Gays Experiences of Harassments in Heteronormative Workplaces in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

The aim of this exploratory study is to understand in what forms gay men are harassed in heteronormative workplaces in Sri Lanka, using the theory of stigma of Erving Goffman. Employing qualitative research methodology, in-depth interviews with sixteen gay employees were conducted. According to the findings of the study we were able to identify how the respondents in heteronormative workplaces were subjected to numerous forms of harassment: 1) ostracism 2) rejection 3) offensive comments about the sexual orientation, 4) sexual innuendos, 5) frequent jokes and name calling, 6) sexual assault, 7) spreading rumors, 8) leering, 9) unwanted touching, patting and squeezing and 10) threats or bribes in exchange of sexual favors as heterosexist harassments. It was specifically revealed how the gays who are open about their sexuality and those who indicate a feminine disposition are the most common victims of these, mostly heterosexist, harassments at the workplace. The gays who are closeted and show masculine characteristics are less likely to be harassed, unless others suspect their sexuality due to some cue, since they are not openly identified by the society as gays. The findings clearly indicate how these different forms of harassment are a result of the respondents' sexuality, indicating the need for organizations to intervene in preventing and handling these instances of harassment to create a safe work environment for the diversified workforce modern organizations have.

Keywords. *Discrimination, Gays, Heteronormative culture, Heterosexist harassments, Sri Lanka, Workplace.*

1. Introduction

Harassment at workplaces (Khubchandani & Price, 2014), also known under different other terms (with overlapping meanings) such as bullying (Einarsen, 2000), abuse (Lopez, Hodson, & Roscigno, 2009), violence, aggression (Neuman & Baron, 1998), discrimination and mistreatment (Ray, Chang, & Asfaw, 2014), has gained increased attention of various parties over the past few decades. Within this literature, harassment of homosexuals at workplaces has been identified as a common occurrence (D'augelli, 1989; Haggerty, 2013; Rodgers, 2009) due to their minority status and the stigma and prejudices surrounding their sexuality. Homophobia and heterosexism in heteronormative cultures are known to give rise to stigmatization and prejudice of homosexuals (Goffman, 1963), thus subjecting them to various forms of discriminations and harassments (Drydakis, 2009).It is specifically reported that lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender (LGBT) individuals are frequently discriminated due to their sexual orientation at the workplace (Equal Ground Sri Lanka, Northwestern University School of Law, & Heartland Alliance, 2013). While there do exists a plethora of research related to homosexuals, researchers highlight the

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need for more studies related to workplace discriminations and harassments of homosexuals (Militello, 2015; Ozeren, 2014). Further, the need for studies in different contexts is also emphasized, especially where most studies are carried out in the West (Ozeren, 2014).

Nonetheless, how and in what forms homosexual employees face harassment at workplaces remains a mystery with very little research being conducted in the area in Sri Lanka. In this background, the aim of this exploratory study is to understand in what forms gay men are harassed in heteronormative workplaces in Sri Lanka. The focus is placed on gay men, as it is reported that gay men in workplaces experience higher rate of violence than the lesbians (D'augelli, 1989; Haggerty, 2013; Rodgers, 2009).

The significance of the study is twofold. First, it is important for organizations at the micro level, and the government at a macro level, to understand the occurrence and nature of harassment different minority groups - including gay men - face in workplaces, in creating harassment free, safe working environment in organizations. This is especially important, when equality and diversity are encouraged by organizations as well as by governments. Thus, findings of this exploratory study will assist the relevant authorities in drafting appropriate policies and procedures as well as legislative reforms on anti-harassment, to ensure effective management of diversity at work. Second, findings of this study will add to the growing understanding of the phenomenon by contributing to the very limited literature on heterosexist harassment against gays in heteronormative workplaces, with culture providing the backdrop. Pryor and McKinney (1995) and Ozeren (2014) emphasize the need for more studies on sexual minorities and the harassments they face at the workplace in different settings, especially in non-western cultures, in order to obtain a complete picture of the sexual minorities at the workplace.

The literature review presented below, is divided into three brief sections. The first section presents an introduction of homosexuals and gays, with a small description about the norms and prejudices towards LGBT community, in general. The second section provides a very brief document of homosexuals in Sri Lanka, setting out the context of the study. The third section reviews research on experiences of LGBT employees in the workplace.

