



Workplace Experiences of LGBTQIA + Individuals in Portugal

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Abstract

Although Portuguese Labour Code forbids discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, 20% of LGBTQIA + workers report workplace discrimination, potentially because non-discrimination policies do not protect against more covert types of discrimination. This study aimed to characterize workplace discrimination and support among Portuguese LGBTQIA + workers using online surveys to capture workplace satisfaction and support and discrimination in the workplace. Quantitative results were computed using STATA, Version 17.0. Qualitative data was analysed using NVivo 12. The sample included 60 participants who self-identified as a sexual or gender minority. Although only 31.9% of participants reported experiencing LGBTQIA + -based discrimination at work, only 30% of participants reported being completely out at work. Qualitative findings revealed two main themes regarding adverse workplace experiences (overt discrimination and covert discrimination), two main themes regarding neutral and positive workplace experiences (acceptance and support and liberation after disclosure at work), and two main themes regarding participants' vision of a truly inclusive and supportive workplace (instrumental changes and changes in values). These findings indicate that discrimination attributable to sexual orientation and gender identity still exists in Portuguese workplaces despite anti-discrimination protections and that more legal, institutional, and social support is needed to ensure a safe workplace for LGBTQIA + people.

Keywords LGBTQIA + · Occupational well-being · Work environment · Workplace discrimination · Portugal

Introduction

Sexual and gender minority workers, including individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQIA +), disproportionately experience workplace discrimination and barriers to employment due to their marginalized social status. In addition to the documented verbal and physical harassment that LGBTQIA + individuals experience at work, LGBTQIA + workers are also less likely to be hired, be promoted, and

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receive raises than their non-LGBTQIA+ counterparts (MVL Badgett et al., 2009; Dyer et al., 2019; Embrick et al., 2007; Herek, 2009; Sears & Mallory, 2011; Sheridan et al., 2017). Studies from a variety of populations show that, for example, LGBTQIA+ job candidates are less likely to be offered a job interview, have a positive interview experience, receive a job offer, and hold high-level managerial positions than straight, cisgender candidates with the same qualifications (Ahmed et al., 2013; Aksoy et al., 2019; Drydakis, 2009; Fasoli & Hegarty, 2020; Hebl et al., 2002; Mishel, 2016; Tilcsik, 2015; Weichselbaumer, 2003). Additionally, LGBTQIA+ employees report worse experiences of employee treatment, workplace fairness, and job satisfaction than their straight, cisgender counterparts (Cech, 2015; Cech & Rothwell, 2020).

Workplace Discrimination and Minority Stress Theory

Minority Stress Theory posits that LGBTQIA+ populations experience increased internal and external stressors due to their marginalized social statuses (Meyer, 2003). Furthermore, substantial research indicates that the disproportionate stress that LGBTQIA+ populations face also increases their risk of psychological distress and mental health issues (Meyer, 1995, 2003; Miner & Costa, 2018; Moya & Moya-Garófano, 2020). This stress, which is often related to experiences of discrimination, expectations of stigma, internalized heterosexism, and concealment of sexual orientation or gender identity, is particularly salient in the workplace, and can negatively impact mental and physical health, as well as job-related outcomes (Meyer, 2003; Velez & Moradi, 2012; Waldo, 1999). For example, studies have indicated that workplace minority stressors, including physical and verbal harassment, exclusion from work and social opportunities, workplace bullying, and pressure to conceal one's identity, are associated with greater psychological distress and lower job satisfaction (Drydakis, 2019; Miner & Costa, 2018; Moya & Moya-Garófano, 2020; Velez et al., 2013). Additionally, expectations of stigma and concealment of one's sexual orientation have been found to be associated with decreased job satisfaction, increased job anxiety, increased psychological distress, and increased fear of stigma and discrimination (Dispenza, 2015; Griffith & Hebl, 2002; Velez et al., 2013). On the other hand, supportive workplace environments (Allan et al., 2015), supervisors (Day & Schoenrade, 2000; Huffman et al., 2008) and co-workers (Cancela et al., 2020), as well as LGBTQIA+-supportive policies (Badgett et al., 2013; Day & Schoenrade, 2000) have been found to be associated with increased job satisfaction and organizational support has been found to be associated with outness (Huffman et al., 2008). Increased perceptions of culture of diversity and inclusion are also positively associated with job satisfaction (Hur, 2020; Pink-Harper et al., 2017; Yousuf et al., 2022).

LGBTQIA+ Workplace Health in Portugal

Portugal is one of the world leaders in LGBTQIA+ workplace protections, with a Labour Code that explicitly forbids discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. While this law prohibits discrimination from the time the hiring process starts through the full duration of the employment contract, employers are not required to provide reasonable accommodations to employees (Leitão et al., 2022). Additionally, despite these protections, a 2019 study by the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Intersex Association found that 20% of LGBTQIA+ participants in Portugal felt that they had experienced discrimination in the workplace (Portugal, 2020). Furthermore, Portuguese and Brazilian

LGBTQIA+ workers have been found to report higher levels of burnout, depressive symptoms, and anxiety, and lower levels of work-related quality of life, work engagement, and occupational self-efficacy compared to normative populations (Pereira et al., 2022). These discrepancies may be explained by the fact that non-discrimination policies do not completely protect LGBTQIA+ workers from more covert types of discrimination, such as microaggressions (Galupo & Resnick, 2016).

