

Strategies to Manage Prejudice-Based Bullying Against LGBT Students at a Selected University in South Africa

Nizibone Juliet Mguye^{1*} 

Bunmi Isaiah Omodan² 

AFFILIATIONS

¹Faculty of Education, Walter Sisulu University, Mthatha, South Africa.

²Faculty of Education, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa.

CORRESPONDENCE

Email: 213051729@mywsu.ac.za

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Abstract: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) individuals in rural Eastern Cape of South Africa face persistent marginalisation due to remoteness and conservative social attitudes, including within universities. This study explores strategies to manage prejudice-based bullying against LGBT students and reduce the stressors associated with such discrimination. To achieve the aim of this study, the research was framed within the constructivist paradigm, employing a qualitative research approach and a phenomenological design for a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. The snowball sampling technique was used to select six LGBT students, while purposive sampling was employed to identify two Student Representative Council (SRC) members and two Student Affairs workers. In-depth interviews were conducted to gather data, which were then analysed and interpreted using Braun and Clarke's 2006 thematic analysis steps. This study revealed several forms of bullying experienced by LGBT students, as well as strategies suitable for managing prejudice-based bullying among them. It emerged that LGBT students encounter technology-facilitated gender-based bullying, verbal bul-

lying, and discrimination, all of which adversely affect their psychological health, resulting in long-term psychological disorders. To ensure the welfare, inclusivity, and safety of LGBT students at the university, participants suggested the need for policy and structural changes, increased awareness and education, support systems, disciplinary measures, and fair resource allocation. This study recommends that the university hold ongoing educational workshops and campaigns, allocate adequate financial resources, network with external stakeholders to gain new insights on managing bullying motivated by prejudice, and promote inclusivity.

Keywords: Prejudice-based bullying, LGBT students, minority students, discrimination, resource allocation.

1. Introduction

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) forms part of the broader LGBTQIA+ community, which represents individuals whose birth sex does not align with their preferred gender. LGBT students at universities, who are socially marginalised, experience disproportionate levels of prejudice-based bullying. Gill & Govier (2023) define prejudice-based bullying as behaviour based on one's race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, or disability status. Perpetrators often express this through negative attitudes, humiliation, and discriminatory behaviour towards LGBT-identifying individuals, typically using social media platforms or verbal displays (Moyano & Sanchez-Fuentes, 2020).

De Pedro et al. (2018) specifically noted that studies focusing on LGBT students in the United States are limited. However, in Appalachia, Ballard et al. (2017) confirmed that LGBT students at universities report a high risk of victimisation and a lack of support from community and institutional practitioners in providing necessary advocacy for those affected. Consequently, Reisner et al. (2020) emphasised the need for innovative mechanisms to address prejudice-based bullying, as its consequences hinder students' well-being and academic progress. In Indonesia, Badgett et al.

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(2017) revealed that LGBT students are perceived as individuals who violate the country's gender norms; therefore, the Indonesian government shows little intention of protecting them from harm, leaving them with limited access to the education they need due to their sexual orientation. The reluctance to protect LGBT individuals has been shown to result in students needing medical attention, as they suffer from anxiety and bipolar disorder (Munira et al., 2023). Despite the fact that LGBT identities are opposed by Indonesian laws and communities, lesbians and gays are increasingly coming out of the closet to the point of sharing living spaces (Fatgehipon et al., 2019).

In New South Wales, Australia, parliaments have restricted discussions on gender and sexual diversity among education practitioners. A study conducted by Thompson (2019) in Australia elucidated that conservative groups have utilised moral panic not only as a strategy to promote and maintain heterosexuality and a heteronormative curriculum but also to undermine a more diverse, gender-inclusive curriculum. Parker et al. (2023) believe that this strategy has made LGBT students vulnerable to prejudice-based bullying and structural tyranny within the Australian education system.

In the case of Africa, numerous countries have criminalised LGBT individuals. A study conducted by Okanlawon (2020) in Nigeria revealed that LGBT students are being molested to death by other students because of their sexuality. The scholar also disclosed that LGBT individuals are not considered one of the 13 marginalised groups in the Nigerian National Policy on inclusive education. In Kenya, a study by Misigo (2022) states that homosexuality has been condemned, and lesbianism is further demonised, with claims that it is caused by social factors, including peer pressure. On the other hand, Majoko and Dudu (2025) noted that in Zimbabwean universities, diversity is not recognised, as LGBT students frequently experience exclusion and pejorative labelling. Despite South Africa implementing policies and enacting laws that prohibit prejudice-based bullying and promote the safety of previously disenfranchised individuals, South African universities remain dominated by heterosexism (Reijer & Smuts, 2024; Walker, 2022). This phenomenon is believed to be "inspired by elders' indoctrinated expectations of behavioural patterns and roles of each gender in the community" (Mguye & Omodan, 2023a, p. 574). Letsoalo et al. (2020) argue that this conservative nature fosters prejudicial attitudes towards LGBT students in South African universities.

