



Discriminación hacia estudiantes universitarios trans en Lima Metropolitana: Estudio cualitativo

Discrimination towards university trans students in Metropolitan Lima: Qualitative study

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RESUMEN

El propósito de esta investigación fue describir cómo se lleva a cabo la discriminación hacia los estudiantes trans en las universidades de Lima Metropolitana. También llamada discriminación por identidad de género, está incluida en los Principios de Yogyakarta (Naciones Unidas), documento que busca servir de protección a la comunidad LGBTQ+. La investigación se inició en septiembre de 2021 y finalizó en abril de 2022. Se utilizó una metodología cualitativa, triangulando diseños como estudios multicaso, análisis documental y entrevistas no estructuradas. Estos últimos fueron procesados y realizados a través de conversaciones en línea (usando Zoom) con estudiantes que fueron seleccionados intencionalmente por los autores. Cinco estudiantes trans fueron la muestra para esta investigación, los cuales a través de una serie de entrevistas nos dieron a conocer que cada uno de ellos tiene una orientación sexual diferente, han sufrido exclusión en sus universidades y han sufrido prejuicios incluso por parte de sus propios docentes y personal administrativo. Es muy recomendable que todo el personal que labora en el campus universitario, en particular el profesorado, reciba capacitación en temas de diversidad sexual, en especial las personas transgénero, y se implementen baños personales unisex.

Palabras clave: Homofobia; discriminación sexual, exclusión social, educación superior

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to describe how discrimination against trans students is carried out in universities in Metropolitan Lima. Also called gender identity discrimination, it is included in the Yogyakarta Principles (United Nations), a document that seeks to serve as protection for the LGBTQ+ community. The investigation started in September 2021 and ended in April 2022. A qualitative methodology was used, triangulating designs such as multi-case studies, documentary analysis, and unstructured interviews. The latter were processed and conducted via online conversations (using Zoom) with students who were purposely selected by the authors. Five trans students were the sample for this research, which through a series of interviews taught us that each of them has a different sexual orientation, have suffered exclusion at their universities, and have experienced prejudice even from their own teachers and administrative staff. It is highly recommended that all staff working on the university campus, particularly professors, receive training on issues of sexual diversity, especially transgender people, and personal unisex toilets be implemented.

Keywords: Homophobia; sexual discrimination, social exclusion, higher education

INTRODUCTION

According to a report carried out by the Trans Movement of Peru shown livestream on Instagram, only 30% of transgender (trans) people study a professional career and only 2% finish their studies. To this worrying figure, we must add the results of the 2nd National Human Rights Survey in 2019 prepared by Institut Publique de Sondage d'Opinion Secteur (IPSOS) (Ministerio de Justicia y Derechos Humanos, 2019) which concludes about the intention to hire a trans person under the assumption of having a company, that 63% of those surveyed would not include them in their payroll.

Trans students, in the vast majority of cases, live their university life in constant harassment, stares, rejection, indifference, insults, and even physical abuse (Caldas, 2019; Vílchez, 2019). Those who identify as trans should give no explanation as to why the name on the class list is not the name they want to be called, or put on their exams, group works, or even on the graduate diploma, to name a few more scenarios.

According to the latest report made by Universidad Peruana Cayetano Heredia (UPCH), only 3% of trans women in Peru have access to formal employment, a reality that leads 70% of them to find sex work as the only income-generating activity (UPCH, 2019). And not only is the street their workplace, it is also where they lose their lives, with several individuals murdered, therefore the life expectancy of a transsexual person whose job is prostitution is 35 years (Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, 2015).

