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FEATURE

**Globalization and Discriminatory Practices Against
Trans-women in the Philippines**

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Abstract. Being transgender, specifically trans-woman still comes with a stigma attached even though it is reported that an estimated 9 to 9.5 million transgender people live in the Asia-Pacific region, with the majority being trans-women, according to a UNDP May 2012 report. However, research exploring the different aspects of transgender people's lives in that same region is not much, but growing. Studies done in the United States of America suggest that transgender people face high rates of discrimination (Grant, et. al, 2011; Kosciw & Diaz, 2006; Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006). However, little is known about the types of discrimination trans-women face in the Philippines context. This phenomenological study explores the experiences of ten trans-women in the Philippines through semi-structured interviews. All interviews and focus groups were conducted in the cities of Dasmariñas and Santa Rosa. Seven themes emerged from analysis of data: awareness of participants' differences, family, violence and abuse, employment, access to health, support, and hope for the future.

She began her morning preparations in the usual way. Makeup? Check. Little black dress to emphasize her curves? Check. High-heeled pumps? Check. As she looked in the mirror she thought, "I look especially stunning today . . . must be doing something right." She wished her boyfriend could see her, but right now she was in a long distance relationship. Still she really craved his presence because he made her life feel safe . . . balanced. Heaven knew she needed things in her life to make her feel balanced. "Oh well, I've got to get to work," she said to her reflection in the mirror, "These medical bills aren't going to pay themselves." Then with a smile she adjusted her breasts for better effect and whispered "Heads up, girls. No one needs to know I was born a boy."

That day, I walked around aimlessly at the mall. A young lady standing outside a distant store smiled brightly and waved in my direction, as if beckoning me to come. Even though I did not know her, I knew that the smile and wave was intended for me. Instinctively, I waved back feeling drawn by her warmth and beautiful smile. As I walked in her direction, it did not take me long to realize that she was not a young lady as I had thought; she was trans-woman.

Many terms can be used to describe transgender; however, Winters (2012) in a United Nations Development Program (UNDP) report suggests that “‘transgender’ and its derivatives (including ‘trans* person’, ‘trans* woman’ and ‘trans* man’) are Western and modern” (p. 6). In the Philippines the term *bakla* (baklá) usually refers to a male person who is exclusively attracted to men. What an English-speaking Westerner might call a trans-woman will likely be labeled by Filipinos as bakla (used in the north) or bayot (used in the center and south) in the Philippines (Aggleton, 1999; Nanda, 2000; Winters, 2006). More formally, “bakla is socially constructed around the concept of transformation and the manipulation of possible scripts, particularly those that involve gender crossing. Indeed, the bakla evokes strong imagery of ‘the male body with a female heart’” (Manalansan, 2003, p. 53).

Even though the operational definitions for homosexuals and baklas make the terms appear synonymous, Garcia (2004) submits that they are far from congruent. However, many Filipinos use them interchangeably because they entail the same social effect: stigmatization. Because of these various labels attached to the key terms, transgender in this study will refer to persons born as one gender but live as the opposite gender. In the context of the Philippines, trans-woman will specifically refer to persons born males who currently live as females, but not necessarily tied to being homosexual; nor to having had sex reassignment surgery. This study explores elements of discrimination in the lives of ten trans-women in the Philippines to see whether their experiences are mirrored in the experiences of trans-women in the USA.

Review of the Literature

History of Transgenderism in the Philippines

Transgenderism seems to have taken root in oral traditions of the past in the Philippines and all of South Asia (Garcia, 2004; Shivananda, 2005). Garcia suggests a fundamental difference between gender and sexuality in the Philippines. He speaks of gender transitive behaviors such as the identities of bakla, bayot, agi, and bantut on the one hand, and homosexuality as typically ‘gay’ same-sex orientation and/or identity on the other. However, “Gender crossing and transvestism were cultural features of early colonial . . . and thus, presumably, pre-colonial communities” (Garcia, 2004 p. 1), but homoeroticism

was not an identifying factor (Nanda, 2000). As a result, elements of what is now termed trans-woman, was simply not classified or defined by their sexual attractions or behavior.