Additionally, despite legal protections, homophobic and transphobic beliefs are still prevalent in Portugal, with research indicating negative attitudes towards LGBTQIA+ rights and parenting (Costa et al., 2013, 2014a, b) and even hate crimes based on sexual orientation and gender identity (Europe, 2011). In fact, the 2015 Eurobarometer found that the proportion of Portuguese participants who thought discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity was widespread was 69% and 65%, respectively (Eurobarometer, 2015). Given that homophobic and transphobic beliefs and discrimination continue to persist in Portugal in general, and in Portuguese workplaces in particular, even with legal protections in place, this study aims to measure LGBTQIA+ workplace experiences in Portugal using a mixed-method approach. Specifically, it aims to describe job satisfaction, experiences of “coming out” at work, and workplace support and discrimination.

Materials and Methods

Design and Procedures

Participants were recruited through mailing lists and social networks, namely Portuguese LGBTQIA+ Facebook groups. After reading the study description and research objectives, participants were asked to read and agree to informed consent before providing any information. Individuals were eligible to participate if they (a) were at least 18 years of age, (b) self-identified as either a sexual or gender minority, and (c) currently or formerly worked in Portugal. Questionnaire contents are described in detail in the *Data Analysis and Tools* section. Ethical approval for this study was granted by the Ethics Committee of the University of Beira Interior, Portugal (CE-UBI-PJ-2020-088).

Participants

Of the 63 individuals who completed the online questionnaire, three did not meet the inclusion criteria due to the age requirement. The sample, therefore, included 60 participants, of which 28 identified as cisgender male (47.46%), 23 as cisgender female (38.98%), 1 as transgender male (1.69%), 2 as transgender female (3.39%), and 5 as non-binary (8.47%). Participant age ranged from 18 to 63 years, with an average of 35.24 years (SE = 1.34). In terms of sexual orientation, 25 participants identified as gay/lesbian (58.33%), 17 as bisexual (28.33%), 4 as pansexual (6.67%), 1 as queer (1.67%), 1 as asexual (1.67%), and 2 as straight (3.33%). All participants were either a sexual or gender minority (i.e., all cisgender participants were a sexual minority, and all straight participants were transgender or non-binary). Regarding relationship status, 27 participants were single, 18 were dating, 12 were married or in a de facto union, and 3 were divorced/separated. Participant demographics are described in greater detail in Table 1.

Table 1 Sociodemographic and occupational findings

	<i>N</i>	Frequency
Age (<i>n</i> =59)		
<i>Mean (SE)</i>	35.24 (1.34)	
Gender (<i>n</i> =59)		
<i>Cisgender male</i>	28	47.46%
<i>Cisgender female</i>	23	38.98%
<i>Transgender male</i>	1	1.69%
<i>Transgender female</i>	2	3.39%
<i>Nonbinary</i>	5	8.47%
Sexual orientation (<i>n</i> =60)		
<i>Gay/lesbian</i>	35	58.33%
<i>Bisexual</i>	17	28.33%
<i>Pansexual</i>	4	6.67%
<i>Queer</i>	1	1.67%
<i>Asexual</i>	1	1.67%
<i>Heterosexual</i>	2	3.33%
Relationship status (<i>n</i> =60)		
<i>Married</i>	2	3.33%
<i>Divorced/separated</i>	3	5.00%
<i>Dating</i>	18	30.00%
<i>De facto union</i>	10	16.67%
<i>Single</i>	27	45.00%
Educational attainment (<i>n</i> =60)		
< =9 years	1	1.67%
10–12 years	23	38.33%
<i>Bachelor-level degree</i>	21	35.00%
<i>Masters-level degree</i>	12	20.00%
<i>Doctorate-level degree</i>	3	5.00%
Place of residence (<i>n</i> =59)		
<i>Large rural area</i>	4	6.78%
<i>Small rural area</i>	4	6.78%
<i>Large urban area</i>	26	44.07%
<i>Small urban area</i>	25	42.37%
Socioeconomic status (<i>n</i> =59)		
<i>Low</i>	5	8.47%
<i>Low-middle</i>	12	20.34%
<i>Middle</i>	30	50.85%
<i>Middle-high</i>	11	18.64%
<i>High</i>	1	1.69%
Employment status (<i>n</i> =60)		
<i>Self-employed</i>	11	18.33%
<i>Employed by someone else</i>	35	58.34%
<i>Student</i>	5	8.33%
<i>Student-worker</i>	5	8.33%
<i>Unemployed</i>	4	6.67%

Table 1 (continued)

	<i>N</i>	Frequency
Time spent in present job (<i>n</i> = 54)		
<i>< 1 year</i>	6	18.52%
<i>1–5 years</i>	23	42.59%
<i>6–10 years</i>	8	14.81%
<i>11–20 years</i>	7	12.96%
<i>> 20 years</i>	6	11.11%
Type of work contract (<i>n</i> = 58)		
<i>Indefinite contract</i>	21	36.21%
<i>Fixed-term contract</i>	14	24.14%
<i>Temporary work contract</i>	3	5.17%
<i>Contractual work</i>	8	13.79%
<i>Does not apply</i>	12	20.69%
Shifts (<i>n</i> = 57)		
<i>Yes</i>	13	22.81%
<i>No</i>	44	77.19%
Weekly hours (<i>n</i> = 51)		
<i>Mean (SE)</i>	33.53 (2.14)	
Type of organization (<i>n</i> = 55)		
<i>Public</i>	21	38.18%
<i>Private</i>	34	61.82%
Work sector (<i>n</i> = 55)		
<i>Primary</i>	3	5.45%
<i>Secondary</i>	9	16.36%
<i>Tertiary</i>	43	78.18%
Size of company (<i>n</i> = 56)		
<i>< = 10 employees</i>	16	28.57%
<i>11–250 employees</i>	21	37.50%
<i>251–500 employees</i>	4	7.14%
<i>> 500 employees</i>	15	26.79%
Out to at least one person at work (<i>n</i> = 50)		
<i>Yes</i>	36	72.00%
<i>No</i>	14	28.00%
Completely out at work (<i>n</i> = 40)		
<i>Yes</i>	12	30.00%
<i>No</i>	28	70.00%

Data Analysis and Tools

Quasi-Qualitative Survey

Our quasi-qualitative survey included five main sections: sociodemographic survey, workplace satisfaction survey, health survey, perceived discrimination survey, and written workplace experience interview.