In addition to the above, in an interview conducted by the EFE Agency (2020), Skarlet Salas, who got her first formal job and became the first trans woman hired by the Municipality of Lima to carry out cleaning work, pointed out that prostitution is no child's dream and that, just like them, trans men and women do not dream of prostitution either. She indicates that they rather see themselves as doctors, veterinarians, studying communication sciences, etc. but when they grow up, they realize that it will not be possible. Commenting on the reality of trans people in pursuing a university career, Skarlet considers that no person could endure studying ten semesters and at the same time defending and fighting for their identity. Finally, she added that there are trans women who have a certain privilege to go to university and it is because they begin their transition after finishing their studies.

According to one of the interviewees, a non-cisgender person takes approximately five years or more in procedures and trials with the Peruvian State to be able to change their name and sex on their ID. If the procedures at university came out with the birth name as required by law, apart from being unfair, it would give more work so that this person can later validate everything with the new name and gender. They are violating their gender identity right.

Specifically, most of the time trans students go from a lack of support at home to a lack of support at their university. It is not enough just to receive the back of the State, which ignores the needs that trans people deserve, as well as the look over their shoulders in relation to the violation of their rights, they also find that same look at their alma mater. This is exemplified in an investigative book on trans people and HIV in Iquitos, where a discriminatory act reported by a person belonging to a non-governmental organization (NGO) is rescued. The person interviewed tells the anecdote of a transvestite student, who was told by his university professor to get out of the class and dress as a man (Salazar et al., 2010).

In Peru, only three universities have approved the trans reform. In 2017, the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú (PUCP), located in Lima, became the first university to accept the norm that was promoted by several student groups and led by the Grupo Reforma Trans (RPP Noticias, 2017). The proposal was that the gender identity of the students be recognized, and after requests and long procedures, the PUCP was able to accredit this reform that gave approval to the name that each trans student wishes to have.

In other words, it is admitted that they are trans people and will not necessarily be identified with the name that was registered on their birth certificate. The norm included using a chosen name in the attendance registry, library cards, and administrative services of the university. However, despite celebrating a small change in favor of the rights of trans students, it is unfortunate that this does not apply to study certificates, proof of enrollment, diplomas, and registration of degrees and titles because University Law 30220 does not allow it (Ministerio de Educación, 2014).

Thus, the Universidad Nacional San Agustín (UNSA) in Arequipa and the Universidad Peruana Cayetano Heredia (UPCH) in Lima followed PUCP's actions, joining the small list of universities in Peru that advocate the development of equality for their students who identify with another gender.

This article was written with the purpose of highlighting the unfair and incredible reality that trans students have to live throughout their university life. Many drop-out from colleges halfway, others do not even think about going to study because of the rejection they will find there since it has already been experienced at home and at school; in some cases, this leads to those students resorting to sex work or educating themselves in some technical job without any professional guidance.

We also hope that this paper is able to raise awareness among universities, higher technical institutions, teachers who practice their profession and those who are being trained, students and future students, the government, and everyone involved in the higher education process and in its infrastructure, to respect the gender with which each of the students identify and to begin to value trans students for their knowledge, not for their reproductive organs.

METHODS

Ethical statement

This study was carried out following the guidelines of the Declaration of Helsinki of 1964 and its subsequent modifications. Ethical standards were respected throughout the research process. The Institutional Research Ethics Committee of Private Norbert Wiener University approved the study protocol and informed consent procedures (approval number 890-2021-CIEI-UPNW). The interviews were administered on site and written informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to participation. In addition, we ensured the anonymity of the data obtained from each participant, so their integrity was not violated.

Study design

The type of research applied in this paper is the multi-case study. This method, which originated in psychological research and was later used in sociology and education, deals with the study of a practical problem or specific situation, whether it be an organization, an event or, as is the case with this research, a person or group of people with similar characteristics (Ñaupas et al., 2014).

It was also designed through the use of multi-cases, which is the analysis of several cases (person, event or activity) on the same topic from a cultural perspective (Creswell, 2005).