2. Literature Review
2.1 Homosexuals and Gays
Homosexuals are defined as the individuals who are sexually and romantically attracted to and who engage in sexual behaviors with the members of the same sex or gender (Fassinger, 1991). In traditional societies, homosexuality is not accepted and is considered a deviant behavior against the norms of heterosexuality (Goffman, 1963) and heteronormitivity. While heterosexuality is identified as the normal sexual orientation (Fassinger, 1991), heteronormitivity is identified as a social norm which promotes heterosexuality, gender conventionality, and family traditionalism (Oswald, Blume & Marks, 2005).

Heterosexism is the concept that goes along with heteronormativity which assumes heterosexuality as the normal sexual orientation, giving rise to homophobia. According to Weinberg "homophobia is the term used to describe the fear and hatred

that characterizes reactions of gay people by family, friends and society" (as cited in Fassinger, 1991, p. 159). In this context, homosexuals gets isolated and discriminated (Fassinger, 1991) in the society as well as in their families. Further, with homosexuals being brought up in a society with negative feelings against gays and lesbians, the internalize homophobia (Fassinger, 1991) leading to further implications for them.

How these various cultural norms have spilled over to the workplace, making homosexuals the target of numerous forms of harassment even at work is well documented (D'augelli, 1989; Elmslie & Tebaldi, 2007; Haggerty, 2013; Rodgers, 2009). Fassinger (1991) reports how gays continuously get subjected to heterosexual biases or heterosexism. Not only the heterosexual majority, but most of the wise (people who support gays) also become victims of heterosexism. This trend is persisting even in cultures that have moved beyond heteronormativity.

In this context, it is not surprising that many gays are afraid to *come out* (reveal their sexuality to public). Thus, they remain*closeted* in the society as well as in the workplace (Bauer & Kleiner, 2001; Brower, 2013; Correia & Kleiner, 2001; Pompper, 2014). It has been found that two-thirds of gay employee population hidestheir sexual orientation at the workplace (Bauer & Kleiner, 2001). According to Stockdale (cited in Konik & Cortina, 2008), even the closeted gays become targets for heterosexist harassments and discriminations if they are effeminate males or has feminine characteristics. These different forms of harassment in turn is said to increase the rate of recurrent major depression for gays than for lesbian (DeAngelis, 2002). All of this illustrates how gays as sexual minorities are facing difficulties in the society and in the workplace.

2.2 Homosexuals in Sri Lanka
In Sri Lanka, under the section 365 of Penal code, same-sex behavior is considered a criminal offence, like in many countries which has the colonial law. Homosexuality is prohibited under section 365 of the Penal code which considers homosexuality as „carnal intercourse against the order of the nature‟.

The rights of the LGBT individuals in Sri Lanka are found to be violated through three other forms: 1) arbitrary arrests and detentions and abusive and violent police behavior, 2) suppression of freedom of expression, assembly, and association, 3) failure to protect against discrimination, hate crimes, and forced marriages by private actors (Equal Ground Sri Lanka et al., 2013). Further, homosexuals are said to be subjected to humiliation, harassment, sexual abuse, black mail and demands for bribes, at the hands of police officers (Chandratilaka & Mahanamahewa, 2015). However, harassment homosexuals‟ face in the workplace is not sufficiently studied in Sri Lanka, indicating an important area for further and deeper inquiry.

2.3 Harassment Faced by Homosexuals at the Workplace
The various forms of harassment that homosexuals face at workplace because of their sexuality are commonly known as heterosexist harassment. Konik and Cortina (2008) define heterosexist harassments as "verbal, physical, and symbolic behaviors that convey hostile and offensive attitudes about one‟s actual or perceived lesbian, gay, or bisexual identity" (p. 314). According to Burgess, Lee, Tran, and Van Ryn (2008) these heterosexist harassments might be both direct and indirect discriminations. A study done in Turkey on sexual orientated discrimination and its experiences found

that lesbian, gay and bisexual employees experience ". . . pervasive presence of a significant level of blatant discriminatory activities ranging from sustained harassment through to repeated unwanted jokes and innuendos, to actual job termination, to threats of violence" (Ozturk, 2011, p. 1115). According to Correia and Kleiner (2001), discrimination at the workplace may be in the form of anti-gay statements and jokes, biases in hiring, hostile work environment, disappointing work assignments, lower pay and poor evaluation and promotions. Heterosexual men are said more likely to hold negative attitudes towards homosexuals and they express these attitudes in the form of jokes (Johnson, 1991). Further, Johnson (1991) mentioned that these jokes "…ranged from vulgar word play to subtle sexual allusions" (p. 852). According to Hemmasi, Graf, and Russ (1994), telling lewd jokes is a common form of hostile-environment harassment in a workplace and these might be direct. While these studies have delved deeper into the concept of harassment, they have been mainly conducted in the West. How harassment of gays takes place in the Asian context has been rarely studied. With the different cultural, social and legal contexts, how harassment is manifested in Asian countries can be different, which is what the current study attempts to explore.