Sociodemographic Survey Sociodemographic information, including age, gender, sexual orientation, marital status, educational attainment, place of residence, and socioeconomic status, was collected using a web-based questionnaire. Additionally, information regarding participants' work life, including employment status, job title, time worked in present job, type of work contract, weekly hours, sector, and size of company, was also collected. Participants were also asked in an open-ended format if and who they were out to at work. Two binary (yes/no) variables were then formed: one which indicated whether the participant was out to anyone at work, and one which indicated whether the participant was completely out at work. If a participant mentioned being out to some people at work but did not mention whether they were out to everyone, they were considered a "yes" to the first variable but were considered a missing value for the second variable.

Workplace Satisfaction Survey Participant workplace satisfaction was measured using a 4-item scale that was adapted from the Work-Related Quality of Life Scale (Easton & Van Laar, 2018). This adapted scale aimed to measure four main elements of workplace satisfaction: quality of professional life, motivation, self-efficacy, and commitment. Each item is evaluated using a five-point Likert scale ranging from *Never (1)* to *Always (5)*. The total score ranges from 4 to 20, with higher scores indicating greater workplace satisfaction.

Self-Rated Health Survey Participant health was measured using four questions. Two questions asked about how often participants missed work due to health concerns in the past month and year, respectively. These questions were evaluated with a five-point Likert scale ranging from *Always or almost always (1)* to *Never or almost never (5)*. The other two questions asked how often participants felt good about their physical and mental health respectively. These questions also were evaluated using a 5-point Likert scale with values ranging from *Never (1)* to *Always (5)*. The total score ranges from 5 to 20, with higher scores indicating better self-rated health.

Perceived Workplace Discrimination Survey The Sexual and Gender Minority Workplace Discrimination Scale (SGMWDS), translated and adapted for Portuguese participants, was used to measure perceived discrimination in the workplace. The SGMWDS is a five-item scale designed to assess workplace discrimination against sexual and gender minorities (Lee et al., 2019). Items are evaluated using a five-point Likert scale ranging from *Never (1)* to *Always (5)*. The total score ranges from 5 to 25, with higher scores indicating greater perceived workplace discrimination due to SGM status.

Workplace Experiences Participants' workplace experiences were explored using eight open-ended questions. Topics included workplace culture, coming out at work, and support for LGBTQIA+ individuals in the workplace. Participant responses were analysed qualitatively for thematic analysis.

Quantitative Data Analysis

Quantitative results were analysed using STATA, Version 17.0. After data cleaning, descriptive statistics, including frequencies, means, and standard deviations, were calculated for each individual item, as well as for each scale overall.

Qualitative Data Analysis

Qualitative responses from the workplace experiences interview were transcribed verbatim and coded using NVivo 12. We used a modified constructivist grounded theory approach, which recognizes that researchers' positionality contributes to data analysis, in our thematic analysis of the data. To ensure consistent coding, codifications were independently completed by two authors. Where codifications differed, the two authors reviewed the discrepancy and discussed until they came to a consistent conclusion. Since the original electronic interviews were collected in Portuguese, the authors also translated the responses into English for the purposes of this report. Both authors have substantial experience with both the Portuguese and English languages, with one being a native Portuguese speaker and the other being a native English speaker.

Results

Quantitative findings

Sociodemographic and Occupational Information

Sociodemographic findings indicate that the majority of participants had obtained at least a bachelor's degree (60.00%), lived in an urban setting (86.41%), and were between low-middle and middle-high socioeconomic status (89.83%). In terms of work, majority of participants were employed (93.33%), had some type of work contract (65.52%), and did not work in shifts (77.19%). The weekly workload of participants ranged from 4 to 64 h, with an average of 33.53 h ($SE = 2.14$ h) weekly, and most participants had been at their job for five years or less (61.11%). Additionally, most participants worked at a private organization (61.82%), in the tertiary sector (78.18%), and for a company with 250 or less employees (66.07%). Of the 50 participants who reported about their outness at work, 72.00% were out to at least one person at their workplace. On the other hand, of the 40 participants who indicated whether they were completely out at work, only 30.00% reported being out to everyone at their workplace. More detailed sociodemographic and occupational findings can be found in Table 1.

Workplace Satisfaction

The average overall workplace satisfaction score was 15.25 ($SE = 0.39$) out of a possible 20 points. Participants reported the highest average scores for commitment to work, followed by preparation for work tasks, then motivation, then satisfaction with professional life. While 74.07% of participants reported being frequently or always committed to work, only 52.63% reported being frequently or always satisfied with their professional lives. Furthermore, 14.03% of participants reported never or rarely being satisfied with the quality of their professional life, while only 5.66% of participants reported rarely or never feeling prepared for more of their job requirements and only 5.56% of participants reported rarely feeling committed to their work. More detailed workplace satisfaction findings can be found in Table 2.