On the whole, the design includes the documentary analysis that, according to Vickery (1970), responds to three needs of the researchers. First of all, knowing what other researchers have done in the same field of study. For this, the analysis of various documents and publications made in high-impact magazines or theses of graduates who worked on this specific topic was carried out; second, understanding informative segments of a specific work, that is, the analysis of the field work carried out, understanding the event in its context in which the events occurred; and third, knowing the total and important information that exists on a particular subject, that is, through the systematic review of the literature.. The documentation process of this investigation began with the recording of the interviews via Zoom, which were saved on the PC devices. Each of the students allowed the authors to record their conversations. After collecting and transcribing the interviews on Word documents, a table on Excel was used to organize the responses of the students.

For the data collection phase, the technique used was the interview. The participants were chosen by the election of the authors. Each of us knew several students who are transgender so we sat and discussed who were more likely to accept to participate in this investigation. Later, we contacted them via Instagram and Facebook, for this, the electronic addresses were obtained with the classmates. There were no exclusion criteria. Their informed consent was obtained with a written document, under the model provided by the university. According to Olabuénaga (1989), the interview is like an in-depth interview whose goals are to understand, increase meaning, get an honest answer, and capture emotions. This technique uses the interview guide as a tool this guide was developed in video conferencing, where interviewees participated with researcher Roncal, a specialist in language translation, which was carried from September 2021 to April 2022 out fully in Spanish on trans students as well as experts who were chosen because they are well respected professors in different colleges at the Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos, with an approximate duration of 60 minutes (see Table 1). The interviews were conducted over Zoom and each interview took between 45 minutes and one hour. The research scenario is the universities of Metropolitan Lima and their trans students, who were interviewed and shared their stories. The experts are prominent researchers from the National University of San Marcos, who have conducted prior research and with prominent leaders of the LGBTQ movement.

Likewise, the narrative analysis was used, which consists of reviewing what was obtained thanks to the interviewed participants and expressing it based on a reformulation of their anecdotes considering context and the differences and similarities of the experiences of the members of the sample (Business Manager Ekon, 2020). The data was reviewed by the authors first by sitting around a table listening to the interviews. After that each of us transcribed the conversation onto Word documents so we could all read them all again. Data were reviewed by the authors first sitting around a table listening to the interviews. After that, each of us transcribed the conversation into Word documents so we could all read them again. Likewise, matrices were elaborated that allowed to compare the answers emitted by the interviewees, for their later systematization. It is important to note that the transgender students who were part of the investigation all concluded that misinformation and lack of friends who are part of the LGBTQ com-



munity affect the way they see trans people.

RESULTS

Thanks to the results obtained in the research process upon interviewing five transgender students, it was possible to particularize ideas about discrimination against trans university students, whose theoretical assumptions and detailed categories offer a look at how it is carried out. In addition, what is presented below is the result of the triangulation made of the findings throughout the investigation, the opinions of experts collected in interviews and the life experiences of five people from the community in question. Also, it is mandatory to clarify that the names used below to identify the participants are nicknames chosen by themselves in order to protect their real identities.

Regarding the sexual identity category, it was observed that the interviewees were comfortable with the questions of gender identity, sexual orientation, and gender expression.

When it comes to the answers to the questions about their gender identities and sexual orientation, three trans students prefer the pronoun “she/her”; one, “he/his” and last but not least, one prefers “they/them”. The latter makes direct reference to their gender, which is non-binary, meaning that they do not identify with either gender (male or female).

Likewise, the sexual orientations include answers such as heterosexual, bisexual and pansexual, this third sexual orientation being used to classify people who ‘feel attracted to any gender beyond the genitals’, as Adriane described it.

In the field of gender role, it was identified that the people interviewed have had very similar experiences regarding wearing clothes of the opposite gender during their growth. Mia and Nath since they were little girls felt feminine and tried to feel comfortable letting their hair long or wearing clothes from the girls’ section. At the same time, Adriane chose to do what Mia and Nath did but with her dolls; she put men’s clothes on her dolls and vice versa.