3. Theoretical Background: Social Stigma Theory

Social stigma theory was introduced by Erving Goffman in 1963. He presented the fundamentals of stigma and discussed it as a social theory with the interpretation of stigma as a way of spoiling an individuals" identity. As he illustrated, stigma refers to "… the situation of the individual who is disqualified from full social acceptance" (Goffman, 1963, p. 11). The society categorizes people using various measurements and labels and for each of these categories, they assign a list of attributes against which standard and non-standard behavior is measured. In other words, the society defines the attributes of people in each category and expects the members in that category to behave according to the pre-determined attributes. This results in societal behaviors in which special concern or attention for other individuals is uncalled for.

Although the society expects the members in a particular setting to possess these set attributes, the reality is entirely different from the expectation. Thus, a discrepancy between the virtual and the actual social identity could be identified. Accordingly, the term social stigma refers to extreme disapproval of a person or a group of persons on the basis of perceived social characteristics which will distinguish those from the other members of the society. Thus, stigma will be fixed to a person who differs from the societal and cultural norms. Stigma could also arise as a result of societal perceptions and judgments of mental disorders, race, ethnicity, sexuality, physical disabilities, illnesses, nationality, power, class, religion and many more facets, which the society uses to categorize people.

The social stigma theory documents three grossly different types of stigma: physical deformities, deviations in personal traits and the tribal stigmas. These types illustrate how the society disapprove and disqualify a person or a group based on the socially accepted norms. The society thus believes the person subjected to stigma is less of a human being and hence marginalizes, and devalues them on the grounds of inferiority. This happens until the stigmatized attributes goes undetected. Though the stigmatized are targeted for discriminations and harassments, according to Goffman (1963), the discrediting attributes may differ geographically and culturally. For instance, one attribute which is considered as discredited among one social group might be an

acceptable norm in another. Thus, while these discrediting attribute holders could be subjected to severe discrimination by a social group that considers the aforementioned attributes as inferior, among another social group the same individual might not be subjected to discrimination. In this background, by using stigma theory, we attempt to identify how stigma regarding gays in the Sri Lankan society plays a role in the harassment they face at the workplace, while also attempting to understand how gays perceive harassment in light of stigma and other prejudices they experience at work.

4. Methodology

Based on the interpretivist research philosophy and qualitative research methodology, the study adopts hermeneutic phenomenology. The sample for the study was chosen from the workforce in Sri Lanka which is predominantly heterosexual. The unit of analysis of the present study is individuals (gay men). Data were collected through in-depth in-person interviews from sixteen gay employees. Given that Sri Lanka is a heteronormative culture and a country where homosexuality is prohibited legally, it was not easy to recruit willing and voluntary participants for the study. Thus, with much difficulty, the participants were identified and approached through personal contacts and snowballing. Initial contact was made with a nongovernmental organization which is working with LGBT community. After communicating the objectives of the study, few willing participants were identified through the organization. Then, snowball sampling was used to approach and recruit more participants. The participants were clearly told of the objective of the study and anonymity of information was assured in gaining their informed consent. Half of the participants were „closeted" gays while the others were „openly" gays. Other than for one participant who was married (a closeted gay), others were unmarried. The participants were mainly from the executive and management category of work, with only one participant being a machine operator. They were in the age category of 24-65 (15 participants were below 50 years of age and one participant 65 years) and represented a variety of industries.

Analysis started from the data collection and a careful process of coding and categorizing was carried out. The main themes were identified based on prior research on harassment. These main themes were then explored using the Stigma theory.

5. Findings

The experiences shared by the sixteen participants during the interviews encompassed an array of heterosexist harassment they face at workplace. Main ten types of harassments against the participants were identified as 1) ostracism 2) rejection 3) offensive comments about the sexual orientation, 4) sexual innuendos, 5) frequent jokes and name calling, 6) sexual assault, 7) spreading rumors, 8) unwanted flirting, 9) unwanted touching, patting and squeezing and 10) threats or bribes in exchange of sexual favors.

