

■ PROGRAM ON DATA SCIENCE FOR PUBLIC POLICY

Lessons from Pakikipagkapwa

Strengthening Philippine Anti-Discrimination Efforts for a More Inclusive Society

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Introduction

Discrimination is pervasive in the Philippines,⁷ with reported cases based on gender (Human Rights Watch 2017), age (Handog 2021), physical appearance (Dayrit and Alibudbud 2022; Lavidés 2024, 123–24), and health conditions (Mrakovcic 2024, 62), among others. It not only causes social divisiveness (Khan, Combaz, and

McAslan 2015, 3) but also anxiety and trauma to those subjected to it (Williams et al. 2019, 1383). Hence, it is imperative for the government to mitigate factors that pave the way for such prejudiced practices.

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⁷ This was mentioned by Senator Imee Marcos during the public hearing of the Committee on Social Justice, Welfare, and Rural Development last 8 May 2024, concerning the Comprehensive Anti-Discrimination bills filed by Senators Joel Villanueva, Grace Poe, Robinhood Padilla, and herself. Retrieved 17 August 2024 from https://legacy.senate.gov.ph/photo_release/2024/0508_04.asp

Pakikipagkapwa and Data Science

Pakikipagkapwa, understood as recognizing others as fellow human beings, naturally stands in opposition to discriminatory practices. This interpretation is supported by its common manifestations, particularly in online spaces. Recently, the Filipino concept of *pakikipagkapwa* in online space has been investigated using analytics (Kobayashi et al. 2024).

Kobayashi et al.'s (2024) study utilized social media posts from virtual chat groups, online communities, and forums. Data were collected through web scraping, which involves automatically extracting information from websites. Software tools, such as programming languages (e.g., R and Python) and software libraries (e.g., Selenium, BeautifulSoup, and *snsrape*) were used to parse and organize the data. The collected data were then preprocessed and analyzed using the topic modelling technique, which inductively extracts topics from a large collection of text data.

The study reveals that the various topics generated through data mining can be grouped into different clusters depending on their relationship with *pakikipagkapwa*. The clusters are as follows: mediums, manifestations, enablers, and moderators. The “mediums” cluster consists of variables that serve as channels for *pakikipagkapwa* to occur. The “manifestations” cluster comprises topics that depict how *pakikipagkapwa* is demonstrated. The “enablers” act as catalysts that pave the way for *pakikipagkapwa* to occur. The “moderators” affect the extent of *pakikipagkapwa*. This emergent model of *pakikipagkapwa* also identifies four factors influencing *pakikipagkapwa* among Filipinos: family upbringing, religious affiliation, school experiences, and actions of famous personalities (Kobayashi et al. 2024).

Implications for Policy

By showing these influences, this study implies areas of action where policymakers and stakeholders can intervene to address discrimination. Although the study involved data science methods and focused on online interactions, these instances are nevertheless as “real” as “real-life” incidents of discrimination. As such, they can also be treated under, or subject to, general policy-making. Recognizing the need for intervention, this policy brief offers practical recommendations to address discrimination, while also examining existing legislations known for their anti-discrimination provisions, like Senate Bill 2766, for any gaps they may have. The policy brief argues that anti-discrimination practices must be incorporated in the following areas: families, religion, schools, and online spaces.

Family Upbringing and Discrimination

While discrimination often arises from the unfavorable attitudes and actions of a group to which the target does not belong, it can also exist in primary groups, like the family. Ideally, a family functions as a safe base for supporting development; however, older members may transmit prejudicial attitudes and model discriminatory

behaviors to younger members. A systematic review of studies on adolescents found a significant family transmission process of ethnic prejudice (Zagrean et al. 2022, 12). Children as young as three years old acquire prejudicial attitudes from their parents, which may later manifest as discriminatory behaviors (Pirchio et al. 2018, 6).

One source of discrimination within Filipino families is the undervaluation of female members, particularly due to the greater weight given to decisions made by male members over those made by female members in certain matters. This can be seen in the Family Code of the Philippines (1987), particularly in its sections on the exercise of parental consent to marry (Article 14), on administration and enjoyment of the community property or conjugal partnership (Articles 96 and 124), and on the exercise of parental authority over the person of common children and legal guardianship over their properties (Articles 211 and 225).

