The Journal of Behavioral Science (TJBS)

Qualitative Article

Policy Research for Microaggression Management Among LGBTQ+ Youth in Thailand

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Abstract

Background/problem: Microaggression is a form of discrimination commonly experienced by LGBTQ+ youth in the form of verbal insults or actions, either intentionally or unintentionally. These often impact the mental health and wellbeing of the victims.

Objective/purpose: The objectives of this research were, 1.) to study the experiences of microaggressions among Thai LGBTQ+ youth; and 2.) and to generate and validate policy suggestions to manage microaggressions for LGBTQ+ youth in schools.

Design and Methodology: This study employed policy research and was conducted in two phases. In phase one, researchers examined the experiences and effects of microaggressions on ten LGBTQ+ youths from four regions of Thailand. Phase two focused on developing policy suggestions for effectively managing microaggressions. In phase two, the researcher divided the discussion into two focus groups, each group had 8 members, with a total of 16 members.

Findings: The findings indicated that the forms of microaggressions among LGBTQ+ youth could be divided into seven categories, including devaluation, privacy violation, degrading or ending a relationship, disrespect, neglect/ignorance, stereotyping, and secondary microaggressions. Furthermore, policy suggestions were developed and these were divided into four aspects related to counseling management, knowledge promotion management on sexuality and gender diversity, facility management and management of freedom of expression and activity.

Conclusion and Implications: The policy suggestions from this research could serve as guidelines for achieving equality and creating safer spaces in school for LGBTQ+ youth in Thailand.

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Microaggressions are actions or environmental indignities that express discrimination against marginalized groups, such as sexism or racism, insults, disrespect, or hate speech (Nadal et al., 2016). The negative impacts of microaggressions are serious psychological issues that have been widely studied, particularly among multicultural psychologists (Owen et al., 2018). The general public tends to view microaggressions as something that is not serious. Such behaviors are overlooked because many people perceive them as normal behaviors in society, and they are used to seeing them (Nadal et al., 2021). If someone experiences microaggression on a daily basis, it may have negative effects on the physical and mental health of the victim (Sue, 2010a, 2010b; Sue et al., 2007) such as depression (Torres & Taknint, 2015) and/ or suicidal ideation (Salim et al., 2019). According to a study on the effects of microaggression, Anderson et al. (2022) studied a group of U.S. medical students and found that those who experienced microaggressions based on their race and ethnicity were more likely to experience depression. A study of black women infected with HIV who experienced microaggression found that the daily microaggressions

took a toll on the physical and mental health of black women living with HIV (Thompson & Dale, 2022). These effects, in turn, caused them to feel sad, have post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) depression, and in some cases were so severe that they eventually led to suicide. (Thompson & Dale, 2022).

A phenomenological study on microaggressions experienced by African Americans in U.S. workplaces revealed that they faced discrimination and harassment from their employers (Rucker, 2021). The result was consistent with a study of racial harassment a g a i n s t persons of color who were under the age of 40 and faced discrimination in the U.S. workplace (Pitcan et al., 2018). Baricevic and Kashubeck-West (2018) examined microaggressions of sexual orientation and experiences of discrimination from having a different sexual orientation among U.S. high school students. The research participants were 14 adolescents in high school, aged 15 to 19, from seven different schools, self-identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer, participated in interviews. The findings indicated that these youth encountered instances of subtle discrimination that aligned with existing microaggression literature from adult samples, yet were also unique to the high school setting. As can be seen, most of these research studies (Anderson et al., 2022; Baricevic & Kashubeck-West, 2018; Pitcan et al., 2018; Rucker, 2021; Thompson & Dale, 2022) and additional literature reviews from other databases found that research related to microaggressions predominantly aimed to examine the experiences of microaggressions against racial groups and working-age individuals. There is a limited body of research on LGBTQ+ youth, and knowledge on this subject remains insufficient, particularly within the context of Thailand. When researchers reviewed literature on strategies to reduce and prevent microaggressions among LGBTQ+ youth in school settings, they found that one effective approach is the establishment of policies to address such microaggressions among LGBTQ+ youth. Studying mental health policies abroad, Canada and Australia were noted to have comprehensive policies aimed at managing and supporting LGBTQ+ groups (Jones, 2015). Implementing school policies for LGBTQ+ youth can benefit these groups by providing supportive frameworks and the authority to prevent microaggressions (Atteberry-Ash et al., 2018; Marchi et al., 2024).

The researchers aimed to study LGBTQ+ youth in the context of Thai society, focusing on their experiences with microaggressions in schools. The study employed a policy research approach and was conducted into two phases. In phase one, the experiences of microaggressions on LGBTQ+ youth were explored. In phase two, policy suggestions for effectively managing microaggressions were developed based on qualitative data from focus groups with stakeholders in school settings, including classroom teachers, psychologists or guidance counselors, directors or administrators, and advocates for LGBTQ+ youth. This could help in preventing microaggressions on LGBTQ+ youth in school settings, and could be used for developing policy suggestions for establishing safer spaces in school for LGBTQ+ youth in Thailand.

Literature Review

The literature review section starts with social identity theory and feminist theory to provide the key concepts related to microaggressions in LGBTQ+ youth and policy research.

Social Identity Theory

According to Tajfel and Turner (1979), social identity defines an individual's function and identity, making it necessary to research and comprehend the concepts of bias, discrimination, and societal conflicts. Furthermore, if a person's social status or social position is higher than that of the general population, they would frequently try to protect or fight with other people of lesser status in order to struggle for superiority and have power. But what if a lower-status group, such as those we observe in society, is considered marginalized. They are often aware that their standing is distinct and lower than others (Hogg, 2000; Ellemers et al., 2002).