5.1 Ostracism

Ostracism occurs „when an individual or group omits to take actions that engage another organizational member when it is socially appropriate to do so" (Robinson, O"Reilly & Wang, 2012, p. 4). With the humans" innate need to belong and be accepted by others, ostracism can be hurtful and devastating for individuals impacting on their organizational performance (Robinson et al., 2012).

Participants of the present study related various instances ofostracism at workplace that they have had to face.

> When they [colleagues] organize trips and parties I don"t get invited. They don"t like to be with me. As an example, generally we get our salaries on 10th of each month. After getting the salary, normally the members of the line organize a small party. I was never invited for those parties. I was never asked to come(Shiwa, 23 year old machine operator of a garment factory who was an openly gay individual).

Tharindu shared a similar experience of one of his friends who is gay;

> A friend of mine who works there [another workplace], experiences exclusion from staff events. One day there had been a party, a party of one of the staff members. But my friend was not invited. So these kinds of discriminations happen. He is also quite frustrated with his company.

Other than being excluded from social gatherings, the interviews indicated how the participants were ostracized by peers, through exclusion from teamwork and in the performance of job duties. They were also not assigned responsible job duties within the team. As shared by Shiwa,

> In a line [processing line] there were fifteen employees. They all ignored me. They really cornered me. Although there was a heavy shipment to complete, sometimes I didn"t even receive a machine to do my work.

Of the two types of ostracism (purposeful and non-purposeful ostracism) (Robinson et al., 2012), the experiences of participants were clearly instances of purposeful ostracism.

5.2 Rejections
While certain studies consider rejection under ostracism or as a synonym for ostracism (Robinson et al., 2012), according to Williams (2007), rejection is "an explicit declaration that an individual or group is not wanted" (p. 427). Interviews revealed various rejections experienced by the participants because of their sexual orientation. Anumal was dismissed from his first job (due to his sexual orientation) and when he applied for a new job, he had been rejected from the interviews, because of his sexual orientation. According to Anumal (38 year old Coach who is a closeted individual), he has faced the same experience in various instances.

> Since I do not have any means to live, I mean financially, I have applied to 6, 7 main governmental institutions in Sri Lanka. From all the interviews I have been selected because of my experiences, my age and the things I have done. After selecting me, when they[interviewer] called the previous employer for service clarification and recommendation, they[previous employer]had given that certificate mentioning that I have been dismissed because of my gayness and the homosexual nature. So I was not offered those jobs.

When assigning additional responsibilities, sexual orientation is found to play a big role according to the participants of the study. Participants mentioned of various

instances they were rejected from assignments at the workplace because of their sexual orientation. As experienced by Gayan, a customer service executive who is openly gay,

> I have missed some chances to take part in some events and initiatives, because of my [sexual] orientation. I know among my friends [peer] there may not be an issue of nominating me to initiatives. But the selection committee does not like to nominate me to the initiative since I am a gay. I can see a gay among that group, but he is closeted. But since I am open, he is in and I am out.

There were also other instances of rejection that the participants reported such as rejection from work groups, and even terminations of employments.

5.3 Offensive Comments

It was also not surprising when the participants cited various instances of experiencing offensive comments about their sexual orientation. Even though Lakshan (27 year old teacher) is closeted, he has experienced an offensive comment in one instance, when he made a supportive statement regarding homosexuals.

> If I become open to the society, there may be one or two who would accept (it/me) but rest will not. As an example, I have a fake facebook account. There was a post against homosexuality and the government regulations. I made a post against that previous post, meaning I raised my voice. Everybody started scolding me over the fb. It [the earlier post]implied that no one understood homosexuality clearly. What I mentioned there was, "it is a normal thing, don"t scorn it." That"s all. People used blaspheme and scolded me. They have commented that I am crazy, and this is a mental illness. … So what I am thinking is, for a comment on fb, the reaction of the people is such, if we disclose the reality what would be the result.

Supun, a senior software engineer who is openly gay, has also experienced offensive comments regarding his sexual identity since he has more feminine characteristics.

> And another thing is that they always tell "ah….. landa wage [like a girl]" like that. Those are offensive at the beginning. I do not have exact straight masculine ideals. I have feminine characteristics. . . I do not match that ideal male. Because of that, I think they joke.

5.4 Sexual Innuendoes

The other heterosexist harassment experienced by gays at workplace issexual innuendos. An innuendo is an indirect expression which is derogatory in nature. In most instances the participants who were open were subjected to these sexual innuendos, which had evoked contemptuous feelings in them.

