ individuals in Northern Philippines aiming to identify the resiliency of LGBTQIA+ individuals amid facing life challenges in relation to their gender. Utilizing a descriptive mixed-methods approach with a purposive sample of adult LGBTQIA+ individuals, the study survey as an approach in gathering quantitative data while thematic analysis was used in organizing qualitative data. The findings reveal that participants predominantly employ positive coping mechanisms, with the highest mean scores observed for "using humor to cope with difficult situations" and "focusing on strengths and resilience. Notably, professional mental health support and substance use were the least utilized coping mechanisms. In terms of subjective well-being, respondents generally reported a positive outlook and high satisfaction across most life aspects. A strong sense of purpose and happiness with work ability, optimism about the future and satisfaction with personal achievements scored highest. High contentment was also reported for personal and family life, friendships, relationships, and self-worth. Recommendations from LGBTQIA+ teachers highlight the critical need for LGBTQIA+-friendly school environments and the eradication of sexism and gender bias in workplaces. Participants also emphasized the importance of merit-based evaluation and equal access to growth and professional development. Overall, the study underscores the remarkable resilience and strong community ties within the LGBTQIA+ community in Northern Philippines. Despite experiencing considerable subjective well-being in many life domains, persistent challenges related to mental health, access to services, and societal discrimination highlight the ongoing need for legal protection and increased gender awareness to foster genuinely inclusive and supportive working environments.

Keywords: LGBTQIA+ communities, coping responses, subjective wellbeing, Northern Philippines

INTRODUCTION

The pursuit of well-being is a universal human aspiration, yet for marginalized communities, it is often compounded by unique stressors and challenges (Meyer, 2003). Among these, the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual, and other sexual and gender minorities (LGBTQIA+) community frequently encounter discrimination, prejudice, and social stigma, which can significantly impact their mental, emotional, and physical health (The Trevor Project, 2024). In the Philippines, despite a generally tolerant façade, LGBTQIA+ individuals continue to face considerable hurdles, including lack of comprehensive national anti-discrimination laws and persistent negative societal attitudes rooted in heteronormative and religious norms (Oxfam Canada, 2022; Manalastas & del Pilar, 2005). These challenges are particularly salient in regions like Northern Philippines, where local contexts and varying levels of community acceptance can further shape the lived experiences of LGBTQIA+ individuals (Equaldex, n.d.)

Research studies consistently highlight the disproportionate rates of adverse mental health outcomes, such as anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation, among LGBTQIA+ populations compared to their heterosexual and cisgender counterparts, largely attributed to "minority stress" (The Trevor Project, 2024; Meyer & Frost, 2009). However, amidst these adversities, LGBTQIA+ individuals also demonstrate remarkable resilience, employing diverse coping mechanisms to navigate daily life and foster their well-being (Pinay Collection, 2025; PIA, 2024).

Understanding these coping strategies is crucial for developing effective support systems and promoting inclusive environments. Furthermore, while some studies have begun to explore the well-being of LGBTQIA+ individuals in the Philippines, there remains a notable dearth of research specifically focusing on the northern regions of the Philippines and the multifaceted aspects of subjective well-being within this regional context (Routledge Open Research, n.d.; DLSU Research Congress, 2022). This gap underscores the necessity for targeted investigations to illuminate the unique experiences and needs of LGBTQIA+ communities in the Northern Philippines.

This study aims to bridge this research gap by exploring the coping responses and subjective well-being of LGBTQIA+ communities in the Northern Philippines. Specifically, this study will address the following research questions:

1. What coping responses do LGBTQIA+ communities employ in addressing life concerns in relation to their gender?

2. What is the level of wellbeing among LGBTQIA+ individuals in terms of:

   2.1 subjective wellbeing (SW);
   2.2 physical health wellbeing (PHW);
   2.3 relationships (R); and
   2.4 overall wellbeing (OW)?