Table 2 Workplace satisfaction

	<i>n</i>	Frequency
Overall workplace satisfaction (<i>n</i> = 52)		
<i>Mean (SE)</i>	15.25 (0.39)	
In general, I am satisfied with the quality of my professional life. (<i>n</i> = 57)		
<i>Never</i>	3	5.26%
<i>Rarely</i>	5	8.77%
<i>Sometimes</i>	19	33.33%
<i>Frequently</i>	20	35.09%
<i>Always</i>	10	17.54%
<i>Mean (SE)</i>	3.51 (0.14)	
In general, I feel motivated to complete my professional tasks. (<i>n</i> = 53)		
<i>Never</i>	0	0.00%
<i>Rarely</i>	6	11.32%
<i>Sometimes</i>	14	26.42%
<i>Frequently</i>	25	47.17%
<i>Always</i>	8	15.09%
<i>Mean (SE)</i>	3.66 (0.12)	
I feel prepared for most of the requirements of my job. (<i>n</i> = 53)		
<i>Never</i>	1	1.89%
<i>Rarely</i>	2	3.77%
<i>Sometimes</i>	10	18.87%
<i>Frequently</i>	26	49.06%
<i>Always</i>	14	26.42%
<i>Mean (SE)</i>	3.94 (0.12)	
I feel committed to my work. (<i>n</i> = 54)		
<i>Never</i>	0	0.00%
<i>Rarely</i>	2	5.56%
<i>Sometimes</i>	11	20.37%
<i>Frequently</i>	22	40.74%
<i>Always</i>	18	33.33%
<i>Mean (SE)</i>	4.02 (0.12)	

Self-Rated Health

The average overall self-rated health score was 15.72 (SE = 0.55) out of a possible 20 points. The majority of participants never or nearly never missed work in the past month (69.64%) and year (63.64%) due to health-related issues. About half of participants reported being frequently or always in good physical health (51.79%) and mental health (50.00%). On the other hand, 12.5% of participants reported never or rarely feeling good about their physical health and 18.51% of participants reported never or rarely feeling good about their mental health. More detailed self-rated health findings can be found in Table 3.

Table 3 Self-rated health

	<i>n</i>	Frequency
Overall self-rated health (<i>n</i> = 32)		
<i>Mean (SE)</i>	15.72 (0.55)	
How many times did you miss work due to health-related issues in the past month? (<i>n</i> = 56)		
<i>Always/almost always</i>	1	1.79%
<i>Many times</i>	1	1.79%
<i>Sometimes</i>	7	12.50%
<i>A few times</i>	8	14.29%
<i>Never/nearly never</i>	39	69.64%
<i>Mean (SE)</i>	4.48 (0.12)	
How many times did you miss work due to health-related issues in the past year? (<i>n</i> = 33)		
<i>Always/almost always</i>	1	3.03%
<i>Many times</i>	3	9.09%
<i>Sometimes</i>	4	12.12%
<i>A few times</i>	4	12.12%
<i>Never/nearly never</i>	21	63.64%
<i>Mean (SE)</i>	4.24 (0.20)	
In general, I feel good about my physical health. (<i>n</i> = 56)		
<i>Never</i>	0	0.00%
<i>Rarely</i>	7	12.50%
<i>Sometimes</i>	20	35.71%
<i>Frequently</i>	22	39.29%
<i>Always</i>	7	12.50%
<i>Mean (SE)</i>	3.52 (0.11)	
In general, I feel good about my mental health. (<i>n</i> = 54)		
<i>Never</i>	2	3.70%
<i>Rarely</i>	8	14.81%
<i>Sometimes</i>	17	31.48%
<i>Frequently</i>	16	29.63%
<i>Always</i>	11	20.37%
<i>Mean (SE)</i>	3.48 (0.15)	

Perceived Workplace Discrimination

Participants reported an average overall perceived workplace discrimination score of 8.23 (SE=0.55) out of a possible 25 points. Participants reported the lowest scores for being passed over or left out of a job due to their sexual orientation/gender identity and the highest scores for being less likely to take part in a new work opportunity than their straight peers. While only 1.72% of participants reported frequently or always being passed over or left out at a job for being LGBTQIA+, 13.21% reported frequently or always having fewer training opportunities for being LGBTQIA+, 11.32% felt that straight employees frequently or always were preferred when new equipment, activities, or working methods were introduced, and 11.54% reported that they were frequently or always less likely to take part in new work opportunities than their straight peers. More detailed perceived workplace discrimination findings can be found in Table 4.

Table 4 Perceived workplace discrimination

	<i>n</i>	Frequency
Overall perceived discrimination (<i>n</i> = 47)	8.23 (0.55)	
Mean (SE)		
Have you ever been passed over/left out at a job for being LGBTQIA+? (<i>n</i> = 58)		
Never	33	56.90%
Rarely	17	29.31%
Sometimes	7	12.07%
Frequently	1	1.72%
Always	0	0.00%
Mean (SE)	1.39 (0.10)	
Do you have fewer opportunities for training because you are LGBTQIA+? (<i>n</i> = 53)		
Never	27	50.94%
Rarely	12	22.64%
Sometimes	7	13.21%
Frequently	6	11.32%
Always	1	1.89%
Mean (SE)	1.91 (0.16)	
Do you feel that straight employees are preferred when new equipment, activities, or working methods are introduced? (<i>n</i> = 53)		
Never	27	50.94%
Rarely	7	13.21%
Sometimes	13	24.53%
Frequently	5	9.43%
Always	1	1.89%
Mean (SE)	1.98 (0.16)	
Do you receive smaller raises than straight employees because you are LGBTQIA+? (<i>n</i> = 51)		
Never	36	70.59%
Rarely	8	15.69%
Sometimes	5	9.80%