In this same context, all the people interviewed have a different point of view regarding the question of whether it is necessary to let others know that they are trans. John, who from the age of 10 stopped identifying himself as a woman and began to do so as a man, points out that it depends on the situation in which each one is and if they feel the need to tell people about it. Mia and Nath agree that more than necessary it is important, since it helps to recognize the existence of the trans community. Finally, Gracia, who began her transition while she was in college, felt compelled by the university to tell about her gender identity because during virtual classes, the university administration did not change the male name on her enrollment to her chosen female name.

Regarding the question about the reason for the internalization of gender stigmas, the students Nath and Adriane agree that it has a lot to do with the time of colonization. Since that time comes the lack of recognition of different genders and sexual orientations, says Nath. This idea is completed by Adriane explaining that this lack of recognition is brought by the Europeans at the time mentioned and that Spanish people are the cause of other genres having been eliminated, reduced, and stigmatized.

Mia, 20, who began her transition during the COVID-19 pandemic, and John, 42, who is part of the Trans Society Female-to-Male (FTM) Peru agreed that stigmas are generated by the lack of information and little visibility of the transgender community. As there are no trans people in different daily areas, it makes it look less normalized, however, they remain positive by pointing out that there are many people who change their way of thinking with information.

On the same question, Gracia, who began her transition during the fifth semester of her career, has no doubt that the society is still being educated in the same way as always at home and in schools. In sum, it is a vicious circle that we have not yet finished leaving because it is this society that normalizes that its population still continue to think with stigmas.

The conversation continued and the people interviewed told about the harshest criticism they have received regarding their transition. Adriane, who was not aware of the term ‘gender non-binary’ until 2018, is a person who identifies as non-binary whose pronoun are ‘they/them’ and started their transition while they were in college. They shared that what affected them the most was constantly witnessing the fact that people do not recognize the existence of trans people as part of society. Adriane concludes with two hypotheses about why they act this way: it is very likely that they feel threatened by the presence of trans people or that they often want to emphasize their power as heterosexual men in society.

The criticism and mockery that a trans person is exposed to on the street are not strange to university classrooms. Mia had been congratulated by her professor with an emotional ‘Congratulations, Mia!’ after her participation in her virtual class. However, since Mia’s birth name could not be changed on Zoom, she still appeared as her birth

name on screen, a classmate turned on her microphone and claimed to everyone “Mia? There is no Mia here”, to which the professor politely corrected “Mia, her name is Mia”.

Despite the professor’s defense, the student insisted on making fun of the gender identity of her trans classmate and said “I don’t understand, here it says [birth name]” Fortunately, Mia’s protector made it clear to please refer to [birth name] as Mia.

As far as indirect discrimination by the study center is concerned, the clear example is the restroom services at universities. There are no unisex or gender-neutral toilets in every faculty, so the use of these services has been limited for trans students because they find themselves in toxic environments, which they prefer to avoid using unisex bathrooms in places like fast food restaurants around the corner from the university or at Starbucks on the other side of campus.

Specifically, this toxic environment in toilets is exemplified by those interviewed with real cases. Adriane never used her college bathrooms as they wanted to avoid the possible discomfort they would cause the girls in the women’s bathroom, since their appearance, as they describe it, was androgynous or “not so feminine” at that time.

Gracia, on the other hand, always used the men’s restroom. However, that decision had to change when the changes due to the intake of female hormones began to become noticeable. She kept using the boys’ bathroom until there was a moment when she entered the bathroom and felt an awkward and sudden silence and guys acted as silence. It was so that Gracia perceived that they were uncomfortable or confused as to why she was there, but at the same time, she concluded in her thoughts that it was still too early to enter the girls’ bathroom, so she felt out of place.

For her part, Nath, who also identifies as non-binary, found a violent environment in the bathrooms. He realized that messages with insults towards him were appearing on the doors of the men’s bathrooms and he was afraid that if he suddenly met one of those people who had written all that they could attack him. Nath regrets that every time he used the boy’s restroom there was murmuring and laughter.