3. What recommendations can be made to foster a more inclusive and supportive environment among LGBTQIA+ individuals?

METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a descriptive research design. Specifically, it sought to describe the various coping responses employed by LGBTQIA+ individuals and their current levels of subjective well-being. The participants of this study were adult individuals identifying themselves as members of the LGBTQIA+ community residing in Northern Philippines. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants of this study. Thus, adopted a mixed-methods approach for data gathering, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques to provide a more holistic and nuanced understanding of the phenomenon. A structured survey questionnaire was the primary instrument for the quantitative data collection. The questionnaire was divided into two main sections: 1) Coping mechanisms and 2) BBC Subjective well-being scale, (Kinderman, et., al. 2013). The survey was administered both online (e.g., Google Forms) and in-person. Descriptive statistics was primarily used to analyze the quantitative data obtained from the survey whereas transcribed interview data were subjected to thematic analysis as described by Braun and Clarke (2006).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents and interprets the key findings of the study in relation to the research objectives and existing literature. The results are analyzed to determine whether they support the initial hypotheses and to explore their broader implications. Patterns, trends, and unexpected outcomes are discussed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the data. Where applicable, comparisons are made with previous studies to highlight similarities, differences, and contributions to the field. The discussion also considers possible limitations and areas for future research.

Coping Responses of LGBTQIA+ Communities. Table 1.1 shows that on average, the participants tend to use positive coping mechanisms more frequently. Respondents generally reported high engagement in several positive coping strategies. The highest mean scores were observed for "Using humor to cope with difficult situations" (M=4.50,SD=0.535) and "Focusing on strengths and resilience" (M=4.50,SD=0.756). Seeking support from LGBTQIA+ friends or community groups, engaging in self-care activities, and engaging in creative expression all showed a mean score of 4.13 with a standard deviation of 1.126. Similarly, relying on faith or spirituality also had a mean of 4.13 (SD=0.835). Participants also reported a relatively high tendency to educate

others about LGBTQIA+ issues (M=4.38,SD=0.916) and distance themselves from stressful situations (M=4.38,SD=0.744).

Table 1.1 Coping responses of LGBTQIA+ individuals employ in combating daily life in the Northern Philippines

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. I seek support from LGBTQIA+ friends or community groups.	8	2	5	4.13	1.126
2. I engage in self-care activities (e.g., exercise, meditation, hobbies).	8	2	5	4.13	1.126
3. I use humor to cope with difficult situations.	8	4	5	4.50	.535
4. I engage in creative expression (e.g., writing, art, music).	8	2	5	4.13	1.126
5. I seek professional mental health support (e.g., therapy, counseling).	8	1	5	2.25	1.389
6. I rely on my faith or spirituality.	8	3	5	4.13	.835
7. I engage in activism or advocacy for LGBTQIA+ rights.	8	3	5	4.00	.926
8. I try to educate others about LGBTQIA+ issues.	8	3	5	4.38	.916
9. I distance myself from situations or people that cause me stress.	8	3	5	4.38	.744
10. I use substances (e.g. alcohol, drugs) to cope.	8	1	5	2.13	1.458
11. I focus on my strengths and resilience.	8	3	5	4.50	.756
12. I find solace in online LGBTQIA+ communities.	8	3	5	3.63	.916
Valid N (listwise)	8				

Seeking professional mental health support (M=2.25,SD=1.389) and using substances to cope (M=2.13,SD=1.458) had the lowest mean scores, suggesting these were less frequently utilized coping mechanisms among this group. The wide standard deviations for these two items indicate a greater variability in responses among participants. Finally, finding solace in online LGBTQIA+ communities had a mean score of 3.63 (SD=0.916).

The high mean scores for "using humor to cope with difficult situations" and "focusing on strengths and resilience" suggest that these participants largely employ internal, positive psychological resources to navigate challenges. This aligns with existing literature emphasizing the importance of positive reappraisal and self-efficacy in resilience building (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000; Bandura, 1977). The relatively high engagement in seeking support from LGBTQIA+ friends or community groups, self-care, and creative expression highlights the importance of social connections and healthy outlets for emotional processing within this population (Fredrickson, 2001; Umberson & Karasawa, 2010). The consistent scores across these items indicate a preference for proactive and community-oriented coping.

The lower reliance on professional mental health support and substance use for coping is notable. The low utilization of professional help could stem from various factors, including stigma, accessibility barriers, or a
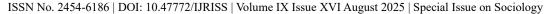
preference for informal support networks (Hatzenbuehler et al., 2014; Corrigan, 2004). The comparatively high standard deviations for these two items, particularly substance use, suggest that while generally low, there might be a subset of individuals within the small sample who do engage in these behaviors to a greater extent. The relatively lower score for finding solace in online LGBTQIA+ communities compared to in-person support from friends/community groups could imply a stronger preference for direct, interpersonal connections for this sample (Riva et al., 2007).