The Eastern Cape Province, where this study is conducted, is considered the most conventional province in South Africa, especially regarding gender-based issues (Nduna & Abaver, 2017). Although the LGBT lifestyle has gained popularity following the repeal of laws that prohibited the revelation and promotion of such identities, as well as the upsurge in awareness campaigns supporting homosexuality, rural communities remain resistant to accepting peaceful coexistence in a gender-diverse setting, claiming they are preserving their culture, traditions, beliefs, and religion. In relation to this, Mguye and Omodan (2023a) observed that prejudice-based bullying does not emerge from a vacuum but stems from a particular instilled doctrine regarding how individuals must conduct themselves in society based on gender.

This extends to higher educational institutions in the province, as Francis and McEwen (2024) articulated that these institutions tend to be spaces that habituate marginalisation and bullying of LGBT students in the name of preserving originality. Consequently, LGBT students feel invisible as they are forced to be inaudible about their seemingly abnormal genders to avoid prejudice-based bullying (Nduna & Abaver, 2017). Chitsamatanga (2023) discovered that prejudice-based bullying does not only take place in study centres, university playgrounds, or special events; student residences are also one of the main hotspots for such bullying. Although an LGBT support group was formed at one of the universities in the Eastern Cape, it is advisable for the university to transform its formal curriculum to facilitate a protective, stable, inclusive, and pleasant climate for all students (Nduna & Abaver, 2017).

The above literature reveals that prejudice-based bullying among LGBT students is a global phenomenon that has been and continues to undermine the wellbeing and safety of university students, especially those in rural settings. Furthermore, recent literature reporting episodes of prejudice-based bullying indicates that the education system has not yet initiated strategies explicitly aimed at protecting LGBT learners, despite some having reconciled with the fact that LGBT students are also human and that we need to coexist peacefully with them. For this reason, this study seeks to unveil strategies tailored to manage prejudice-based bullying among LGBT students in universities to enhance the protection of these marginalised genders and improve their well-being and academic performance.

1.1 Statement of the problem

In South African universities, particularly those located in the rural parts of the Eastern Cape, LGBT students frequently encounter open, prejudice-based bullying (Nduna & Abaver, 2017). Sares-Jaske et al. (2023) identified prejudice-based bullying as a critical issue, as it undermines LGBT students' mental health, academic performance, and overall well-being. This observation corroborates Varny's (2016) report, which highlighted significantly higher rates of mental health issues experienced by LGBT-identifying students in educational institutions. Despite the increasing awareness and the implementation of protective policies, Nduna & Abaver (2017) noted that LGBT students in universities continue to face unique challenges exacerbated by the conservative nature of rural communities. Students from these areas adhere to the instilled doctrine regarding how individuals should conduct themselves in society based on gender, which results in them imposing heterosexism in an unacceptable manner on those who identify as LGBT (Mguye and Omodan, 2023a). Given the aforementioned literature, the lack of specific support systems and tailored mechanisms for managing prejudice-based bullying within universities places these students at a higher risk of isolation, hostility, and psychological distress. Therefore, it is crucial to understand how LGBT students at these institutions manage and resist such adversity in order to develop effective support frameworks and promote a more inclusive academic environment.

1.2 Research questions

To accomplish the main aim of this study, which is to explore strategies for managing prejudice-based bullying against LGBT students, the researchers implemented two subsequent objectives:

- What forms of prejudice-based bullying are commonly experienced by LGBT students?
- Which strategies can be employed to manage prejudice-based bullying among LGBT students?

2. Theoretical Framework

To develop strategies to manage prejudice-based bullying among LGBT students, the researchers find it imperative that the university population understands the various factors contributing to the chronic psychological impairments experienced by these students. This was achieved by examining the study through the lens of Minority Stress Theory (MST), proposed by Iyan H. Meyer in 2003. MST is a framework that provides an understanding of sexual orientation inequalities in educational institutions and their negative effects on health and academic outcomes (Meyer, 2003). The theory posits that individuals who fall under the sexual minority category are exposed to distal or proximal stressors, which are considered chronic for those with a minority identity (Frost & Meyer, 2023). MST suggests that minority health disparities arise from disproportionate vulnerability to stigmatised social status, such as gender diversity (Mongelli et al., 2018).

