**LESSONS FROM PAKIKIPAGKAPWA:**

**STRENGTHENING PHILIPPINE ANTI-DISCRIMINATION EFFORTS**

**FOR A MORE INCLUSIVE SOCIETY**

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# **Discrimination and Data Science**

Discrimination is pervasive in the Philippines.[[7]](#footnote-7) There are reported cases of discrimination based on gender (Human Rights Watch 2017), age (Handog 2021), physical appearance (Dayrit and Alibudbud 2022; Lavides 2024, 123–124), and health condition (Mrakovcic 2024, 62), among others. Discrimination not only cause 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.

# **Data Science and Pakikipagkapwa**

Pakikipagkapwa, understood as recognizing others as fellow human being, 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).

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

The work of Kobayashi et al. (2024) revealed that the various topics that were generated through data mining can be grouped into different clusters depending on their relationship with pakikipagkapwa. These clusters are mediums, manifestations, enablers, and moderators. The ‘medium’ is composed of variables which served as a channel for pakikipagkapwa to occur. The ‘manifestation’ cluster is comprised of topics which depict on how pakikipagkapwa is demonstrated. The ‘enablers’ act as a catalyst that paves the way for pakikipagkapwa to occur. The ‘moderators’ affect the extent of pakikipagkapwa. This emergent model of pakikipagkapwa also identified 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 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 anti-discrimination bills, particularly Senate Bill 2766, for any gaps they may have. The components of the model correspond to stakeholders who acts as both agents and recipients of policy. The policy brief argues that anti-discrimination practices must be incorporated in the following areas: families, religion, schools, and online spaces.

# **Discrimination in Society**

These influences, as previously mentioned, correspond to the four areas identified by Kobayashi et al. (2024), which must be covered in any such legislation. To combat discrimination better, these influences must be discussed at their respective level.

## 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, it is alarming that 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 (Pirchio, et al 2018, 6), which may later manifest as discriminatory behaviors.

One source of discrimination within Filipino families is the undervaluing 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, which was enacted in 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 towards 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 there is a law in place (R.A. 11596) that prohibits and criminalizes marriage when at least one of the partners is below 18 years of age, there are still reports of early and forced marriages among children, particularly in Mindanao (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 2014).

## Religious Affiliation and Discrimination

Majority of Filipinos identify themselves as Catholics. According to the Philippine Statistics Authority (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 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 Lavides (2024, 124–126), the colonization by the male-dominated Spanish Catholic Church led to the formation of biases that promoted discrimination against women and children, especially girls. 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.

In addition, membership in a religious minority can lead to discrimination. In a 2020 survey by International Alert, the majority of young Filipino Muslims living in Taguig and Baguio reported being discriminated 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 Online 2017). This discrimination stems from the perception that Muslims are violent and untrustworthy, and are thus readily labeled as terrorists (International Alert 2018; Saludes 2020).

## Educational Training/Environment and Discrimination

Philippine schools nurture children to build a just and human society, but instead, these institutions have become a locus of discriminatory practices. The different forms of discrimination in school lead to maladaptive psychological, physical health, and educational outcomes. On his study on Filipino high school students, Datu (2018) revealed that everyday discrimination is connected to negative emotions and academic achievement. He found that experiencing everyday discrimination is related to having more negative emotions, which, in turn, negatively affect one’s perceived academic achievement (Datu 2018).

As previously noted, the LGBTQ community is especially vulnerable to discriminatory behaviors, particularly among students, as well as their teachers and parents. Abulencia et al. (2023) explored the experiences and practices of different stakeholders in several Marikina schools. The results showed 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, which leads to emotional distress. The study concluded that gender issues, involving bullying and microaggression, extend beyond the male-female binaries and stereotypes.

Meanwhile, Almeda and Ballesteros (2021) highlighted other forms of discrimination in schools. Indigenous people face overt discriminatory policies, as English is the medium of instruction in school, despite varying levels of fluency in different communities. Another issue is smart shaming, or anti-intellectualism, which leads to the invalidation of unconventional contributions and ideas. Similarly, individuals 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.