Social identity theory offers a valuable framework for understanding the factors contributing to microaggressions against LGBTQ+ youth who identify as sexual and gender minorities in various settings. This theory highlights how group membership and identity can lead to social categorization, often resulting in the segregation of individuals based on their perceived social identities. Such segregation frequently leads to experiences of oppression, bullying, and negative educational outcomes. LGBTQ+ youths, in particular, are vulnerable to microaggressions because they are perceived by society as belonging to a distinct group that deviates from the norms of the majority, resulting in their marginalization and lack of recognition.

Feminist Theory

Feminist theory has emphasized the importance of recognizing multiculturalism, differences in race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, social equality, social stigma, and social justice. Feminist theory was founded on women's experience of oppression in homes, society, or even the workplace, which oppresses women, making them inferior to men (Sakunpong, 2017; Tong, 2009). This dynamic perpetuates incorrect social norms and rigid gender roles, often leading to misinterpretations of these constructs. For instance, societal expectations frequently dictate that women require protection from men, reinforcing traditional notions of femininity and masculinity (Connell, 2002). However, such norms do not solely impose expectations on women. Men are similarly subjected to societal pressures to embody traits of strength, leadership, and professional success, reflecting hegemonic masculinity ideals (Kimmel, 2004). These entrenched norms limit individual expression and reinforce gender-based stereotypes that impact people of all genders, including those with diverse gender and sexual orientations.

The feminist theory can be utilized to explain microaggressions of LGBTQ+ youth and social inequality. Furthermore, this concept emphasizes the significance of recognizing and appreciating diversity across sexual orientations, gender identities, racial backgrounds, and religious affiliations. (Hooks, 1984). By extending this theoretical idea, can comprehend social inequalities and differences in discrimination against marginalized groups. Thus, this theory provides an explanation for the reasons behind the microaggressions experienced against LGBTQ+ youth.

Policy Research

Policy research focuses on the systematic gathering of data. To obtain data-driven results that will lead to problem-solving or development in areas that must be addressed and adjusted at the policy level. Policy research emphasizes in-depth knowledge, with the material gathered subsequently evaluated and analyzed to develop topics of interest. It also focuses on researching societal problems, including economic challenges, health issues, and difficulties in assisting the poor. These are all social challenges that require policies to be developed in order to bring society forward. In order to bring about positive change, policy research must also contribute to a deeper understanding of the issue (Majchrzak, 1984; Pengsawat, 2009).

When studying LGBTQ+ youth in Thailand, it was found that among youth aged 15–24 years, 75% experience ridiculed, 31%, physical violence and 36% are cyberbullied (Ojanen et al., 2023). These actions significantly impact their mental health, leading to depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts, suicide attempts, and self-harm. Research also reveals that Thailand lacks policies and measures to prevent such forms of violence against this group in school settings (Ojanen et al., 2023). Hernandez and Torres (2023) show that schools should have policies for youth with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities to prevent segregation among students. This includes methods to create an environment and atmosphere that does not foster feelings of segregation based on gender, as well as measures to prevent bullying and violence within the LGBTQ+ youth community. The current research intends to in employ policy research to study policy recommendations for addressing microaggressions experienced by LGBTQ+ youth in schools.

Research Objectives

The research objectives of this study were: 1.) to study the experiences of microaggressions among Thai LGBTQ+ youth in school; and 2.) to generate and validate policy suggestions to manage microaggressions for Thai LGBTQ+ youth in school.

Methods

Design

This study is policy research, a research method based on the works of Majchrzak (1984) and Pengsawat (2009), that focus on emphasizes a comprehensive and iterative approach to policy analysis, where understanding the problem, engaging stakeholders, and evaluating outcomes are crucial to developing and implementing effective policies. This research had two phases. The phase one included, 1.) interviews to study the experiences and impacts of youth groups of LGBTQ+ who have experienced of microaggressions; 2.) analyzing the data; 3.) summarizing the result; 4.) draft policy suggestion. Phase two focused on developing policy recommendations for effectively managing microaggressions.

Participants

In this study, the researchers divided the participants into two phases. The participants in the first phase consisted of ten LGBTQ+ youths aged 15 to 18 from four regions of Thailand ($n = 10$) and they were not specifically selected from any school. They met the inclusion criteria for being selected for online interviews about the experiences of microaggressions among LGBTQ+ youth. In the second phase, the researchers organized two discussion groups, which consisted of a total of 16 participants ($n = 16$). Eight participants were assigned to each group. Each group consisted of 2 classroom teachers, 2 psychologists or guidance counselors, two directors or administrators, and two advocates who provided their opinions, made policy suggestions, and checked the quality of the policy suggestions for a complete version.