Subjective Well-Being. Table 1.2 presents the descriptive statistics across 24 items related to various aspects of well-being, as summarized in the table in the next page. A general observation across the items is that the mean scores tend to be above the midpoint (3) of the likely 1-5 scale (provided 1 is the lowest and 5 is the highest satisfaction/agreement). This suggests a generally positive outlook or higher satisfaction levels among the respondents for most aspects surveyed. The minimum values mostly range from 1 to 3, while maximum values are consistently 5, indicating that at least some respondents reported the highest possible level for each item.

Respondents demonstrated high levels of satisfaction across several key areas of their lives. A strong sense of purpose and happiness with work ability scored highest (Mean = 4.38). This was closely followed by optimism about the future (Mean = 4.25) and satisfaction with personal achievements (Mean = 4.25).

Respondents also expressed considerable contentment with their personal and family life, friendships and relationships, and their ability to connect with others (all with a Mean = 4.00). Similarly, there was high satisfaction with self as a person (Mean = 4.00) and the ability to grow and develop personally (Mean = 4.13). The consistently high mean scores and relatively low standard deviations suggest a consensus of positive sentiment by the respondents in these areas.

The survey results highlight three areas of potential concern due to lower average satisfaction or the presence of negative feelings. Depression or anxiety with a mean score below 3 (Mean = 2.50), indicating that, on average, respondents report experiencing some level of depression or anxiety. While the mean score for feeling in control of one's life was above 3 (Mean = 3.25), it was relatively lower compared to other positive aspects. The high standard deviation (1.165) signifies a wide range of responses, with a considerable portion of respondents likely feeling less in control of their lives. Access to Health Services with a mean of 3.00 and the highest standard deviation (1.309) among all items, satisfaction with access to health services shows significant variability. This suggests a strong divide among respondents, with some being highly satisfied while others are clearly not.

Table 1.2 Subjective well-being among LGBTQIA+ individuals in the Northern Philippines.

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. Are you happy with your physical health?	8	3	5	3.75	.707
2. Are you happy with the quality of your sleep?	8	2	5	3.13	.991
3. Are you happy with your ability to perform daily living activities?	8	2	5	3.63	.916
4. Do you feel depressed or anxious?	8	1	3	2.50	.756
5. Do you feel able to enjoy life?	8	3	5	3.75	.707
6. Do you feel you have a purpose in life?	8	3	5	4.38	.744
7. Do you feel optimistic about the future?	8	3	5	4.25	.707
8. Do you feel in control of your life?	8	1	5	3.25	1.165
9. Do you feel happy with yourself as a person?	8	3	5	4.00	.535
10. Are you happy with your looks and appearance?	8	3	5	3.75	.707

11. Do you feel able to live your life the way you want?	8	3	5	3.88	.641
12. Are you confident in your own opinions and beliefs?	8	3	5	3.75	.886
13. Do you feel able to do the things you choose to do?	8	3	5	4.00	.756
14. Do you feel able to grow and develop as a person?	8	3	5	4.13	.835
15. Are you happy with yourself and your achievements?	8	3	5	4.25	.707
16. Are you happy with your personal and family life?	8	3	5	4.00	.756
17. Are you happy with your friendships and personal relationships?	8	3	5	4.00	.756
18. Are you comfortable about way you relate connect with others?	8	3	5	4.00	.756
19. Are you happy with your sex life?	8	2	5	3.13	.991
20. Are you able to ask someone for help with a problem?	8	2	5	3.25	1.282
21. Are you happy that you have enough money to meet your needs?	8	3	5	3.63	.744
22. Are you happy with your opportunity for exercise/leisure?	8	2	5	3.75	1.035
23. Are you happy with access to health services?	8	1	5	3.00	1.309
24. Are you happy with your ability to work?	8	3	5	4.38	.744
Valid N (listwise)	8				

The results generally paint a picture of respondents who are relatively satisfied with many aspects of their lives, particularly concerning their sense of purpose, work ability, optimism, and personal relationships. This strong core of positive well-being could serve as a foundation in the development of a resilient self. (Mayer et al., 2017; Russell, 2005; Kwon, 2013; Bowleg et al., 2003; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Research on LGBTQIA+ individuals often highlights resilience and strengths-based approaches, emphasizing factors like optimism, social support, and the ability to find meaning despite adversity (Russell, 2005; Kwon, 2013; Bowleg et al., 2003). Positive relationships, both within and outside the LGBTQIA+ community, are consistently identified as protective factors for well-being (Cronin et al., 2021; Gandy et al., 2021).