Minority stressors consist of two processes: distal and proximal stressors. Distal stressors, also referred to as external minority stressors, are defined by Frost and Meyer (2023) as stressors originating from individuals or organisations that impact LGBT students. These include discriminatory policies and laws, chronic stressors, daily experiences of discrimination, isolation, or

aggression due to prejudice. In contrast, the authors describe proximal stressors, also known as internal minority stressors, as internalised stigma. This stigma arises from a socialisation process in which sexual or gender minority individuals learn to reject themselves for being LGBT, develop expectations of being stigmatised due to awareness of prevailing social stigma, and conceal their LGBT identity as a means of protecting themselves from external minority stressors.

This theory is relevant to this study as it explores bullying based on prejudicial behaviours exhibited by heterosexuals towards minority individuals, specifically LGBT students, when they disclose their gender identities. Exposure of LGBT students to an environment where gender diversity is devalued places them at high risk of suffering from minority stress, depending on their various reactions. Some LGBT students experience chronic stress due to discrimination by heteronormative laws and university policies, physical assaults by peers, denial of their rights by university staff, and humiliation. Conversely, minority stress can also result from internalised stigma, such as concealing their identities under the pretence of being heterosexual, avoiding university events, and refraining from attending LGBT societies and vigils due to fear of exposure to distal minority stressors.

The researchers applied MST in the discussion and interpretation section, where it contextualised the findings, explored how prejudice-based bullying contributes to the minority stress experienced by LGBT students in universities, and examined the impact on their mental health and academic performance. MST was used to recommend strategies that the university community can initiate and implement to promote inclusivity and protect LGBT students from prejudice-based bullying, ultimately improving their overall well-being and academic performance.

3. Methodology

This study was grounded in the constructivist paradigm, which is ideal for exploring the experiences of LGBT students regarding prejudice-based bullying in their real-life setting, specifically their university. This paradigm assumes that reality is a construct of the participants, and the only way to access it is through interaction with them; therefore, the researchers employed a qualitative research approach. This approach allowed us to interact with human participants, who are typically multifaceted study informants, thereby generating a range of ideas (Omona, 2013). This facilitated the collection of primary descriptive data, which enabled us to uncover solutions for the phenomenon under study (Haven & Van Grootel, 2019). The study utilised a phenomenological research design to examine the meaning of participants' lived experiences through the descriptions generated from interviews and focus groups (Donalek, 2004; Van Manen, 2014). The researchers achieved this by employing the process of bracketing, which involves setting aside our preconceived ideas and perceiving the phenomenon from the perspectives of the participants who have experienced it (Tufford & Newman, 2012).

This constructivism-lensed study utilised snowball and purposive sampling techniques to draw 10 participants, comprising 6 LGBT students, 2 Student Representative Council (SRC) members, and 2 practitioners from Student Affairs, with careful consideration of gender equality. Since the researchers were unfamiliar with the environment from which the data were elicited and could not identify LGBT students, the snowball sampling technique was deemed appropriate for the study. LGBT students provided insights into their experiences regarding prejudice-based bullying. The researchers purposefully sampled two workers from Student Affairs because they are responsible for creating programmes, implementing systems, and holding events specifically designed to enhance the university experience for these students. This technique was also used to sample two SRC members who are tasked with student support services and gender, in order to shed light on the mechanisms for managing prejudice-based bullying against LGBT students.

As this study aimed to obtain an in-depth understanding of LGBT students' perceptions regarding prejudice-based bullying against them (Bhandari, 2020), the researchers conducted in-depth

interviews. In-depth interviews facilitated probing to avoid preconceiving the meanings held by the participants. Due to the sensitive nature of the study, one-on-one interviews were conducted to ensure the confidentiality of the information shared. The researchers achieved this by arranging research objectives into interview questions, which allowed the sampled participants to flexibly articulate their views on the management of prejudice-based bullying (Omodan, 2021). Each participant was allocated 30 minutes to share their perceptions. With the participants' consent, the researchers used a tape recorder to ensure that no important details were omitted during data analysis.