Globalization generally refers to the Western influence on other parts of the globe. Corboz (2009) believes that it “has led to transformation of identities and subjectivities via movement of people, culture and ideologies from Western to non-Western countries” (p. 10). Literature argues whether Western culture really influences transgender behaviors in Asia (Garcia 2004; Winters 2012) since these Western features of trans-persons may not necessarily apply to the Philippines.

Transgender Issues

Transgender persons seem to face additional pressure because of their “gender” classification or non-classification. Literature suggests that little research has been conducted on transgendered people (Lakshmanan & Victor, 2010; Grossman & D’Augelli, 2006). Most issues seem to be related to health care, employment, education, suicide and murder, discrimination on the job, issues with salaries, family life and obtaining identity documents.

A study conducted in the United States of America (USA) by Grant, Mottet, Tanis, Harrison, Herman, and Keisling (2011) found that trans- and gender non-conforming (GNC) people faced widespread and multi-faceted discrimination in every aspect of life: education, employment, housing, health care, and the justice system, among others. Exclusively, 53 percent of respondents experienced an act of life-changing discrimination, which include events such as job loss, housing loss, extreme bullying, physical or sexual assault, lost relationships, incarceration, or denial of medical services (Grant, et. al., 2011).

Health care. Notably, most published studies seem to focus on health vulnerability issues, and could readily be uncovered from the USA. Recurring themes include high risks of HIV/AIDS (Cole, 2006; Edwards, Fisher and Reynolds, 2007; Kaufman, 2008), mental health concerns, high rates of substance abuse, attempted suicide, childhood abuse, past sexual abuse/assault, psychiatric disorders, improper use of sex hormones (Grossman & D’ Augelli, 2006) and health problems due to the sharing of contaminated needles (Edwards, et al., 2007; Grossman & D’ Augelli, 2006).

Studies of gay men who conceal their homosexuality found that these men showed higher risks of suffering from disease such as upper respiratory infections and accelerated HIV disease progression (Cole 2006). Edwards et al. (2007) add that “transgender persons are among the highest HIV prevalence groups, with a prevalence rate of 35% found in male-to-female transgender-identified person in San Francisco, California” (p. 1030). Other recent studies with transgender

women show high levels of HIV infection rates among these individuals (Kaufman, 2008; Edwards, et al. 2007).

Discrimination. After health care issues, discrimination seems to be the second most frequently studied topic on transgender issues. Themes range from discrimination because of new “gender” identity, to bullying, violence, lack of family support, lost job opportunities, low job security, low salaries and verbal abuse (Grant, et. al, 2011; Kosciw & Diaz, 2006). The National School Climate Survey conducted in 2005, studied 1,732 gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender youth. Seventy-five percent reported that they often hear homophobic remarks at school. Nineteen percent reported that similar remarks were also heard from teachers and staff (Kosciw & Diaz 2006). In other studies, transgender youth report that they did not feel safe because they were constantly objectified sexually; received a lot of verbal harassment which might escalate into physical violence from family members, neighbors, strangers and classmates (Grossman & D’Augelli, 2006) and sexual abuse.

This review synthesizes studies done on transgender issues. The current study explored whether transgender people, specifically trans-women face similar discriminatory issues in the Philippines as those reported in studies done in the USA. Two leading research questions were at the center of this study:

1. What are the types of discrimination that trans-women face in the Philippines?
2. How similar or different are these discriminatory experiences with those experienced by trans- genders outside the Philippines, specifically in the USA?

The aim of the study is threefold: to understand better this phenomenon in order to help reduce discrimination towards transgender people; to possibly increase transgender value to the Philippine society; and to assist religious groups in planning for novel ministries to reach transgender people in the Philippines and other Asian countries.