> There is a project manager. He is sarcastic in nature. When I was wearing a ring which was given to me by my partner, he asked me sarcastically, "ah did you receive it for the anniversary". …From that joke he meant that the relationship of me and my partner is not a valuable relationship. That"s how I saw it. This is an instance I felt the discrimination (Supun, 32 year old senior software engineer who is openly gay).

The participants have also experienced offensive comments on their behaviors and fashions.

> Normally my fashions are different [from the accepted norm of how a male should dress]. I use different colors and for those things they make fun of me. Those are mostly offensive. . . There is a stereotype that a man should wear like this; a woman should be like this. It may be the color, size, and the design. Generally, I dress differently. They ask me „is this a dress worn by males? " likewise. And if I wear a shirt with a floral design, they would make offensive jokes.

Here again, the innuendo directly targets the participant, but does not explicitly target his sexual identity.

5.5 Frequent Jokes and Name Calling

According to Johnson (1991), heterosexual men are more likely to hold negative attitudes towards gays and tend to express these attitudes in the form of jokes. Telling lewd jokes is thus identified as a common form of hostile-environment harassment in a workplace, where the joke could be direct or double-edged (Hemmasi et al., 1994). Many of the gays in the present study shared similar experiences. Gayan (26 year old, openly gay, customer service executive of a bank) shared how he and his heterosexual friend were victimized through frequent jokes by others at workplace.

> At the time I joined the company I had one best friend at my office. Now he is not there, but he is a straight boy. He knows everything about me. My staff members had spread a rumor saying that we two are a gay couple. It was not an issue for me. It made me laugh when I heard that. But I really felt upset since they directly said it to my friend. And the other thing is he didn"t have a girlfriend. I was really worried whether because of this he would not be able to find a girlfriend. When we both go to have our lunch together, I got to know that, and they were telling that "ahh... the couple has come to have lunch". And they tease us.

Homophobic name-calling is found to be one of the most common forms of verbal harassment against homosexuals (Birkett & Espelage, 2015).Within the Sri Lankan culture there are certain common slangs for gays (one such main derogatory slang used by Sri Lankan culture against gays is, *"ponnaya"*). It was found out how these slangs are used against the participants at the workplace. Lalith (65 year old hair stylist engaged in the film industry) is an openly gay employee who is professionally a well-known person in his industry and has experienced name-calling in many instances. Citing one such instance he said;

> In film industry there are some minor workers. When they are not behaving properly I ask them to come to me and I rebuke them. After that what they do is, they go and tell others "araponnayamatabanna" [that ponnaya scolded me]. To reply him, I asked him to come again and told him everything I wanted to tell and asked his supervisor to pack his things to send him back to his home. I have done this several times.

5.6 Sexual Assault

Sexual assault is a sexual contact through use of force, threatened force, or a weapon (Lott, Reilly, & Howard (1982). This can be an attempted or a completed rape (Harned, Ormerod, Palmieri, Collinsworth, & Reed 2002). Anumal revealed several such instances of forced sexual intercourses experienced by him at his workplace;

> After I sat for my A/Ls[advance level examination] I joined the Ministry of Defense and it was before the A/L results. Some seniors (Army officers) asked me to come to their rooms after work. They wanted sex from me… I had a girlfriend at that time... I got addicted to this [homo sexuality] because of my seniors actually.

5.7 Spreading Rumors

According to prior research, slander, gossip, and rumours spread about a person are common forms of harassment (Einarsen, 2000). Participants of the study too revealed such experiences. Lakshan explained how he was subjected to rumors within the workplace and the society at large about their sexual orientation.

> We can‟t trust people. They will reject us and refuse us, and they will spread this (our sexual orientation) among others. Sometime they will create their own story and spread it out among others. So can‟t trust the people. (Lakshan)

Gayan‟s experience explained above under frequent jokes and name calling is also an example of rumors that are spread about gays at workplace.

5.8 Unwanted Flirting

Unwanted flirting can be taken as a type of sexual harassment, which can interfere with the work of the victim, creating a hostile working environment. Tharindu (24 year old cahier of a gambling venue, who is a closeted individual) spoke of unwanted flirting that he had to experience at work.

> There is a laborer in my workplace. He shows enormous interest in me. I feel it. That he expects it (sexual relationship). He looks at me, asks unnecessary things from me…like my most personal things.

5.9 Unwanted Touching

There were also physical acts of sexual nature that gay employees face such as touching, patting, squeezing, cuddling and pinching (McDonald, 2012).One participant cited such occasion where the harasser was a customer.