The researchers analysed and interpreted the data with the help of the universally recognised six steps of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which enabled them to systematically organise and analyse complex data sets (Dawadi, 2021). Braun and Clarke (2006) asserted that these steps involve reading the data, familiarising oneself with it, coding the data into themes, identifying analogous themes, revising themes, naming themes, and developing theoretical meanings. Thematic analysis is appropriate for this study because the research objectives, which form the basis of the interview questions, are already theme-based, and the data collected are intended to address these study objectives (Omodan, 2021).

3.1 Ethical consideration

The researchers acquired ethical clearance and a consent letter from the Faculty of Education at Walter Sisulu University (NMD Campus) to engage in the study. An ethical approval letter was obtained from the university where the study was conducted, with the protocol number FEDFREC 2440. The researchers also obtained approval from the gatekeeper at the selected university. We thoroughly explained, using the participants' preferred languages, that there would be no incentives for participating in this study, as well as the voluntary nature of the study, and the principles of anonymity and confidentiality. To ensure confidentiality and anonymity for the participants, the researchers assigned fictional names, such as LS for lesbian students, GS for gay students, SA for student affairs employees, and SRC for student representative council members.

4. Discussion of Findings

Presented below are the findings from the qualitative data elicited through in-depth interviews conducted with 10 participants from a selected university in the Eastern Cape, South Africa. As stated in the methodology section, these findings are organised into themes and sub-themes. From the first theme, "forms of prejudice-based bullying commonly experienced by LGBT students," three sub-themes emerged: technologically facilitated gender-based bullying, verbal bullying, and discrimination. From the second theme, "strategies to manage prejudice-based bullying against LGBT students," five sub-themes emerged: policy and structural changes, awareness and education, support systems, disciplinary measures, and resource allocation.

3.1 Forms of prejudice-based bullying commonly experienced by LGBT students

From the qualitative data collected from the participants regarding objective one, which focuses on specific forms of prejudice-based bullying among LGBT students at the selected university, we have identified the following sub-themes:

3.1.1 Technologically facilitated gender-based bullying

The selected university embraces cutting-edge technological innovations and the current industrial revolution, integrating technology into its operations, particularly in didactic and administrative processes, as well as in communication. However, students often exploit this advancement by using communication platforms for personal interests, including bullying LGBT students based on their sexuality, which negatively impacts their emotional well-being. This issue has been highlighted by the participants in the subsequent responses:

LS1: In most cases, the bullying takes place in those WhatsApp and social media groups. This is mostly common because this is where the bullies find the platform to say inappropriate things about other students and they know how easy it can be to get away without being called out for it at the expense of making others feel less of themselves because of all the hate that especially straight male students portray towards the LGBTQ students.

SRC2: I think the most contributing factor is social media platforms, where you will see students engaging in cyber-bullying and criticising those who form part of the LGBT community.

SA2: The other form of bullying occurs in cyberspaces. One of the students reported being insulted by an anonymous account on WhatsApp that he suspected he/she must have retrieved it from their class WhatsApp group because of the intimate things he said to him.

According to this, social media platforms that are utilised by the institution to enhance effective and efficient communication among students are also exploited by perpetrators to express their envy towards LGBT students. As stated by LS1, the perpetrators find WhatsApp and other social media groups to be convenient forms of bullying because they can swiftly convey messages intended to undermine LGBT students while maintaining anonymity. This assertion is supported by SA2, who suspects that these bullying activities are perpetrated using "ghost accounts" to avoid being held accountable by those who might follow up on their actions. This results in significant emotional damage to the victims' self-worth.

Based on this analysis, while integrating technology into the educational realm improves the quality of education and ensures timely communication among institutional stakeholders, perpetrators use it as a weapon to dehumanise LGBT students. This leads to LGBT students considering leaving these social platforms to avoid hostile online spaces, as they feel degraded, sad, and depressed (Tustin et al., 2014). Their decision to withdraw from social media platforms, such as class WhatsApp groups, may result in them missing important updates, which adversely affects their academic performance and limits their ability to socialise. This finding confirms Peled's (2019) conclusion that being harassed on social media platforms significantly impacts students' academic performance, emotional development, and socialisation abilities.

3.1.2 Verbal bullying

Among the forms of prejudice-based bullying revealed by the participants was verbal bullying, which is primarily used by male students to demean LGBT students at the selected university. The data revealed that heterosexual male students exhibit patronising behaviour, using a series of vulgar words with the intention of stigmatising and psychologically harming LGBT university students. This has been expressed in the following participants' statements:

GS3: Being a gay student in a university that is flooded with students and lectures from rural backgrounds means being labelled by unfavourable names, overhearing whispers, and being looked at in a weird way. This takes away all the confidence, self-trust, and safety. Our residences are unsafe because that is where we interact the most and the male students seem to be more of bullies than the female students.