Sampling Procedures

In the first phase of the study, Thai LGBTQ+ youths aged 15 to 18 were recruited using purposive and snowball sampling techniques through an online recruitment announcement seeking research volunteers in October 2022. Following this, the LGBTQ+ youths were required to complete a checklist survey about their experiences with microaggressions to verify that they met the eligibility criteria. Thai LGBTQ+ youth who scored 3 or higher on a checklist survey, it means that LGBTQ+ youths have experienced of microaggressions and selected for online interviews for their experiences of microaggressions. In the second phase of study, classroom teachers, psychologists or guidance counselors, directors or administrators, and advocates for people with LGBTQ+ youth, were recruited using purposive and snowball sampling techniques from announcement of recruitment to find volunteers to participate in research via online media in June 2023. The researchers organized two discussion groups to generate and validate policy suggestions to manage microaggressions for Thai LGBTQ+ youth in schools.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The inclusion criteria for phase 1 included: 1.) LGBTQ+ youth who have experienced microaggressions are being studied at school settings; 2.) Thai national people aged 15 to 18; 3.) participation in the study is voluntary; and 4.) a screening assessment has scores 3 points or higher on a checklist survey of microaggression experiences among LGBTQ+ youth. The inclusion criteria for phase 2, classroom teachers, psychologists or guidance counselors, and directors or administrators and advocates for people with LGBTQ+ youth, included: 1.) an individual with experience in school settings (classroom teachers, psychologists, guidance counselors, directors, or administrators) is being sought to provide insights for policy suggestions.; 2.) have at least 5 years of work experience, as the researcher is looking for someone with this kind of background who can help gather data and come up with ideas for writing policy suggestion

to manage microaggressions among LGBTQ+ youth; and 3.) are Thai nationality, (gender and age are not specified). The exclusion criteria for phase 1 and phase 2 included: someone who is unable to participate completely in the research.

Instruments

The data were collected by using three different research instruments in each phase included: 1.) a checklist survey of microaggression experiences among LGBTQ+ youth; 2.) semi-structured interview questions; and 3.) focus group discussion questions for create and examine policy suggestion to manage microaggressions among LGBTQ+ youth.

In the first phase, a checklist survey was developed from reviewed literature of microaggression experiences among LGBTQ+ youth and was checked by two experts. This instrument has 10 questions, it was used to select LGBTQ+ participants who experienced microaggressions. Those with scores greater than or equal to 3 would be selected to participate in this research and interviews about their experiences of microaggressions. Some of the checklist questions and statements are: "You are often asked about your sexual orientation or gender identity in public by those around you, causing you to feel ashamed and uncomfortable to answer". If LGBTQ+ youth have scores greater than or equal to 3 on a checklist survey, they will receive semi-structured interview for collecting data regarding the microaggression experiences of LGBTQ+ youth in Thai institutions. Some of the semi-structured interview questions are as follows: 1.) Have you ever experienced microaggressions in school that are involved with discrimination, or neglect from teachers or your friends because of being LGBTQ+ or not, and how?; 2.) How do these experiences affect you and how do you feel about them?

In the second phase, focus group discussion questions were designed and utilized to create and examine policy suggestions for managing microaggressions among LGBTQ+ youth. The focus group participants consisted of school directors or executives, teachers or homeroom teachers, guidance teachers or psychologists, and advocates. Some of the questions used are as follows: 1) What are your opinions and suggestions regarding the prevention and management of microaggressions against LGBTQ+ students? 2) What are your suggestions regarding the issue of adding online counseling platforms for LGBTQ+ students?

Procedure

In the first phase, LGBTQ+ youth participants completed a checklist survey on microaggressions, with those scoring 3 or higher, it means that LGBTQ+ youth have experienced of microaggressions, eligible for the study. Semi-structured interviews were then conducted to explore their experiences with microaggressions and gather data for policy suggestions. In the second phase, two focus group discussions were held with 16 participants (8 per group) focused on developing and refining policy suggestions for effectively managing microaggressions. After that, the draft of the policy suggestions would be evaluated by experts who were members of the second group to cross-check the utility, feasibility, propriety, and accuracy of these policy suggestions. The suggestions from the experts who evaluated the policy suggestions for microaggression management among LGBTQ+ youth were analyzed and interpreted to measure the index of consistency. The researchers revised and created a complete and practical policy suggestions for microaggression management among LGBTQ+ youth at the school level. The details of procedures of this study are shown in Figure 1.

The data collected from the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions were transcribed verbatim into word by word. The transcripts were checked for accuracy by listening to the data collected repeatedly in order to get the most accurate information. The researchers decoded and categorized the main topics into sub-themes and themes using the deductive data analysis method where themes and sub-themes were developed from literature reviews regarding policy elements for LQBTQ+ youth management in Thai school settings and then conclusion and verification of data.