Table 4 (continued)

	<i>n</i>	Frequency
<i>Frequently</i>	1	1.96%
<i>Always</i>	1	1.96%
<i>Mean (SE)</i>	1.49 (0.13)	
Are you less likely to take part in new work opportunities than your straight peers? (<i>n</i> = 52)		
<i>Never</i>	29	55.77%
<i>Rarely</i>	8	15.38%
<i>Sometimes</i>	9	17.31%
<i>Frequently</i>	4	7.69%
<i>Always</i>	2	3.85%
<i>Mean (SE)</i>	1.88 (0.16)	

Qualitative Findings

Qualitative findings were organized into three main sections: (1) adverse workplace experiences, (2) neutral and positive workplace experiences, and (3) desired workplace changes. Section 1 focuses on participants' negative workplace experiences related to their sexual orientation or gender identity and is divided into two main themes: *overt discrimination* and *covert discrimination*. Section 2 focuses on participants' neutral and positive workplace experiences related to their sexual orientation or gender identity and is divided into two main themes: *acceptance and support* and *liberation after disclosure at work*. Section 3 focuses on participants' suggestions for making the workplace a more inclusive and supportive environment for sexual and gender minorities and is divided into two main sections: *instrumental changes* and *changes in values*. Themes, subthemes and supporting quotes, can be found in Tables 5.

Adverse Workplace Experiences

Overt Discrimination Two subthemes regarding overt discrimination arose: homophobic/transphobic comments; and harassment, occupational exclusion, and job loss. Participants described homophobic/transphobic comments as blatant verbal aggression and bullying. Some participants described these comments being said to their face, while others heard these comments second-hand. Participant 10, for example, reported, "I have a friend who very recently received a completely unreasonable, homophobic, and aggressive comment regarding my work and sexual orientation." Participants also expressed that these comments often include constant sexualization of LGBTQIA+ people. For example, Participant 36 explained that after coming out to co-workers, "People stop looking at me as someone else, as another individual being, and there is a sexual connotation in everything I do and everything I am." This participant also expressed that over time, these experiences became completely intolerable.

Harassment, occupational exclusion, and job loss were characterized as discriminatory practices that participants experienced after revealing their sexual orientation or gender identity at work. These practices were perpetrated by both co-workers and supervisors, with participants describing constant mockery, distancing of colleagues, and even instances of blackmail. Participant 36 also reported, "I have had occasions that other colleagues obviously refused to work with me." Furthermore, several participants reported either having lost a job due to their sexual orientation or gender identity, or having friends who had had this experience.

Covert Discrimination The four subthemes that were related to covert discrimination were cis- and heteronormative expectations, jokes and passive comments, social exclusion, and pressure to hide sexual orientation/gender identity. Participants described cis- and heteronormative expectations as experiences where they were othered due to their LGBTQIA+ identity or felt like they had to avoid expressions of their identity for the comfort of others at work. Several participants, for example, reported that they felt pressure to dress a certain way because they felt judged when they wore clothes that were not typically worn by non-LGBTQIA+ people. Other participants reported perceived discomfort from colleagues when they talked about their personal lives. Participant 61, for example, said "Among my closest friends I notice that it is always easier to hear from a heterosexual

Table 5 Summary of qualitative findings

Topic	Theme	Subtheme	Supporting quotes
Adverse workplace experiences	Overt discrimination	Homophobic/transphobic comments	"I've always made it a point to assume my sexuality and affectivity in front of everyone with whom I relate. From that moment on, a lot of things change. Attention focuses on that aspect and people stop looking at me as someone else, as another individual being, and there is a sexual connotation in everything I do and everything I am. As time goes by, this becomes intolerable." (Participant 36)
		Harassment, occupational exclusion, and job loss	"The boss I suspect disclosed to several people and tried to blackmail me at the time, with no success." (Participant 12) "I have experienced constant harassment, loss of position at work, mockery, distancing of colleagues, among others..." (Participant 22)
	Covert discrimination	Cis- and heteronormative expectations	"Being a straight-passing man there has always been an expectation that I have to dress a certain way, to like certain things." (Participant 15) "There is still an underlying religious culture when it comes to talking about sexuality and even LGBTQIA + people in positions of power occasionally show internalized homophobia." (Participant 15)
		Jokes and passive comments	"We get used to hearing many comments that at first seem harmless but carry feelings contrary to our sexual orientation. I have suffered prejudice for being gay, but I believe that in my case it was something veiled and not very explicit." (Participant 61)
		Social exclusion	"I realize that there is a distance and some places/people that I don't have access to (this on a personal level), which I imagine is because I am a gay man." (Participant 61)
		Pressure to hide sexual orientation/gender identity	"In the previous [job] I felt no protection and even the possibility of negatively affecting my career, to the point that I never disclosed my sexual orientation." (Participant 7) "I don't think the staff directly excludes but I don't feel super secure in sharing that I am LBGT. Not that they would exclude me, but the environment is straight." (Participant 60)

Table 5 (continued)