GS1: Mostly, I'd say it's verbal bullying. Some students who are around the campus tend to call us names, sometimes insult us and make us feel uncomfortable by using metaphors so that other students can look at us.

SA2: Verbal harassment is common among the male students; they often call gay students by derogatory names such as sissy boy.

LS3: As "L" in LGBT, which proudly displays the masculine side, I have recently experienced mockery by male students. They said things like even if I feel like a man, I still go on my menstrual cycle and I will never have balls like men, and one day I'll probably find a way to dating men again because what we are doing as LGBT is forbidden.

This data showed that perpetrators use explicit prejudicial insults and labelling intended to degrade LGBT students. Words such as "sissy boy" are primarily used to feminise gay students, which is a complete insult to them. According to the perpetrators, the use of these slurs is a method to enforce masculinity among those identifying as gay. On the other hand, drawing unwanted attention towards LGBT-identifying students through metaphors or loud whispers results in being watched, ridiculed, and judged by others. This may lead LGBT students to refrain from revealing their gender, fearing that they may experience similar treatment from heterosexual students. Additionally, GS3's assertion linked prejudice-based bullying with the backgrounds of the perpetrators, which also reflect the conservative nature of the vicinity in which the selected university is located. They believe that the stereotyping and pejorative labelling stem from the conservative backgrounds of the perpetrators.

This finding revealed that the most hostile students towards LGBT students at the selected university are male students. This hostile behaviour is influenced by conservative values and ingrained beliefs about how one should conduct themselves to be socially acceptable, which strongly affects how they perceive and interact with other students. The data also revealed feelings of internalised shame resulting from overt and covert bullying, decreased confidence, lack of safety, and discomfort from being constantly demeaned. These factors may lead to emotional disorders that hinder LGBT students' ability to concentrate in the classroom.

3.1.3 Discrimination

Discrimination is used as a weapon to enforce segregation among students identifying as LGBT. This creates a hostile and unsafe university environment for them, contradicting the institution's role as a place of inclusion and development. Based on this study, LGBT students are being denied their rights to participate in certain institutional activities because of their sexuality. In this regard, the participants stated that:

GS1: This mostly happens at the residences because most of the times we stay as males, then because you are gay, the others do not understand us, and they discriminate us even in the facilities such as gym and other sporting activities happening in the university.

GS2: Bullying that is based on sexuality is common among male students. They are so discriminatory, especially when it comes to sports. They do want gay students to play alongside them because they refer to them as women and suggest that they play netball and volleyball. So, I can say the most common form of bullying is discrimination.

SRC1: They are being discriminated. When a student is a gay, the straight male students tease or discriminate the gay student that they are moffie and they cannot spend time with them because of their sexuality. This does not sit well with them because they did not choose their sexuality. They were born that way. This mostly happens in residences, especially in privately owned residences.

SRC2: You will find out that the male students will refuse to queue behind the members of the LGBT community.

First and foremost, the data revealed shared environments such as bathrooms and fitness areas as specific hotspots for bullying. This explicitly highlights unwelcoming behaviour and denial of access to communal living. The data also disclosed that gay students are the most discriminated against within the LGBT community. The deliberate exclusion of gay students from sporting activities, which serve as a means for male students to bond, degrades and denies gay students' peer membership in

a social setting. This links their sexuality to non-masculine sports, using gender stereotypes to justify discrimination. Perpetrators use terms such as “mofie” and language that is primarily motivated by homophobia, intending to inform gay students that they are no longer considered real men. The gender misclassification employed by heterosexual students seeks to belittle gay students.

Based on this interpretation, it appears that the discriminatory tendencies of heterosexual students towards gay students are greatly influenced by a misunderstanding of sexual diversity and a reluctance to understand other genders. This is evident as their avoidance of spending time with LGBT students prevents them from learning and understanding the LGBT community, thereby perpetuating their misconceptions about gay students. This will lead to further instances of gender-based discrimination unless the university implements and enforces mechanisms that can effectively curb prejudice-based bullying. However, these findings are similar to those of Shabneez et al. (2023), who observed that prejudice can be expressed in various ways, including discrimination against LGBT students, as conforming to such identities is often considered abnormal.