Methodology

Research Approach and Rationale

The qualitative research platform permits me to explore any social phenomenon more deeply. As a result, my purpose was truly to try to understand this social phenomenon from the perspective and experiences of the actors involved (Moutstakas, 1994; Lester, 1999; Patton, 2002; Ospina, 2004), and to be able to describe, understand and explain the essence of the lived experiences of individuals about a phenomenon (Lichtman, 2013; Creswell, 1998). Hancock (2002) however suggests that a qualitative study may not necessarily provide

definite explanations but it can raise awareness and increase insight. Therefore, this research was conducted using the phenomenological approach to uncover and describe the lived experiences of some trans-women in the Philippines. .

Three main qualitative methods were used. Participant observation (see Lichtman, 2013; Hancock 2002; Guba & Lincoln, 1981) was one of the methods. It involved two techniques: written descriptions, which allowed me to record observations of people (Hancock, 2002), photographs and artifacts (see Hancock, 2002). The second method was in-depth interviews (Lichtman, 2013). The final method for data collection was conducting focus group interviews (Lichtman, 2013). The purpose of using it in this study was the efficiency of this method of collecting data on a group of individuals with similar characteristics within a subgroup (Hancock, 2002) and to facilitate group interaction among participants (Hancock, 2002; Lichtman, 2013).

Positioning and Reflexivity

The literature suggests that there are many factors that can influence the researcher and the research in a qualitative study (Lichtman, 2013; Patton, 1990; Malterud, 2001). Thus it is important that I position myself because “all research is guided by researchers’ feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied” (Denzin & Lincoln, as cited in Birks & Mills, 2011, p. 8). In that context, I believe in the existence of the Divine. I believe that the Divine is responsible for creating all human kind, regardless of their orientation; and that all human kind is in need of His saving grace. It should be noted that I am a novice in the field of research as well as in the area of this study, but I seem to have a general burden for unrepresented groups, or groups which are silent while being discriminated against. Finally, I like qualitative research because I can study the lives on others more deeply, while trying to make a difference.

In dealing with the effects of the research on the research participants, I interacted casually with participants before the interviews to reduce the possibility of my having a direct effect on them. In dealing with the effects of the phenomenon on me as the researcher, I spent significant time in trying to understand my research participants. Prolonged engagement allowed me maintain sensitivity when the time came to conduct interviews as it became less probable that singular events such as interviews would seriously affect data collection and analysis. In dealing with researcher competence as highlighted by Patton (2002), I tried to address it in three ways. My previous experience in dealing with sensitive topics assisted me in entering the study with an open mind to find out about the phenomenon. This provided a foundation that was critical for all data collection methods. I tried to be very systematic in data collection, management and analysis by adhering to the rigor of the study, ensuring that all categories were saturated when developing themes.

Sampling and Research Participants

Recruitment. Three different approaches were created to recruit participants. The first attempt was to recruit participants through a transgender organization based in Manila. It was unsuccessful because I received no response from the person contacted. In the second approach, I used snowballing by recruiting participants through a friend. In the third attempt, I approached people who appeared to have identifiable external traits of trans-women on three separate days at two malls in the Dasmariñas region. During the initial contact with all recruits, I introduced myself, the study, and answered any questions the prospective informants had. They were also allowed to review consent forms and questions ahead of time; some in my presence, and to others it was sent via email, before agreeing to participate in the study.

Participant selection. Participants were selected through snowballing and purposive sampling techniques because of the sensitive nature of the study. Patten (2007) submits that snowballing “is useful when attempting to locate participants who are hard to find” (p. 51). In addition, purposive sampling was also used, since it is a good method to select people whom researchers believe are good sources of information (Patten, 2007). In this instance, 10 participants were selected from the 12 who were recruited as the study sample using the following criteria: (a) must be born Filipino; (b) must identify as trans-woman or its derivatives (i.e. born male now living as female [MtF]), cross dresser, drag queen; (c) must be between the ages of 20 to 40; (d) must speak English; and (e) must be willing to sign the informed consent form to participate in the study. All participants met these criteria.