However, the data also points to specific challenges. The mean score for "depressed or anxious" suggests that mental health concerns are present within this group. The significant variability in feelings of "control of life" and "access to health services" warrants further investigation. These areas, particularly health service access and feelings of control, appear to be highly individualized experiences within the sample. This could be due to differing personal circumstances, access to resources, or perceptions. (American Progress, 2023; KFF, 2024; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2018; Fredriksen-Goldsen et al., 2012, 2014; Institute of Medicine US Committee on Lesbian G, 2011). Many studies confirm that LGBTQIA+ individuals experience higher rates of mental health issues, including depression and anxiety, compared to the general population, largely due to minority stress, stigma, and discrimination (KFF, 2024; American Progress, 2023; NIMHANS & UNDP, 2023). Barriers to accessing affirming and competent healthcare services are well-documented and contribute to these disparities, leading to varied experiences among individuals (American Progress, 2023; KFF, 2024; Taylor & Francis, 2024).

The high standard deviation for asking for help (item 20) might suggest that while some are comfortable, others might face significant barriers or reluctance in seeking assistance. This could be linked to cultural factors, social

support networks, or individual coping mechanisms. (Index Copernicus, 2025; SeattleU, n.d.; Taylor & Francis, 2022). Research consistently indicates that LGBTQIA+ individuals face unique barriers to help-seeking, including fear of discrimination, lack of culturally competent providers, internalized stigma, and limited social support, which can lead to reluctance in seeking professional assistance (Index Copernicus, 2025; SeattleU, n.d.; Taylor & Francis, 2022).

The relatively lower satisfaction with "quality of sleep" (item 2) and "enough money to meet needs" (item 21) are common areas of concern in general populations. While not at critical levels, they represent ongoing challenges that could impact one's overall well-being (KFF, 2024; ResearchGate, 2021; ResearchGate, 2019). Studies show that LGBTQIA+ adults are more likely to report problems with sleep and frequent worries about finances, impacting their overall well-being, which aligns with general population concerns but can be exacerbated by minority stress (KFF, 2024; ResearchGate, 2021).

Fostering Inclusive and Supportive Workplace Environment. Table 1.3 shows major themes as to the recommendations of LGBTQIA+ teachers to attain better quality of wellbeing.

Table 1.3 Recommendations of LGBTQIA+ teachers in fostering a more inclusive and supportive workplace environment.

Theme	Sub-theme / Key Idea	Supporting Quotes & Examples
School Environment & LGBTQ+ Rights	Recent Conflict for Protection of Rights	"The school environment must be LGBTQIA+ friendly coz just recently I had an argument with the school heads for protecting the rights of lgbtq students."
	Importance of LGBTQ+ Friendly Spaces	"All school environment must be lgbqt-friendly..."
	Positive Personal Experience in School	"As a transgender teacher at INRSF, I have been fortunate to work in a supportive school environment where my identity is respected. My colleagues (both teaching and non-teaching staff) have consistently shown acceptance and professionalism, creating a space where I feel valued. Students, too, have demonstrated maturity by addressing me as "Ma'am" and respecting my role as an educator/teacher."
Workplace Equality	Eradicating Sexism and Gender Bias	"Workplaces should begin eradicating the culture of sexism or those acts that are geared toward gender bias."
	Merit-Based Evaluation	"We should all treat everybody capable and not solely based on judging people because of gender but because of what they can do and what they can accomplish."
	Equal Access to Growth & Development	"Everyone should have an equal access to growth and professional development."
Government Inclusivity	Appreciation for Current Initiatives	"I am already happy with the inclusivity and what government is giving to the LGBTQIA+++ right now. Keep it up and I am excited for the future of what LGBTQIA+ may bring."
Experiences with Discrimination	Discrimination Outside School	"However, outside the school setting, I have faced moments of discrimination rooted in gender stereotypes."
	Misuse of Colloquial Terms	"While I'm comfortable with terms like bakla (a colloquial Filipino term for LGBTQIA+ individuals), I have encountered instances where it is used mockingly or accompanied by laughter."

	Personal Coping Mechanisms	"Though I strive to respond patiently and ignore such remarks, there are times when I feel compelled to address them directly."
Advocacy for Legal and Social Change	Need for Anti-Discrimination Bill	"For me, anti-discrimination bill should be passed and gender awareness should be echoed/promoted."
	Promotion of Gender Awareness	"...gender awareness should be echoed/promoted."
	Inclusive Celebrations/Resolutions	"There must be a resolution on Inclusive Day where all women, men and members of the LGBTQIA+ community are celebrating for a purpose. Activities incorporated shall adhere to gender and development."