Figure 1
Procedures of Research
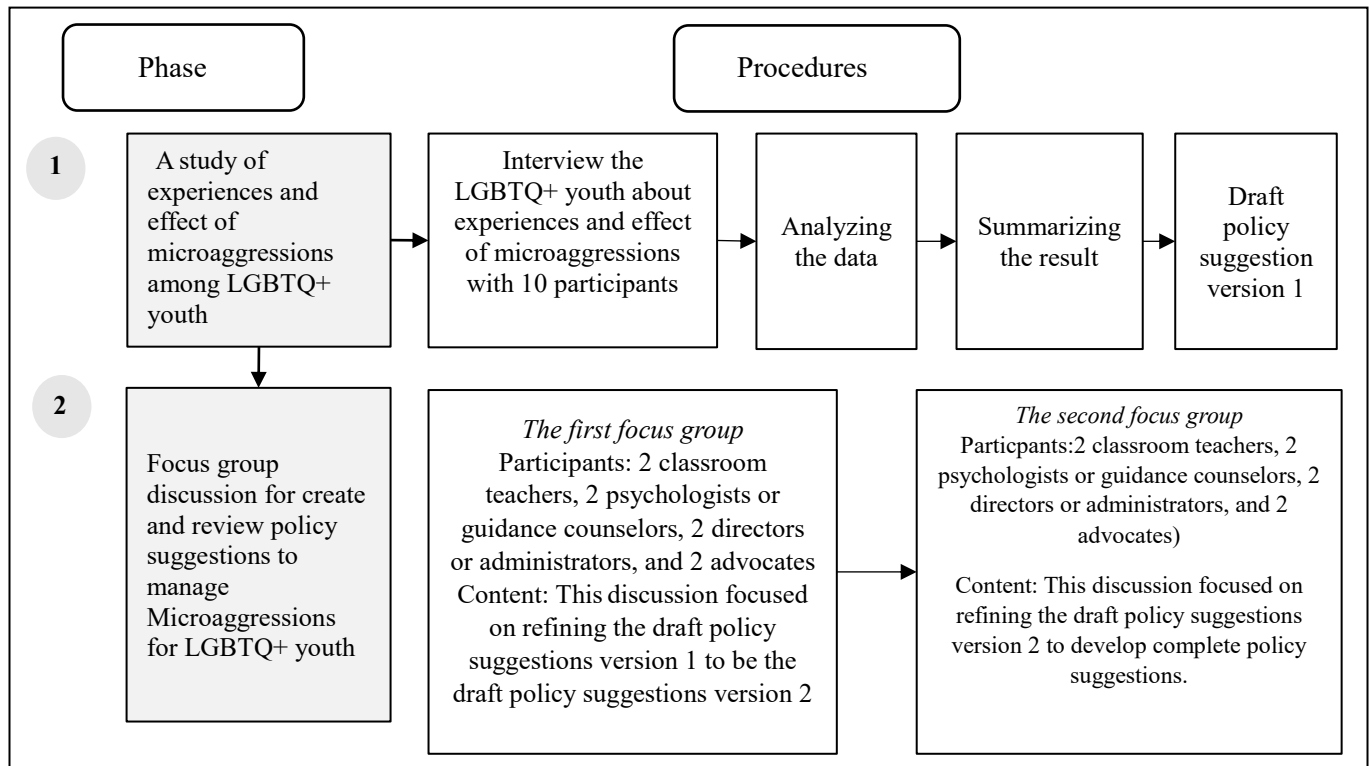
Results

Demographics Data

The first phase, the semi-structured interviews, were conducted with 10 LGBTQ+ youths. Their age were between 15 and 18 years old, with the mean age being 16.50 ($SD = 1.08$). The research respondents identified their gender and sexual identity as: 3 individuals identified as transgender, 2 as gay, 1 as bisexual, 1 as queer, and 3 as other. Half of the participants were from central Thailand, which accounted for 50%. The rest of them were from the northern region (20%), the northeastern region (20%), and the southern region (10%), as shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Demographic Characteristics of LGBTQ+ Youth

Pseudonym	Age in years	Region/ Province	Sexual/Gender Identity
Emmy	15	North/ Chiang Mai	Unclear gender identity but feel like a woman and have feelings/love for males
Kae Kai	17	Northeast/ Si Sa Ket	Queer
Sen Dai	15	South/ Pattani	Unclear gender identity because used to dress up like a woman in the past but currently dress up as a man or typical gay man
Kla	16	North/ Chiang Mai	Unclear gender identity but have feelings for those who make her feel comfortable regardless of their gender identity
Annie	16	Northeast/Roi-Et	Transgender
Mali	18	Central/Pathum Thani	Bisexual
Tawan	18	Central/Saraburi	Transgender
Prae-wa	17	Central/Saraburi	Transgender
Jom	17	Central/Bangkok	Gay
Jib	16	Central/Bangkok	Gay

In the second phase, two focus groups were conducted with 16 participants, including classroom teachers, psychologists or guidance counselors, directors or administrators, and LGBTQ+ advocates, as shown in Table 2. They provided policy suggestions and reviewed the quality of these suggestions to finalize the completed policy.

Table 2
Demographic Characteristics of the Participants in The First and Second Focus Groups

Pseudonym	Age in years	Focus Group	Occupation	Role
A	47	1	School director of a school in Khon Kaen	School Director
B	47	1	Deputy director of a school in Mukdahan	School Deputy Director
C	28	1	Teacher of a school in Nong Bua Lamphu	Teacher
D	30	1	Teacher of a school in Si Sa Ket	Teacher
F	30	1	Guidance teacher of a school in Si Sa Ket	Guidance Teacher
G	23	1	Guidance teacher of a school in Krabi	Guidance Teacher
H	36	1	Manager of Ubon Ratchathani Rainbow Sky Association	LGBTQ+ Rights Advocate
J	38	1	LGBTQ+ Rights Advocate from the Facebook page: The Coalition of Innovation for Thai Youth	LGBTQ+ Rights Advocate
K	50	2	School director of a school in Nong Khai	School Director
L	36	2	Deputy director of a school in Krabi	School Deputy Director
M	28	2	Teacher of a school in Udon Thani	Teacher
N	26	2	Teacher of a school in Si Sa Ket	Teacher
O	25	2	Guidance teacher of a school in Si Sa Ket	Guidance Teacher
P	29	2	Guidance teacher of a school in Bangkok	Guidance Teacher
Q	27	2	Project Manager: Thai Transgender Alliance (Thai TGA)	LGBTQ+ Rights Advocate
R	41	2	Director of Sister Foundation, Rayong	LGBTQ+ Rights Advocate

Research Findings

The findings from the first phase, based on semi-structured interviews about microaggressions experienced by LGBTQ+ youth, identified 7 categories: devaluation, privacy violation, degrading or ending relationships, disrespect, neglect/ignorance, stereotyping, and secondary microaggressions, which are explained in detail.