Data Collection

Instrument. A four-part instrument was created for this study. The first section is the interview guidelines; the second section is the one-on-one interview question sheet/ focus group question sheet; the third section consists of a 5-personal question sheet; and the final part consists of a 7-demographic question sheet. The Interview Guidelines gave the purpose of the study; researchers’ expectations; focus group rules; and time of group meeting. The Interview Question Sheet/ Focus group Question Sheet outlined the questions that would be used as a guide for the 1-hour session of each of the 10 participants. The Demographic Information sheet- contained seven questions that sought to uncover participants’ background information such as pseudonym, age, marital status, race, ethnicity, language, educational level, and employment status.

My colleagues served as the first peer reviewers for the instrument. It was later sent to the informant who assisted me with recruiting other informants for the study. Five questions were removed from the Demographic Information sheet as a result. The instrument was then sent to the Ethics and Review Board (ERB)

of my school for review and approval. The incentive to study participants was the opportunity given for them to share their story and thoughts on how globalization influences them as transgender, if it did at all. In addition, participants were assured that though the interview was recorded, anonymity and confidentiality would be upheld.

Procedures. Before reading the interview protocol, participants were introduced to my assistant, who would be observing, and to an interpreter who would translate in the event that any of the participants chose to use Tagalog. I asked participants if they were comfortable with the idea of having them present and they all gave their approval. All interviews ranged from 52 to 120 minutes each. Although the interviews were conducted in English, there were times when one of the participants in both focus groups expressed themselves in Tagalog. At those times the interpreter provided the English version to the story.

In both focus groups, participants shared some information that could make them quickly identifiable. An agreement was made to make modification to those portions when transcribing and conducting data analysis. Removing such data did not affect the integrity of data collection or analysis.

At the end of all sessions, I concluded with a debriefing time by asking my assistant (the observer/ recorder) and the translator their comments on what transpired. They were able to give insight about how they saw participants interact and how they saw participants influencing each other in expressing ideas. I asked them about the guided questions and if there was anything that could be adjusted or asked better. Because of feedback from the assistants, the second focus group went more smoothly.

Setting. One-on-one and focus group interviews, and participant observations were all conducted in the cities of Dasmariñas, Cavite and Santa Rosa, Laguna. Dasmariñas is the nearest city to the Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies, and is located approximately 30 kilometers south of Manila. It is the 11th largest city in the country in terms of population. Santa Rosa is 38 kilometers south of Manila and is considered the densest city in the province and the third largest local government unit in Laguna.

Data Analysis

In qualitative research, “the purpose of data analysis is to organize, provide structure to, and elicit meaning from research data” (Polit & Beck, 2008, p. 507). In this study two very similar methods were used to analyze data: Patton’s (2002) method of inductive analysis, and Polit and Beck’s (2008) editing analysis Style. Patton (2002) recommends the inductive analysis, which consists of organizing the smallest units of data into meaningful categories and themes. It begins with specific observations and develops toward general patterns. This is because

phenomenological analysis begins as soon as the data collection begins, with the goal of finding common themes, concepts or patterns in data (Moustakas, 1994; Polit & Beck, 2008).

My two assistants and I did the data analysis. Each provided assistance in one focus group interview. After listening to the interviews, transcribing them and developing codes, categories and themes; assistants were given the opportunity to scan through the listing to provide insight, agree or disagree with the themes that emerged.