Some family practices that also discriminate against women include: (1) the prevalence of girls aged 15 to 19 who are married, divorced, or widowed in an informal

union; and (2) the negative attitude toward working mothers (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development n.d.). In particular, the former reflects the notion that children are the property of their parents, especially in the case of child brides. Although Republic Act No. 11596 prohibits and criminalizes marriage when at least one of the partners is below 18 years of age, reports of early and forced marriages among children, particularly in Mindanao, still persist (United Nations Population Fund 2024).

Another type of discrimination is the non-acceptance and, at times, abuse experienced by LGBT [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender] family members. In a study funded by the United Nations Development Program, it was found that at least one out of ten Filipino LGBT respondents had been a victim of violence and abuse, mostly committed at home by their parents (AFP News 2014).

Religious Affiliation and Discrimination

Majority of Filipinos identify themselves as Catholics. According to the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA 2023), out of 108,667,043 people across the country in 2020, 78.8 percent are Roman Catholics; 6.4 percent are Muslims; 2.6 percent are Iglesia ni Cristo; 0.8 percent each are Seventh Day Adventist and Aglipay; 0.6 percent are Iglesia Filipina Independiente; 0.5 percent are members of Bible Baptist Church; 0.4 percent each are members of United Church of Christ in the Philippines, Jehovah's Witness, and Church of Christ; and other religious affiliations comprise the remaining percentage.

According to Lavidés (2024, 124–26), the colonization by the male-dominated Spanish Catholic Church led to the formation of biases that promoted discrimination against women and children. By using the Catholic image of the Virgin Mary and the Holy Family, women were made to believe that engaging in sexual activity prior marriage considered them “impure.” Meanwhile, children born out of wedlock were deemed outcasts.

On the contrary, being part of a religious minority can also lead to discrimination. In a 2020 survey by International Alert, the majority of young Filipino Muslims living in Taguig and Baguio reported being discriminated against because of their religion (Saludes 2020). Some individuals found it difficult to get employed due to having Arab-sounding names; or even when

hired, they were not allowed to wear hijab (International Alert 2018; GMA News 2017). This discrimination stems from the perception that Muslims are violent and untrustworthy, leading them to be labeled as terrorists (International Alert 2018; Saludes 2020).

Educational Training/Environment and Discrimination

Philippine schools nurture children to build a just and humane society. But, over time, these institutions have become loci of discriminatory practices. On his study on Filipino high school students, Datu (2018) reveals that everyday discrimination is connected to negative emotions and academic achievement. He found that experiencing everyday discrimination is related to increased negative emotions, which, in turn, negatively affect one's perceived academic achievement (Datu 2018).

As previously noted, the LGBTQ community is vulnerable to discriminatory behaviors, particularly among students involving teachers and parents. Abulencia et al. (2023) explore the experiences and practices of different stakeholders in several Marikina schools. The results show that discriminatory behaviors included teachers inquiring about students' sexual orientation, inappropriate touching by volunteer staff, and a lack of parental support for their children's sexuality, all of which lead to emotional distress. The study concludes that gender issues, involving bullying and microaggression, extend beyond the male-female binaries and stereotypes.

Meanwhile, Almeda and Ballesteros (2021) highlight other forms of discrimination in schools. Indigenous people face overtly discriminatory policies, including the use of English in schools, despite fluency varies between communities. Another issue is smart shaming, or anti-intellectualism, which leads to the invalidation of unconventional contributions and ideas. Similarly, students with mental health issues face discrimination due to the stigma surrounding mental health. They become reluctant to seek help, feel isolated, and face limited growth opportunities.