The sentiments expressed by LGBTQIA+ teachers underscore a critical need for inclusive and supportive environments within educational institutions, particularly in the Philippines. The data reveals a duality: while some teachers, like the transgender educator at Ilocos Norte Regional Schools of Fisheries (INRSF), experience positive and respectful workplaces, there remains a pervasive undercurrent of discrimination outside school settings and a strong call for systemic change within. This confirms findings in broader literature on LGBTQIA+ individuals in the workplace, which consistently highlights the importance of inclusive environments for professional development, job satisfaction, and overall well-being (Matsick et al., 2024; Sean, 2020). The call for eradicating sexism and gender bias, ensuring merit-based evaluation, and providing equal access to growth and professional development aligns with research advocating for comprehensive diversity and inclusion initiatives that go beyond mere tolerance to genuine acceptance and empowerment (Aguilar et al., 2022). Furthermore, the recurring demand for the passage of an anti-discrimination bill and the promotion of gender awareness reflects the ongoing struggle for legal and social recognition, a persistent challenge in the Philippines despite the existence of some local ordinances and internal DepEd policies aimed at protecting LGBTQIA+ individuals in schools (Human Rights Watch, 2017; Amnesty Philippines, 2023). These teachers' experiences, both positive and negative, reinforce the idea that while progress is being made in some aspects, significant gaps remain in creating truly equitable and affirming spaces for all, demanding continued advocacy for policy reforms and cultural shifts.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study reveal a complex picture of resilience, community strength, and at the same time persistent challenges experienced by LGBTQIA+ individuals especially in workplaces and in the community.

The study found that LGBTQIA+ individuals in Northern Philippines predominantly employ positive coping mechanisms indicating a strong reliance on internal psychological resources also underscoring the vital role of social connections and healthy emotional outlets. It also highlights the vital role of social connections and healthy emotional outlets. Interestingly, professional mental health support and substance use were reported as the least utilized coping mechanisms.

Overall, participants reported a generally positive outlook and higher satisfaction levels across most aspects of their lives. However, areas of concern emerged, particularly regarding depression or anxiety suggesting mental health challenges within the group.

The recommendations from LGBTQIA+ teachers underscore the critical need for LGBTQIA+-friendly school environments and the eradication of sexism and gender bias in workplaces. Participants emphasized the importance of merit-based evaluation and equal access to growth and professional development for all. While appreciation for current government inclusivity initiatives was expressed, experiences with discrimination outside the school setting and the misuse of colloquial terms highlight persistent societal challenges. The strong advocacy for the passage of an anti-discrimination bill and the promotion of gender awareness demonstrates a clear call for legal and social change to ensure equitable treatment and safety for LGBTQIA+ individuals.

LGBTQIA+ individuals in Northern Philippines demonstrate remarkable resilience through positive coping strategies and strong community ties. While they experience considerable subjective well-being in many life domains, specific challenges related to mental health, access to services, and societal discrimination persist. The recommendations from LGBTQIA+ teachers provide crucial insights for policymakers and institutions to create genuinely inclusive and supportive environments, highlighting the ongoing need for legal protections and increased gender awareness.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on these findings, here are key recommendations to build upon the existing strengths and address the identified challenges:

Strengthen Mental Health Support. Increase access to LGBTQIA+-affirming mental health services. This is paramount given the reported mental health concerns and low engagement with professional support. Initiatives should focus on reducing stigma, ensuring accessibility, and providing services from trained professionals who understand and respect LGBTQIA+ identities and experiences.

Champion Inclusive Workplaces and Communities. The strong call for an anti-discrimination bill is critical. Such legislation would provide legal protection against discrimination in employment, public accommodations, and other areas, fostering safer and more equitable environments. Workplaces and community organizations should regularly conduct Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion training that specifically addresses LGBTQIA+ issues, unconscious biases, and the importance of respectful language. This can help eradicate sexism and gender bias and promote merit-based evaluation and equal opportunities.

Amplify Gender Awareness and Education. These campaigns can help combat societal discrimination and the misuse of derogatory terms by promoting understanding, empathy, and respect for LGBTQIA+ individuals. Beyond schools, promoting gender awareness in various community platforms can help shift societal norms and foster a more inclusive culture.

By focusing on these areas, policymakers, institutions, and community leaders can work collaboratively to create a truly inclusive and supportive environment for LGBTQIA+ communities in Northern Philippines, building on their inherent resilience and fostering their continued well-being.

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