Of equal importance are the administrative services provided by the university which are reflected in its level of instruction in transgender issues. Fortunately, Adriane received support from their university’s psychology department during their transition. However, the same fate did not befall the other interviewees.

Mia and Gracia formally requested their universities to change their names on the professors’ registry, however, they refused and said that this could only be done if the new name by which they wanted to be called was on their IDs. During the COVID-19 pandemic, it was quite inconvenient since their names could not be changed on the Zoom platform where they received virtual classes.

Likewise, Nath and John agree that the level of education on transgender issues is nil. They also recognize that when they told their respective teachers that they are trans and to please call them by their names with which they identified, they turned red or were surprised. Nath emphasizes the need for all people who work in the university to know about the transgender issue.

When it comes to the rights category and the fact of ignorance about trans issues, they are present in various aspects at the university. For example, classrooms. During face-to-face classes, the looks in the room were everyday for all the interviewees. Adriane even stopped going to a class because they didn’t feel comfortable with homophobic comments from a teacher. Also, Gracia told that her design professor assigned a project which consisted in making clothes for boys or girls. Grace then told him that she was going to make a dress for a child, and the professor said that her idea was perfect, that she should design it. However, when she mentioned it to her sewing professor, she told her that boys don’t wear dresses and that she should design something else. Finally, John remembers that his English as Second Language teacher called him Miss and assures that he did it on purpose since her appearance was masculine, not feminine in order to be called Miss.

When Nath’s gender expression was more non-binary or feminine, the university’s security personnel would hold her for a moment in the entrance booth to verify her university ID card, ask her information and verify it on the computer. For Nath, there was a prejudice about non-binary gender expression. Eventually, she complained a couple of times and they apologized after speaking to the supervisor having been explained that it was a real discomfort to be stopped when she entered and as a consequence, she was late for classes and it affected her mood.

Is the name change for a trans student significant? For Adriane, it is not. However, Mia, who considers her name her identity, points out that during virtual classes the fact of seeing her birth name on the platform, turning on the camera, and speaking with her voice, which is far from feminine, generated more dysphoria in her. She feared that when they saw her and heard her they would say ‘him’ and not ‘her’ and call her by her name on the list.



Similarly, for Nath who thinks that it is very important and that it depends on each trans person if they want to change the name or not. He also points out that for people who want to change it and do not feel identified with the legal name, it is really painful that it appears at different times, such as procedures, or things where they are not yet recognized. At his university, together with a collective, they began with the request that trans people be allowed to change their names. It was a process that lasted years for it to be accepted and when this initiative was approved, Nath was one of the first people to request the name change.

To conclude, John also agrees with Nath, but by his own decision he never requested a name change at the university where he studied his first career nor at the current one where he studies his second one. He mentioned he decided not to change it in order to make the trans issue visible and he concludes emphatically by saying that it won't until there is a gender identity law.

The following steps were considered throughout the development of this research: the topic and the research scenario were determined through the documentary review of cases that occurred in certain universities; then, the data was analyzed and classified based on its relationship with the category under study. Information and concepts addressed in the interviews were evaluated and analyzed; the participants were informed of the objectives of the research and the purpose of the interviews; the interviews were conducted with the participants in one day by mutual agreement and recording was allowed with their agreement. We triangulated the data collected from participants with that from academic journals, relevant government regulations, and the entity's own records, and then presented our findings in an orderly fashion to facilitate a thorough investigation of the case.

DISCUSSION

Just as the Yogyakarta Principles define sexual orientation as that which encompasses sexual, emotional, or affective attraction to another couple who shares the same gender, another gender, or several genders, Isabel Menacho, who participated as an expert interviewed in this research, explained that being trans includes those people who do not agree with their gender and want to change it to a different one, explained that being trans includes those people who disagree with their gender and want to change it to a different one. They are usually people who change their gender to feel comfortable with their body. Likewise, expert Barbara Ponce stated that being trans is making a decision to change the gender with which an individual does not agree and gives up their birth gender. Therefore, Castro (2017) concludes that all people are worthy and should be treated without discrimination, enjoying their dignity, for the benefit of society as a whole.