Devaluation

Devaluation refers to verbal expressions that express contempt, disrespect, or ridicule, causing the youth to feel like they are a clown, or an outcast in a crowd of people because they are a group of LGBTQ+ youth. The victims feel alienated and different from others. Moreover, it also includes behavioral expressions such as facial expressions, the ways they look at them, physical reactions, etc. Such behaviors express disapproval, discrimination, contempt, and disrespect among LGBTQ+ youth.

> They call me a faggot, a dumb queer and say something like "Nobody wants to hang out with you." ... When I was in primary school, they would call me a disgusting and scary homo that no one wanted to play with me. (Mali)

Privacy Violation

Privacy violation refers to how LGBTQ+ youth have to deal with both verbal and physical harassment. For example, youth are often questioned in public by those around them about their sexual

preferences, sexual orientation, and use of hormones. As a result, youth feel embarrassed and uncomfortable answering those questions. They must deal with behaviors that violate their privacy against young people just because they are LGBTQ+ Youth are bullied and teased when they have to go to the restroom, such as being asked about personal matters regarding urination, or being watched while going to the restroom, causing them to feel ashamed, and traumatized, and may have a serious psychological effect that makes them afraid to go to the restroom in school.

> They ask if I take hormone pills or if I take pills like other transgenders do. When going to the men's restroom, they will peep at me in the restroom. They often peep at me which makes me feel paranoid when going to the restroom. I have never used the restroom in school from Grade 3 until Grade 9. No matter how much I want to pee, I will hold it until I can go home to pee because I feel that home is my safest place. (Annie)

Degrading or Ending a Relationship

This refers to how people around them react, degrade a relationship status, keep their distance, and end a relationship with them once they find out their true gender identity and sexual preferences as LGBTQ+. This causes them to feel undervalued and discriminated against because their gender identity is not yet accepted by society in school.

> When I was a kid, people did not accept that were LGBTQ+ at first. When I came out, people around me whether they were females, males, and even teachers would keep a distance from me …I felt that this wasn't something that people accepted. At that time, this kind of thing was not accepted enough for us to say that hey, we are people of LGBTQ+. (Emmy)

Disrespect

This refers to when LGBTQ+ youth experience behaviors from other people that indicate devaluation, inferiority, or even contempt by using words or actions that are done intentionally or unintentionally. Such behaviors make the youth feel inferior and undervalued and feel like they are not treated fairly because of their LGBTQ+ identity.

> They will be like, 'The girls do this, and the boys do that.' Then, point at me and say, 'What are you? You have no gender like others, so you don't have to do anything.' She said something like this to me. (Annie)

Neglect/Ignorance

This refers to when LGBTQ+ youth experience inequality regarding their sexual identity. Educational institutions often neglect LGBTQ+ students and only prioritize cisgender students. Educational institutions often overlook this group of youth, causing LGBTQ+ youth to not receive equality or access to various facilities that should be provided, such as restrooms, hairstyles, school uniforms, Boy Scouts, Red Cross Youth, or even rooms/showers when going to camp.

> I have experienced this in high school. It was the school director who had a bias about these things. He enforced a rule that all male students should have the male hairstyle only which was an undercut hairstyle... a lot of students who wanted to have a longer hairstyle, had no confidence when they had to do the shortcut. (Jom)

Stereotyping

Stereotyping refers to when people around them make assumptions that all LGBTQ+ youth share the same traits. People tend to stereotype that LGBTQ+ are all the same as what they have seen in various media. Therefore, these people often make a judgment based on what they believe. They assume that LQBTQ+ youth have very high confidence in expressing themselves, love dressing up, care about their appearance, are looking, have all-round abilities in both studies and sports, etc. They often feel pressured,

stressed, or even disappointed that people around them or society do not understand the true identities of LGBTQ+ youth.

> Teacher said something like, 'Oh, if you are gay, then you should be better at studying than men. You have to be brave enough to express yourself. You must know how to play volleyball. There must be many things that you can do.' But personally, I don't know how to play volleyball. (Kae Kai)

Secondary Microaggressions

This refers to when LGBTQ+ youth experience physical violence, physical harassment, mocking, disrespect, or even being discriminated against by the perpetrators and not getting help from those around them. Those around them do not protect or be a voice for LGBTQ+ youth even though they see such incidents. These people believe that such behaviors are normal, and they are something that students do to tease each other. The LQBTQ+ are sometimes blamed for being too sensitive.

> Sometimes they help. Sometimes they turn away. Sometimes they defend me and tell friends who are bullying me to stop doing it. When they turn away, they just ignore what happens and don't say anything when I report the incident...No, they just laugh and think we are just joking and they don't think anything about it. (Jom)

In the second phase, focus group discussions with 16 participants—including classroom teachers, psychologists, guidance counselors, directors, administrators, and LGBTQ+ advocates—resulted in policy suggestions and a review of their quality, leading to a completed version as follows:

The Completed Policy Suggestions on Microaggressions Management among LGBTQ+ Youth

The researchers would like to present the findings of the analysis of the first and second focus group discussions into aspects that were criticized and suggested by the participants of focus group discussion. All eight experts, the second focus group, evaluate the policy suggestions in all four had utility, feasibility, propriety and accuracy at the highest level. This means that policy suggestions can actually be used in educational institutions. The details are as follows:

Counseling Management

Mental health services for LGBTQ+ youth in educational institutions should be improved by adding an online counseling service that is convenient and easy to access for the youth to receive counseling. This includes coordinating with relevant agencies to help when LGBTQ+ students experience incidents of microaggressions by providing a hotline service where they can directly talk to a psychologist, or someone involved in helping LGBTQ+ youth. In addition, all educational personnel who do not have a background in counseling should receive training related to counseling skills and processes in order to acquire basic skills for giving advice to students. Those skills include having professional ethics in keeping the privacy of students.