Results and Discussion

Since this study was solely concerned about discriminatory practices, participants were asked questions and allowed to share stories about different aspects of their lives such as family reaction to their sexual orientation; employment issues, health services access, violence, live-in situation, coping with people's attitudes, and access to hormone therapy. From the data, seven themes emerged which aimed at addressing aspects of the research questions. These are: awareness of participants' differences, family, violence and abuse, employment, access to health, support, and hopes for the future. These represented key ideas participants presented about their experiences of discrimination. Selected quotes from the respondents are cited to illustrate the themes. Most of the themes that emerged seemed to support what other researchers found about discrimination against transgender people in the USA.

For example, the theme of family was used or referenced regardless of what was being discussed. The following are some of the codes for family. Participants felt that their family provided support for their decision. They felt that they were being somewhat rejected by their family. They generally lived with family and generally believed that being trans-woman or gay adds value to their family. They were verbally abused by family members. Some participants expressed that their family was afraid for their safety because of their chosen lifestyle. In addition, there was frequent mention of different family members, such as: my mom was not pleased; my mom told me that I should not pursue that lifestyle; my uncles told me I cannot be bakla; my family members dissuaded me from being bakla. Each theme was developed using a similar rigorous approach.

Awareness of Difference

Though the research was looking at discriminatory practices against trans-women in the Philippines, data revealed that participants' self-awareness and perception of family or society would impact their overall experience of being trans-woman, and also how they recognize and deal with discriminatory issues in the different aspects of their lives. Categories included participants knowing from an early age that they were different and attracted to the same sex; and

participants indicating that members of their family in most cases saw that they were different. It was noted that the experiences of participants varied. Some indicated that they were teased about it even before being aware of what being bakla was. Notably, all participants felt that they knew they were gay or different before the age of ten. One participant reported knowing when he was 3 years of age. The participant recounts that “I’m aware that I am gay when I was 3, when my father died. I used the ribbon in the flowers to make a sash. I used it because I watch the TV contest *Little Miss Philippines*.” (Focus Group 2, participant 1).

Notably, participants’ reports seemed to be similar to studies done in the USA, since Mallon (1999) asserts that some children begin to identify their gender at age three. Additionally, Rosenberg (2002) suggests that it could be as early as two and a half years of age.

Family and Living Situation

Participant experiences with family were varied. The following categories emerged: participants felt that their family provided positive support for their decision; participants felt that they were being somewhat rejected by their family because they were choosing to be different; participants generally lived with family; and some participants believe that being trans-woman or gay is financially beneficial to parents. Some participants reported that though the rejection was not always spoken, family’s unspoken cues indicated disapproval. One participant recounts that

The only one that kept on reminding me of my feminine movements was on my father’s side. My mother was silent. My father kept on reminding me, don’t do that, try to be a little masculine. I knew he was displeased because of the way he looked at me. (Focus group 1, participant 3)

Interestingly, in their study in the USA, Grossman, D’Augelli, Salter, and Hubbard (2005) suggest that coming out as transgender to one’s parents is not always a safe choice. These authors report on one study done with 55 trans-youth which found high levels of verbal and physical abuse from parents, with the highest levels seen by those youth who least conformed to gender stereotypes.

Most participants lived with parents. Only three participants indicated that they were renting or living alone, and in one of these cases, “the group” rented the home for relaxation purposes. Similarly, in a study conducted by Grossman and D’Augelli (2006), demographic results showed that 50% lived with parents or relatives. One unique feature found in this study seems to be participants’ view that most Philippine families would not mind having a gay son because of a commonly-held belief about them being loving towards parents. Studies to support such findings were not uncovered from the USA. One participant puts it this way:

That is a common practice here in the Philippines. It's our culture. If parents have a son who was gay, that the gay son would be the one to take care of the parents when they get older. If you ask some parents, they would rather choose to have a gay son because when they grow old, they will take care of them. (Focus Group 2, participant 2)