Influence of Famous Personalities and Discrimination

The parasocial interactions Filipinos form with famous personalities play a significant role in combating discrimination, especially in online contexts. Kobayashi et. al. (2024) note that online audience develop parasocial relationships with figures from show business (“showbiz”), politics, and news documentaries. This observation echoes Centeno’s (2016, 445) assertion that the parasocial relationship Filipinos develop with media personalities extend into areas like politics. Moreover, Filipinos who participate in celebrity events are not just passive spectators. Their interactions with celebrities influence how these events are perceived (Pertierra 2020). Kobayashi et al. (2024) also observe the difference between political figures and showbiz personalities. Political figures are often associated with specific services and programs, while showbiz personalities are linked to broader terms of pakikipagkapwa, such as “pakikisama” and “pakikiisa.” Nevertheless, both types of public figures are expected to use their platform to

promote just and fair treatment, thereby countering discriminatory behaviors.

This confirmation of the influence of parasocial interactions affirms that development sector advocates—including communication units of the government, line agencies, and cabinet agencies involved in development communication—have good reasons to include celebrities in advocacy campaigns against discriminatory behaviors and policies. It also suggests that more research should be done regarding the various roles celebrities might play in facilitating participatory approaches to development communication, which should be anti-discriminatory by their nature. Furthermore, it suggests that various measurable aspects of pakikipagkapwa would be useful in formulating the terms of reference in contracts that celebrities sign when recruited for government advocacy campaigns, ensuring that their statements and behaviors do not promote discrimination.

Policy Gaps and Policy Recommendations

Different laws address various forms of discrimination, yet there continues to be a gap in coverage. For example, Article 16.1 of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) seek to uphold the rights of women (PCW 2019). However, it focuses mainly on marriage and family relations (PCW 2019). Meanwhile, the SOGIESC bill, which aims to criminalize discrimination based on one’s sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or sex characteristics, has not yet been passed into law; therefore we still cannot rely on its protections.

The Philippine Constitution, the Civil Code, and the Revised Penal Code of the Philippines prohibit religion-based discrimination. Additionally, the Indigenous Peoples’ Rights Act of 1997 (R.A. 8371) extends to indigenous people the same rights and privileges available to all Filipinos. While these laws exist to protect individuals, they may have potential gaps in addressing the intersectionality of discrimination, including but not limited to vague language, insufficient remedial measures, and weak enforcement mechanisms.

Currently, Senate Bill (SB) no. 2766, the Comprehensive Anti-Discrimination Act, is at the forefront of the Philippine government’s legislative agenda to combat unfair treatment of others.⁸ It was filed by Senators Grace Poe, Robin Padilla, Joel Villanueva, Imee Marcos, and Jinggoy Estrada last 6 August 2024. This proposed measure seeks to address all forms of discrimination including, but not limited to, those based on age, ethnic origin, religion, political affiliation, gender, civil status, employment, education, medical condition, skin color, and facial features, making it the most inclusive anti-discrimination legislation to date. Thus, the Comprehensive Anti-Discrimination Act deserves to be commended for its blanket approach to cover a range of discrimination-related issues.

⁸ To know more about Senate Bill No. 2766, visit: <https://legacy.senate.gov.ph/lisdata/44493404471.pdf>

A Broader Anti-Discrimination Bill

If implemented, SB 2766 will safeguard the most vulnerable and help facilitate their availing of needed assistance (Amnesty International Philippines 2021). However, while SB 2766—particularly Sections 5, 6 and 8—highlights actions considered discriminatory, identifies liable persons, and includes corresponding penalties, the measure lacks provisions that address the influences shaping social consciousness and inculcating biases that promote discrimination. This is where pakikipagkapwa comes in. The main purpose of the legislative measure can be achieved if pakikipagkapwa is incorporated as a guiding principle. Furthermore, the authors argue that it is at least as equally important to mitigate factors contributing to discriminatory practices, such as family influence and upbringing, school experiences, religious teachings, and actions of famous personalities.

In particular, a discrimination law must include provisions that will facilitate the development of programs to counter biases and promote the egalitarian spirit of pakikipagkapwa within families through community-based activities and formal education training; train school teachers and administrators on how to identify and address their biases, as well as how to establish a more inclusive school environment; investigate the discriminatory nature of selected teachings of different religious organizations and come up with measures to address such; and ensure that the platforms of famous personalities are used solely to promote pakikipagkapwa.

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