Online Counseling. This refers to providing an online counseling service that is convenient and easy to access for the students, such as using Line Official for online counseling without having to reveal their identity to request counseling. This will make LGBTQ+ students feel comfortable disclosing their identities or their problems. The educational institutions should publicize the ways to access an online counseling service provided by the educational institutions. This includes access to a hotline or a direct line to a psychologist or relevant external expert who can provide assistance when LGBTQ students experience microaggressions. In this regard, educational institutions should coordinate with external agencies or organizations that have expertise related to LGBTQ+ to create a network that can provide both

psychological and legal counseling services and bring LGBTQ+ students justice in cases of microaggression.

The consultation Training. All educational personnel in schools should be trained in order to acquire basic skills in counseling, listening, and ethics in maintaining confidentiality when students seek advice. The training also includes knowledge training regarding how to provide counseling for LGBTQ+ students, such as knowledge about the use of various hormones against transgender students, etc. This training can help schools that lack guidance counselors or teachers with counseling skills to be able to support students who come to ask for advice and understand LGBTQ+ students more.

Confidentiality of LGBTQ+ Students. All personnel in educational institutions, not just guidance counselors or psychologists, but all teachers and school administrators should have a code of conduct for the confidentiality of LGBTQ students. If a student reveals his or her gender identity to them, their confidentiality is extremely important. This is the personnel in the educational institution are the first people and are closest to the students in the educational institution.

Educational Personnel as a Voice for LGBTQ+ Youth. Every educational institution personnel should have a role to play as a spokesperson in order to reduce the violence that occurs in educational institutions for LGBTQ+ youth who experience microaggressions, including sexual harassment. Personnel in educational institutions should be their representatives for voicing violent incidents that occur against LGBTQ+ youth so that educational administrators or society can see the actual problems. In addition, LGBTQ+ youth should receive the help they need and be prevented from violent problems that may occur in educational institutions in the future.

Knowledge Promotion Management on Understanding of Sexuality and Gender Diversity

Educational institutions should prioritize the promotion of activities, organizing training, or even providing knowledge and creating an understanding of sexuality, gender diversity, sexual orientation, human rights, etc. Educational institutions may make joint agreements or commitments with outside agencies or organizations that organize activities. Training should be provided to all staff and students in educational institutions every year so that everyone in the school can see the importance and be aware of how to be considerate towards people with gender diversity.

Curriculum and Instruction. Educational institutions should apply knowledge about sexuality and gender diversity, including how to be considerate towards LGBTQ+ people to related courses, such as guidance courses, health education, biology, or additional courses, etc., Teachers or personnel in educational institutions should understand gender identity, sexual orientation, sex, and gender expression. In addition, the teachers or homeroom teachers should apply knowledge and understanding content for students in class about gender diversity.

Organizing Activities. Educational institutions should organize activities related to gender and sexual diversity on various occasions, such as organizing activities during Pride Month and organizing academic talks by inviting LGBTQ+ experts from other organizations to discuss the issues related to LGBTQ+ to educate personnel in educational institutions and all students to have knowledge and understanding about gender diversity and how to be considerate towards people with diverse backgrounds.

Training. This refers to educational institutions collaborating with external organizations related to LGBTQ+. Training projects and activities should be organized to provide knowledge and understanding to all personnel in educational institutions regarding gender identity, sexual orientation, sex, sexual diversity, and human rights. Training should focus on providing personnel in educational institutions and all students with knowledge, understanding, acceptance, and conduct or even being careful with words used towards LGBTQ+ students, including promoting a more positive attitude towards LGBTQ+ people.

Facility Management

Educational institutions should allocate budgets to build buildings and facilities such as restrooms, shower rooms, and rooms when attending camps for youth of LGBTQ+ or provide a restroom that does not differentiate between genders (toilets for all genders) to increase safety in using school restrooms as well as to reduce violence that may occur when school restrooms.

Restrooms for LGBTQ+ Students. Educational institutions should provide restrooms for LGBTQ+ in school buildings as an alternative for students with gender diversity and to make LGBTQ+ students feel safe when going to the restroom without feeling paranoid when having to go to the restroom that only belongs to the gender given at birth. This can help reduce bullying that may occur against LGBTQ+ students, such as sexual harassment, teasing, pulling pants, etc.

Accommodation/ Restrooms/ Shower Rooms for LGBTQ+ Youth when Camping. Educational institutions should provide rooms, shower rooms, or gender-free shower rooms as one of the options for LGBTQ+ students in order to make students feel safe and comfortable when using the rooms and restroom. LGBTQ+ youth such as transgender students who dress in women's clothing may feel unsafe if they have to share a restroom or room with a group of men. Therefore, educational institutions should provide rooms and shower rooms for LGBTQ+ students.

Freedom Management for Expressions and Activities

Educational institutions should recognize the importance of freedom in expressing oneself in various forms of activities against LGBTQ+ youth in educational institutions, such as clothing, hairstyles, participation in activities and rights movement, organizing clubs that support activities, and providing opportunities for LGBTQ+ students to fully express and display their abilities as seen appropriate in an educational context without being discriminated against by teachers or other students.