However, discrimination against trans people is still a thing, and the younger people being discriminated are, the worst forcing them to change their appearance is (Caldas, 2019; Vílchez, 2019). For Sacsá (2019) the female trans population is the one that receives the most discrimination, especially in study centers; for Ale (2017) in the same way, they are scenarios of discrimination.

Expert Héctor Santa María, for his part, provides a definition for the modern sphere and explains that being trans today has a connotation of change or transformation of a state in which one is not satisfied. It includes all transsexual people who have a gender identity that does not coincide with their sex and want to make a permanent transition to the gender with which they identify, thus they often seek medical assistance to help them align their bodies with their sex identified.

Though, in study centers such as universities, discrimination against trans students occurs often. These places where it is not appropriate to speak out to manifest their trans identity, discrimination against them is normalized because the regulations go against the expression of gender identity (Martínez and Íñiguez, 2017).

Experts Ponce and Santa María agree when pointing out the difference between sexual orientation and gender. For Ponce, sexual orientation is a decision to have an affective relationship with another person of the same or another sex; while gender is more oriented to how a human being feels internally about her own identity expression. Sexual orientation is not related to gender status because this is simply a decision to have affective relationships with a person of the same or another sex without necessarily implying gender.

For his part, Santa María mentions that many times these two terms tend to be confused, due to the lack of information and understanding on these issues. Sexual orientation is presented as the sexual attraction that one has towards another person, be it of the opposite sex or of the same sex; and it differs from gender, since gender is how we recognize or identify ourselves as a man or a woman, regardless of our sex.

On the other hand, expert Menacho indicated that the gender role refers to the identity of each person, whether female or male, as the way we relate to the world according to our gender.

Likewise, expert Santa María explains about gender roles and mentions that are actions or situations that are established socially and traditionally. For example, it was believed that only men should work and women should be in charge of the house, or that the man is dominant and the woman delicate, or that the man wears pants and the woman wears skirts. In the same way, he explains the gender role in the trans community, he points out that due to the affirmation of their sexual identity they try to assume established gender roles, therefore a transsexual woman who identifies as a man will have masculine attitudes and behaviors that are socially established.

CONCLUSIONS

Discrimination (exclusion) towards trans students in universities in Metropolitan Lima is demonstrated against their sexual identities, excluding them in their classrooms and other areas and attacking their basic rights at the university.

The sexual identity of trans students at universities in Metropolitan Lima manifests itself in a unique way in each student. Five trans students were interviewed who recognize themselves with different pronouns, which include: he/his, she/her, and they/them. In the same way, their genders were non-binary, feminine, and masculine. The results also revealed that the sexual orientations of the interviewees include pansexuality, heterosexuality, and bisexuality; and that everyone agrees that being trans is not a choice.

Regarding the exclusion of trans students in universities in Metropolitan Lima, they appear in their classrooms in person and/or virtually through discriminatory acts. Thus it was found that these acts include verbal insults such as through social networks, calling trans students by their birth name, mockery in the toilets, denial of the request for name change in documents or virtual classrooms, and too many ID verification steps before entering the building.

Regarding the rights of trans students in universities in Metropolitan Lima, these are presented in different areas depending on what is sought to be protected in the human being: from being discriminated against, from not recognizing their identity, from being subjected to cruel treatment, of the oppression of expression, and of not receiving an education. The investigation found that these rights are respected when depending on the career that the trans student studies, as well as how they dress, whether they participate in class or not, the class modality, the sex of the teacher, and the semester they attend. However, the violation of any of these rights did not make a difference in the ages of the students.

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