Topic	Theme	Subtheme	Supporting quotes
Neutral or positive experiences	Acceptance and support	Respect and equal treatment from superiors and co-workers	"In the current company I feel that the space is inclusive and that they respect my identity and my mental health" (Participant 22) "I told them and they still treat me like they treat the heterosexuals." (Participant 27)
		Neutral reactions to disclosure of sexual orientation or gender identity	"I told my co-workers about it and they reacted well, naturally." (Participant 52) "It was never a specific topic of conversation, the only thing that came up was the subject of partners, and then it was mentioned to my CEO. There was no reaction, because it is something natural, it was simply a point to touch, without changing the confidence or the respect that was already shown." (Participant 1)
		Separation of personal and professional life	"It's a place where everyone is treated and respected the same way, everyone's personal life is always left at the door, inside we are all professionals and a very lively environment and respect is what is always asked of us by the employer" (Participant 32) "Only a few colleagues know because we are friends outside of work. I try not to mix personal and professional life." (Participant 6)
		Inclusive actions	"At my current job, there are several measures being implemented, one of them being the LGBTQIA+ Group that I belong to." (Participant 22) "These have been liberating experiences for me. I can be myself and not have to omit more personal issues when they come up." (Participant 7)
	Liberation after disclosure at work		"I no longer feel the stress and pressure of hiding, of inhibition to speak, of fear that my language or my body would give me away." (Participant 21)

Table 5 (continued)

Topic	Theme	Subtheme	Supporting quotes
Desired workplace changes	Instrumental changes	Trainings and education	"Maybe that the company would show that it was supporting the community and not just making money from LGBT + people. For example, diversity trainings at work" (Participant 60) "Education falls far short of what is needed to improve the society that will welcome young workers with non-normative sexual orientations and gender identities in the future." (Participant 10)
		Inclusive policies	"Non-mandatory use of uniforms discriminated by gender" (Participant 23) "The websites of LGBT associations would not be blocked. There would be an employee advocate. Phobic views would be banned and punished." (Participant 12)
	Changes in values	Visibility	"The company would show that it was supporting the community and not just making money from LGBT + people. For example, diversity trainings at work, employing LGBT + people, donating percentage of the profits to LGBT + and marginalized communities instead of just putting up LGBT + flags once a year (although I think LGBT + symbols can help a person feel safer), etc." (Participant 60)
		Inclusion	"One of the things my workplace does that I have never seen done before is my boss puts pronouns in email (even though she is a cis person). I find this a great way to show inclusion" (Participant 23)

colleague that he has a wife and children than to comment about a possible boyfriend of mine.” Although participants largely believed that these experiences were not meant to be hurtful, they still described them as ostracizing.

Similarly, participants described jokes and passive comments as things that were likely not meant to be harmful but still carried transphobic or homophobic undertones. For example, Participant 51, said that when she comes out at work, “some co-workers react the first time with a homophobic joke like, ‘Look, I’m only looking for men. Stay away from me.’” While comments like these are likely a way for co-workers to deflect their discomfort, this discomfort is then deflected right back onto their LGBTQIA+ colleagues. Additionally, many jokes, such as the one mentioned by Participant 51, highlight that LGBTQIA+ workers are often highly sexualized in ways that non-LGBTQIA+ workers are not. Furthermore, participants expressed that these jokes and comments are often repeated, wearing down on LGBTQIA+ workers over time.

Participants described social exclusion as experiences where they believed they were left out of social interaction with co-workers due to their sexual orientation or gender identity. Although this subtheme is similar to the previously described occupational exclusion, social exclusion was often more subtle and harder to prove, due to the fact that although it happened between colleagues, and it was not explicitly work-related. For example, participants expressed that non-LGBTQIA+ colleagues avoid socializing with LGBTQIA+ people during lunch and on cigarette breaks. Participant 61 described this subtler exclusion saying, “I realize that there is a distance and I don’t have access to some places/people, which I imagine is because I am a gay man.”

Finally, participants described pressure to hide sexual orientation/ gender identity as a fear of revealing their LGBTQIA+ identity at work due to the negative repercussions it may have for them. While many participants who expressed feeling this pressure had not come out at work at all, it was also expressed by those who had only come out to a few people at work. Participant 2, for example, reported, “I revealed it [my sexual orientation] to two colleagues who immediately advised me not to talk about it because I have a homophobic and critical boss.” However, other participants felt pressure to hide their identity, even without such explicit warnings. For example, Participant 60 said, “I don’t think the staff directly excludes, but I don’t feel super secure in sharing that I am LBGT. Not that they would exclude me, but the environment is straight.” This example also highlights the connection between cis- and heteronormative environments and pressure to hide one’s LGBTQIA+ identity at work.

Neutral and Positive Workplace Experiences

Acceptance and Support Four subthemes arose regarding acceptance and support: neutral reactions to disclosure of sexual orientation or gender identity; respect and equal treatment from superiors and co-workers; separation of personal and professional life; and inclusive actions. Neutral reactions to disclosure of sexual orientation or gender identity were described as experiences where participants came out to colleagues and no one reacted or the conversation continued as it normally would. Participants expressed appreciating neutral responses because it made them feel like their identity was something normal to their co-workers and nothing to fixate on.

Participants who described respect and equal treatment from superior and co-workers felt that their experiences in the workplace were similar to their non-LGBTQIA+ counterparts. Although these experiences often overlapped with neutral reactions to disclosure of

sexual orientation or gender identity, this subtheme was not specific to disclosure. Additionally, while some participants described respect and equal treatment as a lack of discrimination, other described a more active support. For example, Participant 32 expressed that they felt accepted and welcomed when colleagues “Accept us as we are, no matter who we are. Respect is the best offer”. This participant highlighted the difference between equal treatment because their identity was ignored, and equal treatment because their identity was respected.

