


The State and the LGBTQI+ People: Toward an Inclusive COVID-19 Humanitarian Response

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Dear Editor,

In a recent article, Walsh and Stephenson (2021) noted that sexual minorities, particularly gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men (GBMSM), have increased mental and emotional stress during the pandemic because a majority of them have lingering morbidities and underlying conditions that make them highly vulnerable to grave illnesses and death from the COVID-19 virus. I would argue that social inequality and exclusionary tendencies against the LGBTQI+ community, in general, have been more evident within the pandemic and that further impinged upon their conditions and health.

In the Philippines, a lesbian couple was denied food and economic aid by the local government on the ground that they are not considered a “family” (Ritholtz, 2020). Such exclusionary practices have also been documented in some other countries during the pandemic. Social inequality and exclusionary tendencies against sexual minorities have always been present even before the pandemic. What the pandemic has revealed is that these fault lines of inequality are rather more systematic and structural. Access to health care and medical treatment has generally been not a problem among the members of the community, particularly those people living with HIV (PLHIV). What needs rethinking is the dispositive principle that makes up any humanitarian response and ensures that it does not in any way perpetuate inequality and discrimination against any minority and marginalized.

It is therefore imperative that the COVID-19 humanitarian response be inclusive and non-discriminatory drawing on a basic principle that everybody is a human person with inherent dignity and basic human rights.

Some practical strategies include the active incorporation of members of the LGBTQI+ community into the entire organization of humanitarian efforts, from planning to execution and evaluation. It is also necessary that the public spaces be more available and safe for them to be present and interact with the rest of society to increase awareness, dialogue, and collaboration.

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