3.2 Strategies to manage prejudice-based bullying among LGBT students

This theme presents the strategies proposed by the participants to manage prejudice-based bullying against LGBT students at the selected university. From the collective views of the participants, six sub-themes emerged: policy and structural changes, awareness and education, support systems, disciplinary measures, student empowerment, and resource allocation.

3.2.1 Policy and structural changes

Numerous participants proposed that the selected university must update or revise its generic policies and code of conduct to explicitly address prejudice-based bullying and facilitate the protection of LGBT students against those who intend to harm them. Harrison et al. (2020) also suggest that universities should revise their anti-bullying policies to create more inclusive and comprehensive frameworks that can be applied in interventions against prejudice-based bullying. In this regard, the participants have stated:

LS1: Update codes of conduct, harassment and bullying policies to explicitly address prejudice-based bullying. Designating LGBT-specific staff and partnering with LGBT organisations.

SA2: I suggest that the university adjust its policies to the inclusive policies, because we have an anti-bullying policy, but it does not directly speak to the LGBT community.

The data demonstrates that the participants recognise insufficient anti-bullying policies tailored to combat prejudice-based bullying at their respective universities. They believe that if their institution revises policies to ensure the safety of LGBT students, prejudice-based bullying will be more manageable. The fact that LS1 and SA2 suggested policy revisions clearly demonstrates their awareness that managing bullying requires specific policies that are meaningful and enforceable to put an end to prejudice-based bullying. On the other hand, designating staff trained to handle sensitive cases without judgment will be the best strategy to minimise the prevalence of prejudice-based bullying. Furthermore, networking and partnering with external LGBT organisations will broaden the knowledge that will help the institution tackle bullying at its roots.

Based on the above analysis, the selected university's existing anti-bullying policies and code of conduct do not explicitly address bullying motivated by prejudice directed at sexual minority groups but are instead generic. This may cause distal stressors that Frost and Meyer (2023) believe are caused by discriminatory policies and laws due to prejudice. However, it is fundamental that the university management or policymakers revise the policy to promote a safe learning environment for LGBT students so they can thrive emotionally and academically. This finding supports Brixham College (2024), which has highlighted that inclusive anti-bullying policies guarantee an advocate learning

environment that is free from hostility, intimidation, and all forms of prejudice-based bullying among LGBT students.

3.2.2 Awareness and education

A number of participants argued that the university populace lacks knowledge about gender diversity and ways in which they can protect LGBT students from the hostility that emanates from misunderstandings and misconceptions about these genders. However, the students suggested that the university must ensure ongoing education by creating safe spaces for this marginalised group and promoting the current support mechanisms. The participants suggested the following:

LS1: Establish a dedicated task force that oversee bullying prevention, response, and support. Have awareness campaigns, events and social media promoting inclusivity and support and services.

GS3: I suggest that the university must organise workshop to teach not only the LGBT students to accept themselves but also the entire university populace to know who we are. The University can use our Facebook page and webpage, posters, and other forms they use to promote other programs within the university.

SA2: Visible signage, Increase the number of workshops and events, and include LGBTQIA+-based facilities in the orientation programs.

GS2: If there are other support systems that I might not be aware of, I suggest that the university promote those by using the institutional Facebook page, and web page and mention those during the orientation period so that even the freshmen will be aware of such services.

This data demonstrates the shortcomings of the university in officially communicating and disseminating the available anti-bullying mechanisms to the university community. The participants demand that the university move from marginalised, whispered knowledge to a recognised, official part of the university's mission and culture. This shift will validate the need for support, promote diversity and inclusion, and normalise the LGBT community. Creating awareness about the resources designated to manage prejudice-based bullying against LGBT students will not only promote the safety of LGBT students, but it will also guarantee their privacy, as they will not have to inquire about these services from anyone who may hold stereotypes or be judgmental.

According to LS1 and GS1, employing educational campaigns, providing detailed information about the mechanisms on the institutional website, and using posters will make it easier for LGBT students to utilise these services when encountering bullying. Additionally, GS3 and SA2 suggested that the selected university hold workshops aimed not only at LGBT students but at the entire university populace, to formally introduce them to LGBT issues. The more people know and understand something, the less likely they are to exhibit discriminatory behaviours towards it. These workshops will also promote self-acceptance for LGBT students and combat the ignorance and prejudice prevalent within the university populace. Equally disseminating detailed information about the currently available support mechanisms that can aid in managing prejudice-based bullying is a crucial step that the selected university can take to ensure that LGBT students are aware of and can utilise these mechanisms to address the issue. Vaill et al. (2020) deem creating awareness of available support mechanisms important, as the lack of promotion of institutional resources, including anti-bullying policies, has left students unaware of these policies and other relevant information that they can use to minimise the rates of prejudice-based bullying.