Separation of personal and professional life was characterized as workplaces where workers did not know about their colleagues’ lives beyond their roles at work. Participants who described these types of workplaces had not come out at work due to this separation and had neutral feelings towards these environments. While separation of personal and professional life was largely described as an organizational practice, some participants also described it as a personal choice. For example, Participant 6 stated, “Only a few colleagues know, because we are friends outside of work. I try not to mix personal and professional life.”

Although specific types of inclusive actions varied, participants consistently described them as things that helped them to feel more welcomed and accepted at work. Some participants referred to specific legal actions, such as anti-discrimination policies, while others referenced social support, such as the implementation of LGBTQIA+ groups at work. While most participants described institutional-level actions, some also described actions by individuals. For example, Participant 23 stated, “My boss puts pronouns in her emails (even though she is a cis person). I find this a great way to show inclusion.” In this example, the action of one individual with relative power in the workplace was able to make the space more welcoming for all.

Liberation after Disclosure at Work Liberation after disclosure at work was characterized by participants as a feeling of freedom or relief after revealing their sexual orientation or gender identity in the workplace. Participants described this process as freeing because once they had come out, they did not have to fear that they would accidentally reveal their LGBTQIA+ identity. Participant 21, for example, explained, “I no longer feel the stress and pressure of hiding, of inhibition to speak, and of fear that my language or body would give me away.” Other participants also explained that coming out allowed them to be more open at work and made it so that they did not have to hide parts of themselves in the workplace. For example, Participant 7 reflected on their coming out experience saying, “These have been liberating experiences for me. I can be myself and not have to omit more personal issues when they come up.”

Desired Workplace Changes

Instrumental Changes There were three subthemes regarding instrumental changes: training and education; inclusive policies; and mental health support. Participants expressed their desire for training and education in the workplace so that all employees would have a stronger understanding of LGBTQIA+ identities and issues. This was identified as a necessity as many individuals have never been taught about LGBTQIA+ identities during their educational experiences and are often ignorant about the experiences of LGBTQIA+ people. Participants explained that by educating and training employees, many of the jokes and discriminatory comments could be avoided as people would have a stronger understanding of impact of this type of prejudice. Some participants also mentioned that by prioritizing

diversity trainings, employers would indicate to LGBTQIA+ employees that they genuinely are invested in supporting them beyond performative gestures.

Participants described inclusive policies as institutional changes that would make the workplace safer and more welcoming for LGBTQIA+ employees. A wide variety of policies were suggested, including adding pronouns on nametags and emails, hiring an employee advocate, financial appreciation, and stronger enforcement of anti-discrimination laws. Participants also suggested that work uniforms should not be gendered to help prevent gender dysmorphia for transgender and non-binary employees. On the other hand, one participant had a different approach to policy changes, indicating that the best policy would be to enforce separation of personal and professional life so that there would not be any opportunity for discrimination based on identities.

Participants also highlighted a need for greater mental health support for LGBTQIA+ people in the workplace. While participants had different visions for implementing this support, they all expressed that, for it to be successful, mental health support would need to be specifically tailored to the needs of LGBTQIA+ individuals. For example, Participant 2 focused on support groups, stating, “There should be open door and support sessions for LGBTQIA+ people with socializing and sharing of experiences,” while Participant 12 focused on practitioner support, stating “There should be more support in psychiatric and psychological terms. While straight colleagues can talk openly when they end a relationship, we cannot because of the homophobia felt.” Although these participants differed in the ways they envisioned mental health support, their responses both highlighted the fact that there is a current lack of support for LGBTQIA+ workers and that changes need to be made to make these individuals feel safer and more accepted in the workplace.

Changes in Values The two subthemes that arose regarding changes in values were visibility and inclusion. Participants highlighted a need for greater LGBTQIA+ visibility in the workplace, explaining that visibility both helps LGBTQIA+ workers to feel more accepted and encourages non-LGBTQIA+ workers to be more accepting of their colleagues. Additionally, participants indicated that it is important that companies openly support LGBTQIA+ people outside of the workplace as well, suggesting that companies volunteer in the community and support LGBTQIA+ organizations. Participant 60, however, suggested a more nuanced approach to promoting visibility, stating,

“Maybe the company would show that it was supporting the community and not just making money from LGBT+ people. For example, diversity trainings at work, employing LGBT+ people, donating percentage of the profits to LGBT+ and marginalized communities instead of just putting up LGBT+ flags once a year, even though I think LGBT+ symbols can help a person feel safer.”

This statement highlights the fact that while visibility is an important step towards making LGBTQIA+ workers feel safer, visibility alone is not enough to truly support LGBTQIA+ individuals in the workplace.

The final subtheme, inclusion, was described by participants as a need to go beyond acceptance to truly support and celebrate LGBTQIA+ workers. Participants explained that it was not always enough for them to simply be treated the same way as their non-LGBTQIA+ colleagues and that for them to be truly supported and included, their unique needs and struggles needed to be acknowledged in the workplace. Additionally, they expressed that inclusion needed to be prioritized as a company value so that all workers know as soon as they begin working that it is part of their job to ensure a culture of inclusivity for all.