D. 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) found that online audience develop parasocial relationships with figures from show business (“showbiz”), politics, and news documentaries, echoing Centeno’s (2016, 445) assertion that the parasociality relationship that Filipinos develop with media personalities extend into areas like politics. Moreover, Filipinos who participate in celebrity events are not passive spectators; their engagement and responses with celebrities actively shape the narrative of the said events (Pertierra 2020). Kobayashi et al (2024) further observed that political figures were associated with specific services and programs, while showbiz personalities were linked to broader terms of pakikipagkapwa, such as “*pakikisama*” and “*pakikiisa*.” In both cases, these 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 the communication units of government line agencies and cabinet agencies mandated to do development communication work—have good reasons to involve 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 the contracts celebrities sign when they are recruited to participate in government advocacy campaigns, stipulating that they assure that their statements and behaviors do not promote discrimination.

# **Policy Gaps and Policy Recommendations**

Several laws address these forms of discrimination. Article 16.1 of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and Republic Act No. 9710, or the Magna Carta for Women, seek to uphold the rights of women and protect them against discrimination (Philippine Commission on Women 2019). In particular, the said article of CEDAW focuses on marriage and family relations (Philippine Commission on Women 2019). However, as of now, 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.

The Philippine Constitution, the Civil Code, and the Labor Code prohibit religion-based discrimination. Additionally, the Indigenous Peoples’ Rights Act of 1997 (R.A. 8371) extends the same rights and privileges to indigenous people that are available to all Filipinos. While these laws exist to protect people, misunderstandings and prejudices about religious beliefs ultimately prevent them from connecting with one another, thereby inhibiting pakikipagkapwa.

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]](#footnote-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.

Unlike CEDAW, the Magna Carta for Women, and the SOGIESC bill that predominantly focus on gender-related issues, SB 2766 is more inclusive. This bill aims to establish the necessary implementing mechanisms to institutionalize the fight against all forms of discrimination in the country. The Comprehensive Anti-Discrimination Act (Senate Bill No. 2766) deserves to be commended for its blanket approach to cover a range of discrimination-related issues.

## **A Broader Discrimination Bill**

If implemented, SB 2766 will safeguard those most vulnerable and help facilitate their availing of needed assistance (“Pass the Comprehensive Anti - Discrimination Bill - Amnesty Philippines” 2021). However, while SB 2766 especially sections 5, 6 and 8 highlights actions which are considered discriminatory, the persons liable, and the corresponding penalties which are crucial, the measure lacks provisions addressing the influences that shape social consciousness and inculcate biases promoting discrimination. This is where pakikipagkapwa comes in. The spirit of these protections can also be enshrined in a broader discrimination bill (not just on women), incorporating pakikipagkapwa as a core guiding principle. Furthermore, the authors argue that it is at least as equally important to mitigate factors, such as the influence of family and upbringing, school experiences, religious teachings, and among others, which pave the way to inculcate biases in the Filipino consciousness and perpetuate discriminatory beliefs and practices.

In particular, a discrimination law must include provisions that will facilitate the development of programs that will counter the biases and promote the egalitarian spirit of pakikipagkapwa in the family through community-based activities and in formal education training; train school teachers and administrators on how to identify and address their biases, as well as how to establish a school environment that is more inclusive; 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 shall be used solely to promote pakikipagkapwa.

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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 May 8, 2024 concerning the Comprehensive Anti-Discrimination bills filed by Senators Joel Villanueva, Senators Grace Poe, Robinhood Padilla, and herself. Retrieved 17 August 2024 from <https://legacy.senate.gov.ph/photo_release/2024/0508_04.asp> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. To know more about Senate Bill No. 2766, visit: https://legacy.senate.gov.ph/lisdata/4449340447!.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-8)