3.2.3 Support systems

Since the participants showed dissatisfaction with the current support systems offered by the university as a means of minimising the marginalisation of LGBT students, they proposed several

support systems that the selected university can use in addition to the existing mechanisms to manage prejudice-based bullying. These are their propositions:

GS3: I would suggest that people who are delegated responsibilities associated with our well-being communicate with other universities so that they learn how they deal with bullying.

LS1: Foster collaborative relationships with student organizations. Providing centralized hubs, confidential reporting, and counselling.

SA2: I think community partnerships such as motivational speakers and influencers can play a huge role in trying to speak with the university community about effects of bullying the LGBT students.

Due to the ineffectiveness of the existing university support systems, the participants suggested that the selected university must prioritise networking with other universities. This indicates that the participants are aware that effective support systems exist elsewhere, thereby advising the university to adopt practices from other institutions. This approach will help explore various ways to ensure that LGBT students feel safe in all aspects of their lives within the university environment. This suggestion aligns with Langarita et al. (2024), who recommended that policymakers establish a collaborative network for professionals to share resources and expertise, enabling them to work together effectively to support the well-being and success of LGBT students.

The proposed partnerships with motivational speakers, influencers, and others are a modern way to reach students more broadly. These partners can introduce different perspectives on sexuality and bullying, making the message more relatable and impactful than relying solely on university staff. This will help students understand diverse genders and reduce their stereotypes and misconceptions about them. Furthermore, fostering relationships between the university and student organisations will lead to the establishment of firm reporting structures, which will improve the rate at which LGBT students report instances of bullying, rather than concealing them until they cause emotional harm and hinder academic performance. This finding aligns with Nyawo and Govender (2022), who suggested that educational institutions must improve reporting procedures to increase the frequency of managing bullying incidents.

3.2.4 Disciplinary measures

The need for appropriate disciplinary measures for those who perpetrate against the existence of LGBT students is expressed by the participants below:

GS1: I feel like there must be actions that are taken toward the perpetrators instead of moving the victim from the residence, because it is not going to end the bullying. There must be disciplinary measures, and they must be known.

GS2: ...maybe we will have enough time to draft disciplinary measures for those who perceive us as people who need correction.

The above articulations demonstrate participants' belief in justice. Participants call for the university to implement disciplinary measures with explicit consequences for victimising LGBT students. Publicly visible consequences will serve as a warning for perpetrators who exhibit hate towards LGBT students, and as an assurance to the victims that the institution prioritises their safety. The university is urged to exercise its authority in validating the acceptance of LGBT students by rejecting the perpetrators' justification for 'correcting' LGBT students.

Based on this analysis, this study has revealed that the selected university does not have formal disciplinary and accountability measures for individuals who undermine the existence of LGBT students. However, handling bullying cases without confronting the perpetrator seems completely unjust for the victims, as the perpetrator will continue to perceive LGBT students as trespassers who

are not supposed to share a room or socialise with heterosexual students. This mindset gives them more grounds and courage to continue bullying even more students who identify as LGBT. Therefore, drafting and communicating disciplinary and accountability measures is one of the necessary strategies to manage prejudice-based bullying against LGBT students. This finding aligns with Okafor's (2021) recommendation that appropriate disciplinary measures should be taken against the perpetrators of bullying.

3.2.5 Resource allocation

Inadequate institutional resources limit the effectiveness of managing prejudice-based bullying against LGBT students. This is why the participants proposed that the selected university allocate sufficient resources to address prejudice-based bullying. Regarding resource allocation, participants have said:

SRC1: ...ensure that there is a residence for the LGBT students because they understand each other but the thing is they will not be able to interact with others.

SRC2: It's just a matter of enough monetary resources to implement these measures more especially in inductions for first years to educate them about coexisting with LGBT individuals.

SA1: I suggest that the university must have report mechanisms that can be accessed anonymously by calls and other social media platforms. They also need to have a budget for the students to travel to other campuses to attend LGBT based campaigns.