Violence and Abuse

A few participants indicated that they were victims of verbal abuse and in some cases physical abuse by because they were trans-women. This abuse came from both family and community members. Categories in this theme included: participants being aware of physical violence against gays/ trans-women; participants being familiar with being verbally abused by others and participants reporting varying ways of coping with people's overt discrimination toward them. However, few of these were serious personal attacks of violence against them. Notably, a few participants shared experiences of friends who had serious attacks of violence against them because of being bakla in neighboring countries outside of the Philippines. These findings were similar with results from the National School Climate Survey (2005) in the USA. For instance, researchers found that 17% of participants reported that they were physically harassed, while 12% reported being physically assaulted because of their gender expression. One participant in this study passionately shared her experience,

In college, I was bullied every day because of my color, because I am gay. I am fat. From the pathway to the classroom, I was bullied. So it's like for every day I would hear these words, so I had to stop school. I asked for help in the guidance office but they did not do anything about it. They just told me "let it be, let it pass." So I had to stop school because of that. (Focus group 2, participant 1)

Employment

All participants were employed; 5 full-time and 5 part-time. Notably, 8 out of the 10 reported to have had some level of discrimination with employment. Categories included participants experiencing some level of discrimination when they appeared feminine and participant's loss of jobs because of being gay/bakla. All participants agreed that the fashion and retail industries are open to employing trans-women/ gays, while the banking/financial industry was not that open. One participant revealed the following about his first job experience:

I applied to a bank; and they told me I was accepted but I had to cut my hair. Then they told me it's really one of their rules. So I did not push through with the job, instead I applied to another company; it's a fashion. They accepted me because they have a different kind of industry, where people

like us are being accepted. So, it's really based on the kind of industry; fashion or retailing, they are kind of open to homosexuals like us. (Focus group 2, participant 2)

Grant et al. (2011) found that transgender people are unemployed at alarming rates in the USA and its territories. They also face discrimination at alarming rates (Burns & Krehely, 2011). In addition, researchers found that an overall 13% of respondents were unemployed; which nearly doubled the national average at the time of the survey. Researchers revealed that forty-seven percent (47%) said they had experienced an adverse job outcome such as being fired, not hired or denied a promotion because of being transgender/gender non-conforming; 26% said they had lost a job for the same reason (Grant et al., 2011).

Health Care

Unlike findings of studies done in the USA, participants in this study reported not having problems accessing community health care services. There was general consensus among participants that they identified themselves upfront as "bakla." In addition, they all reported that since they were biologically born male, when filling out forms, they simply complied by ticking the male box. One participant shared that

Health services in our country are open to anyone who wants to avail it. It is not limited to a certain gender, regardless of what sexual orientation you have. There is gender sensitivity right now. (Focus group 2, participant 2)

These findings contrast with those of Grant et al. (2011) report that 28% or respondents who indicated that when sick or injured, they postponed medical care due to discrimination. Nineteen percent reported refusal of care; 28% experienced harassment or violence in the medical setting; and 50% had to teach medical providers about transgender care. Though statistics in this regard is readily available, it should be noted that all participants reported that they visit the doctor mostly in relation to employment. As such, I am unsure whether medical providers in the Philippines have a better knowledge of how to provide care to transgender people.

Support

Categories that emerged relating to support include: participants provide support for each other because each one would face some kind of discrimination; and participants usually move around in groups. In general, it appears that participants seem to have closely-knit relationships with one another. Social support seems to be very important to them since some of them have to deal with rejection or forms of abuse at home, in the community and possibly on the job. In

one of the focus groups, participants revealed that social support is so important that they have a common place for socialization.