> Recently one of the customers came and when he was giving money to me, he touched my hand. After that I never let him to do it. Now, when the same customer comes to me, I do not give money directly to him. I keep his money at a side of the table so he can take it. (Tharindu)

This expresses how Tharindu experienced the physical sexual heterosexist harassment at the cash counter. A similar experience was shared by Shiwa,

> One incident I can remember. One of my colleagues in the production line, one day he tried to harass me physically. That was the lunch break and I was waiting

in line. The others had already gone for their lunch. Suddenly this boy came, hugged me and squeezed my nipples. I was shocked.

5.10 Threats or Bribes in Exchange of Sexual Favors

Known as quid pro quo harassment, threats or bribes in exchange of sexual favors are found to be a common and serious form of sexual harassment. Again, Tharindu shared his experiences in this regard.

> When I was working at town hall [in the Municipal Council], there was a relative, actually a brother of Minister of a local government. When he came to town hall, he sat near me and talked with me. Not only once, but few days and asked me "where do you live? What are you doing? Are you living alone?" and so on. For all his questions I gave an answer. Then he asked me for my phone number and told me he wanted to meet me. But I refused to give him my number and ignored him. I was not attracted to him… So I ignored him. Because of that, he called me through the general line and threatened me. He told me, he will not let me to work there and that he will reveal everything to others… because of these things I was frustrated and I resigned from the job.

A same kind of experience was shared by Anumal, when he was facing a disciplinary inquiry where the head of the inquiry made a request from him.

> There was a homosexual case against our head also. It [the homosexual case] was on the internet. So in the inquiry, he tried to get my attention on him. But I never gave my consent. He is an old man. To have sex, there is an age category and type of body that I prefer. Without these, I am not interested in sex. So he was not my choice. So they dismissed me. The incident can be considered as an implicit bribery made by the head of the inquiry.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

According to the findings of the study we were able to identify how the participants in heteronormative workplaces were subjected to numerous forms of harassment: 1) ostracism, 2) rejection, 3) offensive comments, 4) sexual innuendos, 5) frequent jokes and name calling, 6) sexual assault, 7) spreading rumors, 8) unwanted touching and 9) threats or bribes in exchange of sexual favors, as heterosexist harassments. Among the many forms of harassment, sexual harassment such as sexual innuendos, sexual assault, unwanted touching and threats or bribes in exchange of sexual favors are most common experiences of harassment among the participants. Other experiences of the participants, such as ostracism, rejection, offensive comments, and frequent jokes, name calling and spreading of rumors can be considered as general forms of harassment, some of which are also common.

All in all, similar to many studies of LGBT employees experiences at work (Eliason, Dibble, & Robertson, 2011), the present study too indicates how Sri Lankan workplaces are still hostile and exclusionary with regard to gay employees. This indicates how the societies" disapproval of gays has transpired to workplaces and is manifested through these various acts of harassments in the work setting.

It is evident that on the one hand, the participants encounter harassment due to social stigma about homosexuals in the society, and on the other hand, these harassments

further stigmatize the participants, creating a vicious cycle of stigma. Even though Goffman (1963) reports how stigma and resultant treatment of individuals can differ in different contexts, the experiences of participants indicated the high prevalence and persistence of stigma and negative treatment of employees in all types of work settings.

The fact that the gays who are open about their sexuality and those who indicate a feminine disposition are the most common victims, provide sufficient evidence to this existence of social stigma in the Sri Lankan workplaces and the negative outcomes they bring to employees. The gays who are closeted and show masculine characteristics are less likely to be harassed, unless others suspect their sexuality due to some cue, since they are not openly identified by the society as gays.

While Equal Ground Sri Lanka et al. (2013) reports assignment of worst shifts and tasks, assignment of higher quotas than their peers and being fired as the most common forms of discrimination against the LGBT individuals, participants of the present study did not indicate experiencing these types of harassment (other than for one participant who shared experiences of being fired due to his sexuality). Further, participants did not indicate any discrepancies in payments in contrast to findings that gays are paid less than heterosexual employees (Correia & Kleiner, 2001; Drydakis, 2009). It was also interesting to note that in few instances, the openly gays were harassed by the members of the same minority group who are closeted. Through this, the harassers might be attempting to protect their identity as gays and gain social acceptance.

Within a context of legal prohibition as well as social prejudices, the participants are helpless in the face of harassment and have to endure harassment silently. This can intern bring about various negative consequences to the participants, organizations and the society at large. Hence, in light of the inaction from the point of view of the government, organizations have a bigger role to play in ensuring a harassment free environment for this marginalized group of employees.

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