The selected university's inability to curb bullying can be resolved by addressing its shortcomings in the provision of necessary resources. These resources include LGBT-based residences and financial support. To start with, a personalised residence is perceived as a necessary physical sanctuary where LGBT students can escape bullying and find support. The participants, on the other hand, anticipated unintended negative consequences, namely segregation, which could possibly hinder interaction with other students. SRC2 and SA1 believe that the university is not investing enough monetary resources towards the LGBT society budget. However, they propose that the budget must be allocated to proactive education and funding for travel to other campuses for educational and knowledge-sharing purposes. Furthermore, SA1 suggested that the university must invest in reporting platforms that will maintain anonymity for LGBT students who fear retaliation.

Although there are identified limitations in providing a separate residence for LGBT students, it sounds reasonable because participants have revealed that the most common hotspots for bullying are their residences, where they encounter each other often. Mguye and Omodan (2023a) also suggest that the provision of LGBT-based facilities will not only serve as a method to segregate LGBT students from perpetrators but will also be a sign of acknowledgement for all LGBT students. However, the selected university needs to consider including and paying more attention to "gender" in its application forms so that they can easily identify students who need to be allocated to LGBT residences.

Finance is a crucial resource that brings all other resources into existence. An adequate budget will not only facilitate travel but will also enable the institution to invite external LGBT ambassadors to instil a deeper understanding of gender diversity, so that even those who perceive them as trespassers will refrain from patronising them and treat them with dignity. It will also provide sufficient training for staff responsible for handling gender-diversity issues. Lastly, some LGBT students might find reporting this kind of bullying embarrassing; this is why it is imperative for the university to establish anonymous bullying reporting lines that are designated to urgently follow up on prejudice-based bullying before it escalates. This conforms with Messman et al. (2022), who stated that anonymous reporting through hotlines allows for a safe and secure means of reporting violence within the educational setting.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study focused on exploring strategies to manage prejudice-based bullying against LGBT students at a selected university. It involved 10 participants, which comprised six LGBT students, two student affairs workers, and two SRC members. The study concluded that the existence of prejudice-based bullying against LGBT students is not imagined; it is a phenomenon that these students endure, as the perpetrators are reluctant to embrace gender diversity due to a lack of exposure to information on the subject. In response to two questions regarding the forms of bullying they encounter and the locations where bullying occurs most frequently, participants' explanations revealed that heterosexual male students are often the source of this harassment, which psychologically affects the targeted students. Therefore, participants recommended that the selected university should draft more inclusive and comprehensive policies, a code of conduct, and disciplinary measures that explicitly outline the charges for perpetrators. Moreover, it is advised that the university increase the number of awareness campaigns, provide adequate resources for LGBT students, and create external networks to gain insights on how to protect this minority group from oppression.

The researchers therefore recommended the following:

- The university holds ongoing prejudice and inclusivity programmes to combat the stereotypes and hate that heterosexual students have towards LGBT students.
- The university implements and enforces a strict cyberbullying and digital conduct policy to minimise the weaponisation of social media platforms by perpetrators.
- The university must ensure that adequate financial resources for LGBT-based needs are allocated so that LGBT representatives can efficiently organise LGBT-focused programmes.
- The university should network with external stakeholders to gain new insights on managing bullying motivated by prejudice and promoting inclusivity by drafting, implementing, and enforcing anti-bullying policies and disciplinary measures for perpetrators.

4.1 Limitations and further studies

We intended to elicit data from LGBT students, specifically gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender students; however, we were unable to locate the bisexual and transgender students. We initially planned to use two data collection methods: in-depth interviews and focus groups. However, due to the varying schedules of participants, they could not gather at the same time, leading us to consider using only one data collection method: the in-depth interview. Since the study findings revealed that prejudice-based bullying commonly occurs among heterosexual male students and gay students, we suggest that future studies must explore the effects of prejudice-based bullying and coping mechanisms for gay students in a hostile university environment.

5. Declarations

Author Contributions: Conceptualisation (N.J.M. & B.I.O.); Literature review (B.I.O.); methodology (N.M.); software (N/A.); validation (B.I.O.); formal analysis (N.J.M.); investigation (N.J.M. & B.I.O.); data curation (N.J.M.); drafting and preparation (N.J.M.); review and editing (B.I.O.); supervision (B.I.O.); project administration (N.J.M.); funding acquisition (N/A). All authors have read and approved the published version of the article.

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Data availability statement: The data supporting the findings of this research are available upon request from the corresponding author. While the data is included in the article, the ethical guidelines

obtained for the study prevent its public accessibility to uphold confidentiality between the author and the participants. This measure guarantees the protection of communication during the study and ensures compliance with established rules of engagement between the parties involved.

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