Expressing One's Identity and Sexuality through Clothing or Hairstyle. Educational institutions should recognize and provide opportunities for gender-diverse students to express their identities and sexualities through clothing or hairstyles. Moreover, educational institutions should issue rules or policies for the dress codes of LGBTQ+ students or issue a permit in terms of a school uniform or hairstyle to set rules and regulations among LGBTQ+ students in order to follow the same guidelines of educational institutions.

Activity Organization in School. Activities organized at school should provide LGBTQ+ students with opportunities to participate in them. Schools should provide opportunities for LGBTQ students to be leaders or representatives in various activities equally and without discrimination on the basis of gender.

Opportunities for the Rights Movement of LGBTQ+ Students. Educational institutions should provide a space for LGBTQ+ students to promote the rights of people with gender diversity in educational institutions, such as a talk about gender diversity, knowledge training, and a campaign for the student presidential election. This can be a point of change in the perspective and attitude of personnel and all students in the school that can create more positive awareness and acceptance against LGBTQ+ students.

Organizing Specific Activities for LGBTQ+ Students. School should provide safe spaces or clubs for LGBTQ+ students as a learning resource and network for organizing creative activities for students of diverse genders, such as allowing them to comfortably express their own identities and sexualities, being friends and advisors to each other within the club or even providing opportunities for activities against all students without gender discrimination. Spaces or clubs for LGBTQ+ students can be a source of emotional support for them so that they can live happily in school.

The Completed policy suggestions on microaggressions management among LGBTQ+ youth are summarized in Figure 2.

Figure 2

The Completed Policy Suggestions for Microaggressions Management among LGBTQ+ Youth
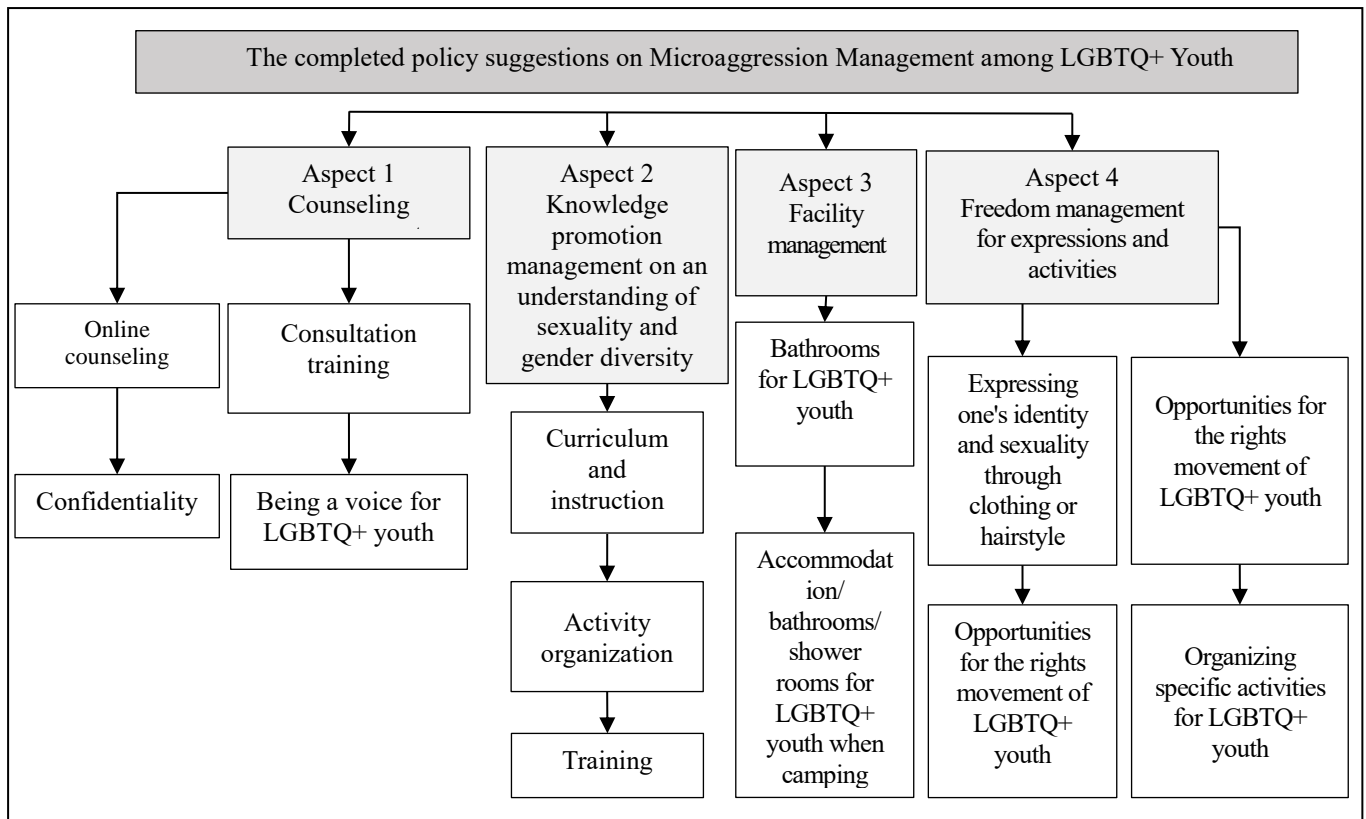
Discussion and Conclusion

Discussion of Main Results

This research explored the experiences of microaggressions among Thai LGBTQ+ youth in schools, and found that the microaggression was experienced in seven distinct categories: devaluation, privacy violation, relationship degradation or termination, disrespect, neglect/ignorance, stereotyping, and secondary microaggressions.