Discussion

This mixed-method pilot study used online surveys and electronic interviews to describe workplace support and discrimination among LGBTQIA+ workers in Portugal. Quantitative findings indicated that Portuguese LGBTQIA+ workers in this sample were generally satisfied with their workplace experiences, felt good about their health, and had fairly low levels overall perceived discrimination at work. Additionally, while most participants were out to at least one person at work, most were not out to everyone at work. This supports previous findings from the ManpowerGroup that indicate that the majority of Portuguese LGBTQIA+ individuals do not feel comfortable sharing their sexual orientation with colleagues (ManpowerGroup, 2021). Importantly, the same study found that 62.35% of Portuguese LGBTQIA+ participants thought that coming out improved job productivity, highlighting an important discrepancy between ideal lived experience and actual lived experience.

Furthermore, while our quantitative results indicated generally positive workplace experiences, our qualitative results indicated that LGBTQIA+ workers still experience a variety of discriminatory experiences at work, including harassment, homophobic and transphobic jokes, and job loss. On the other hand, some participants did describe supportive workplace experiences, including neutral responses to disclosure of sexual orientation or gender identity and organizational-level anti-discrimination policies. Participants expressed a need both for instrumental changes, like culturally competent trainings, inclusive policies, and mental health support, and for changes in values to promote visibility and inclusion, to make the workplace a safer and more welcoming environment for all LGBTQIA+ people.

The differing participant responses highlight the complex realities of LGBTQIA+ workers in Portugal, which is consistent with previous research examining other aspects of LGBTQIA+ life in Portugal. For example, while the 2019 Eurobarometer found that about 78% of Portuguese citizens thought that lesbian, gay, and bisexual people should have the same rights as their straight counterparts (Eurobarometer, 2019), about 80% of Portuguese people identify as Catholic and the Catholic Church explicitly does not support acts of homosexuality (Estatística, 2012; Teresa Martinho Toldy, 2013). This type of discrepancy complicates the lived realities of LGBTQIA+ people in general, as well as LGBTQIA+ workers specifically, in Portugal.

Strengths, Limitations and Future Directions

Although this was a pilot study, it has several important strengths. To our knowledge, this is the first study that specifically focuses on workplace experiences of LGBTQIA+ people in Portugal, addressing an important research gap. Our sample included individuals with a wide range of sexual orientations, gender identities, ages, occupations, and types of workplaces, providing us with a broad view of LGBTQIA+ workplace experiences. Furthermore, our mixed-method study design allowed us to describe workplace experiences both quantitatively and qualitatively, which results in a more complete characterization of these experiences.

This study also had limitations, however, including the potential selection bias that may have arisen due to the fact that recruitment and survey completion were done online, and, therefore, our results may not be generalizable to LGBTQIA+ workers who do not use

the internet or social media. Additionally, while our study aimed to include Portuguese members across the LGBTQIA+ community, our questionnaires did not capture race/ethnicity data, so we do not know how workplace experiences may vary between different racial/ethnic groups in the LGBTQIA+ community and cannot be sure that our results are generalizable to each of these groups. This is an important gap as previous research has found that LGBTQIA+ racial and ethnic minorities consistently report more adverse and discriminatory experiences than their white LGBTQIA+ counterparts (Cech & Rothwell, 2020; Sheridan et al., 2017). Furthermore, the cross-sectional nature of this study did not allow us to establish temporality, and therefore we do not know whether discriminatory and supportive experiences preceded or followed mental and physical health outcomes.

To address some of these persistent gaps, future research should aim to include a more diverse sample of LGBTQIA+ workers, especially racial/ethnic minorities, transgender and non-binary people, and people living in rural areas, as these groups likely have unique workplace experiences that are important to characterize. Additionally, future studies should aim to include a larger sample that allows for analysis between groups to better understand the heterogeneity of experiences within the LGBTQIA+ community. To address some of the complex realities that LGBTQIA+ workers face, future research should also study variables across contexts and actors, as Minority Stress Border Theory suggests that minority stress experienced at work may impact family/personal life, and vice versa (Holman, 2019). By studying this population across contexts, we may be able to better understand the most effective places to intervene to make meaningful positive changes for LGBTQIA+ workers.

Despite the fact that additional research is needed to more fully understand the workplace experiences of LGBTQIA+ people in Portugal, there are some steps that can already be taken to make the workplace a safer and more welcoming place for all. As recommended by study participants and consistent with previous research (Metinyurt et al., 2021), workplace trainings aimed at addressing biases should be implemented in Portuguese workplaces to help workers identify and reduce their biases. Additionally, we recommend stronger anti-discrimination laws, as many workers described discriminatory experiences in the form of microaggressions, which are very difficult to protect against with existing laws. While these laws would protect the most people when implemented at a national level, organizations can also make their workplaces safer for LGBTQIA+ employees by creating stricter internal anti-discrimination policies.

Conclusion

Despite legal protections, LGBTQIA+ people in Portugal continue to suffer from discriminatory experiences in the workplace. While reported discriminatory experiences differ greatly, Portuguese LGBTQIA+ workers consistently identify a need for more legal, institutional, and social support at work to feel safer and more welcome at work. These findings suggest a need for stronger workplace protections, more education and training around LGBTQIA+ issues and acceptance in the workplace, and more explicit communication regarding support and equality of marginalized people in the workplace.

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Data Availability The datasets generated during and analysed during the current study are not publicly available as they contain information that could compromise participant privacy, but are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Declarations

Ethics Approval Ethical approval for this study was granted by the Ethics Committee of the University of Beira Interior, Portugal (CE-UBI-PJ-2020-088).

Consent to Participate Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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