My friends and I we're renting a dorm, a dormitory. It's a place for us to mingle, to socialize, to drink. So we're renting that place. Actually, we are more like 15. But we are sharing. We go there to relax. (Focus group 2, participant 4)

In addition, during focus group interviews, participants had a tendency to use one person, as a base when expressing a thought. When sharing stories, they would frequently look in that person's direction to smile, or to say "I never told him this before." Participants constantly verbally affirmed each other during the interview when a participant was expressing some insecurity. For example, one shared, "I'm not pretty. I am not pretty like Denise. I'm not skinny." Other group members were eager to affirm, "she's not pretty, but she's hot" "she's a hottie." There are large numbers of support groups for transgender people in the USA and a proliferation of them in the Philippines, for example, Society of Transsexual Women of the Philippines (STRAP) based in Manila and Coalition for the Liberation of Reassigned Sex (COLORS) based in Cebu. However, none of the participants reported being a part of any organized group.

Hopes for the Future

All participants were given an opportunity to share what they hoped would be the future for trans-women. Most expressed that, overall, they hoped for a life without discrimination associated with their sexual orientation. Participants were particularly hopeful for the day when trans-women would be treated as "normal" citizens, humans, and not as trans-women, gay or bakla. Categories that emerged were: not to experience discriminations associated with being trans-women or gay; choosing to be who they are if they had to do it again; and possibly making minor changes if they had to, to enhance themselves not changing themselves. Specific wishes of some participants were to have longer hair, be whiter, be thinner, and not to have a disability, in the case of one participant. However, most were quite content, just the way they were.

There is nothing wrong in being gay as long as being human; doing everything that you can be. You find a job; you're not hurting anyone else, as long as you can be someone useful to society. I think that is more important. (Focus group 1, participant 4)

Conclusions and Recommendations

Before conducting this study, I would have easily concluded that trans-women in the Philippines face little or no discrimination because of the number I regularly come into contact with. However, overall findings seem to suggest that

there are some similarities in discrimination against transgender people in the Philippines with that found in studies in the USA. Few exceptions were found. Findings of this study give some valuable insight into the research questions, but may have produced more questions than answers. For instance, even though participants reported experiences of discrimination in varied situations such as in their families, communities, problems with finding certain types of jobs, and even with violence, some participants expressed that they do not believe that things are “that bad” in the Philippines. As a result, future studies exploring discriminatory practices using a larger sample may provide deeper insight into the experiences of trans-women or baklas in the Philippines. Patton (1990) suggests that when the sample size is too small, findings cannot be generalized beyond the groups who were studied.

This study strictly explored the experiences of trans-women. Brown (1995) suggests that sexual orientation is a different experience for women. For example, cardiac and cancer risk factors seem to be more prevalent among lesbian women than heterosexual women, because they were more prone to smoking, having an unhealthy diet, and becoming overweight (Cochran et al., 2001). Therefore, future research can be done to explore whether trans-men (biologically born female living as male) in the Philippines have similar experiences in health, and also to explore discriminatory factors overall.

Some differences were found between studies done in the USA and findings in this research. For example, Sandfort et al (2006) believed that people who experience prejudice and discrimination or who concealed a same-sex orientation in the workplace have higher rates of job burnout and lower levels of general health. However, participants in this study did not report feeling burned out or discriminated in their present jobs. This may be the case in some instances because they were accepted for who they are, and in others, because there was no disclosure about sexual orientation.

Finally, an overall recommendation would be for more studies to be conducted on different aspects of the lives of transgender persons in the Philippines. Even though the UNDP report provided an estimate of transgender persons living in the Asian region, statistics for those living in the Philippines are currently unknown. This seems to be a problem in the USA as well. Burgess (1999) reveals that the prevalence of transgender people in the USA is unknown, it was estimated to be somewhere between 3 to 10% of the entire population (Grossman & D’Augelli, 2006). More recently, the NCTE (2009) also states that figures are unknown but it provides estimates between .25% and 1% of the population.

Lack of research in these basic areas could perpetuate vulnerability cycles of discrimination for transgender people in the Philippines in general. In addition, lack of research can intensify health vulnerability issues such as mental health,

irresponsible sexual behavior, and increased rates of HIV/Aids. Findings would help the government in planning for future as well as to give religious groups opportunities to develop ministries to reach transgender people here in the Philippines.

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