The categories of microaggressions highlights behaviors and speech that indicate exclusion of LGBTQ+ youth from societal acceptance. These actions include discrimination, bullying, or even privacy violations, resulting in feelings of inequality, lack of recognition, and social exclusion for LGBTQ+ youth. This aligns with feminist theory which explains that society predominantly values and prioritizes masculinity, often diminishing the importance of other genders, thus assigning social roles according to societal norms. Moreover, individuals with diverse sexual orientations in such a male-centric society are judged and devalued accordingly, perpetuating inequality and discriminatory practices (Sharf, 2007). Additionally, it aligns with social identity theory, which describes societal tendencies to segregate social identities, leading to marginalization and mistreatment of those who deviate from the majority, thereby pushing them to withdraw from societal engagement due to lack of acceptance of their sexual and gender identity (Brewer & Campbell, 1976). Feminist theory and social identity theory (Sharf, 2007; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) explain the root causes of microaggression across these 7 categories as: 1.) devaluation; 2.) privacy violation; 3) degrading or ending a relationship; 4.) disrespect; 5.) neglect/ignorance; 6.) stereotyping; and 7) secondary microaggressions. These findings are consistent with the study by Ojanen et al. (2023), which revealed that Thai LGBTQ+ youth often fall victim to various forms of violence, including physical, verbal, and sexual violence.

The completed policy suggestion is based on a study of experiences of microaggressions among LGBTQ+ youth and focus group discussions with stakeholders who provided opinions and suggestions to develop the policy. The policy can be divided into four aspects which include, counseling management, knowledge promotion management on an understanding of sexuality and gender diversity, facility management, and freedom management for expressions and activities. The findings regarding each policy suggestion can be discussed as follows:

Policy suggestion aspect 1, titled counseling management, aligns with the findings of Levenson et al. (2023), who studied the benefits of counseling management for individuals from gender and sexual minority groups who frequently endure emotional trauma. If this counseling policy is implemented, counselors must learn to understand issues related to gender and sexual diversity, as well as cultural differences, when working with LGBTQ+ youth to enhance the counseling alliance and improve counseling outcomes. (Ratanashevorn et al., 2024). Moreover, counseling services should be made more accessible for LGBTQ+ youth, with additional information on hormone therapy provided specifically for transgender youth. This approach would enhance the effectiveness and relevance of counseling services for LGBTQ+ individuals (Intakaew, 2018).

Policy suggestion aspect 2, titled knowledge promotion management on an understanding of gender and sexual diversity among educational personnel in schools, aims to foster an inclusive atmosphere within school. This finding aligns with the study by Hernandez and Torres (2023), who emphasized that school should incorporate a curriculum that provides knowledge and understanding about gender diversity, sexual orientation, and gender identity. To prevent discriminatory treatment of students based on gender and sexuality, strategies should be implemented to foster an environment and atmosphere free from gender and sexuality-based prejudice.

Policy suggestion aspect 3, titled facility management, refers to the management of facilities such as restrooms and dormitories commonly segregated by assigned sex at birth. This policy aligns with the studies by Intakaew (2018) and Hernandez and Torres (2023), which emphasize that school should structure their facilities to better embrace diverse gender and sexual identities. The restroom is one that needs to be prioritized. There should be all-gender restrooms that accommodate young people of all gender identities, ensuring a sense of security and comfort for students when using these facilities.

Policy suggestion aspect 4, titled freedom management for expressions and activities, promotes the ability of LGBTQ+ youth to express their gender identities in schools through LGBTQ+ group formations and participation in various school activities. This aligns with the study by Leung et al. (2022), which highlights the importance of supporting LGBTQ+ youth communities to enhance their visibility and facilitate social connections within schools. Such support significantly contributes to improving their overall well-being. Establishing a network of emotional support within the school can foster a greater sense of respect and acceptance for oneself and other members of the community. It also lifts each other's spirits and fosters a sense of safety. Moreover, there is also a need for school to support gender-affirming attire, hairstyles, and unrestricted expression.

Limitations

This study has some limitations. First, the data collection for this study was still lacking for some sexual identity who are lesbians, causing the information obtained to lack suggestions and experiences of microaggressions in this identity and second, this research was collected the data through the online system only. It may be a limitation to understand the experiences of LGBTQ+ youth who do not have access to online media. Future studies should study specific groups in terms of sexual/gender identity, such as studying only transgender people, to study the impact and severity of each group receives violence and differently the experiences of microaggression for creating the policy suggestions that are specific to that group (Anzani et al., 2021).

Implications for Behavioral Science

The study findings have significant implications for behavioral science, particularly in understanding and addressing the common forms of violence faced by Thai LGBTQ+ youth. Behavioral scientists can play a crucial role in developing multidisciplinary interventions, advocating for policies, and promoting educational programs that foster understanding and acceptance of LGBTQ+ identities especially in school settings based on this study. By integrating these findings into practice, behavioral scientists can contribute to the well-being and empowerment of LGBTQ+ youth, creating a more equitable and compassionate society.

Conclusion

The policy suggestions for managing microaggressions among LGBTQ+ youth are crucial for protecting them from violence in school settings. These policies aim to reduce and prevent microaggressions by implementing accessible online counseling services and providing support for those affected. Additionally, they emphasize organizing training and activities to educate staff and students on appropriate language, fostering understanding, acceptance, and positive attitudes toward LGBTQ+ youth. These measures not only address microaggressions but also create safer spaces within Thai school settings.

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