

Documentary

I Exist: A Three-part Documentary Empowering Intersex Individuals in Areas of Barangay New Lower Bicutan, Taguig City, and Barangay 770 Zone 84 Sta. Ana, Manila, Philippines

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Abstract

This study explores the impact caused by a three-episode documentary series entitled 'I EXIST', intended to raise awareness regarding intersex persons especially those from Barangay New Lower Bicutan, Taguig City, and Barangay 770 Zone 84, Sta. Ana, Manila. The documentary deals with the challenges intersex persons face, drawing from both narratives and expert inputs, such as misunderstanding, social stigma, and lack of legal acknowledgment. This research will focus on the experiences of individuals with Congenital Adrenal Hyperplasia (CAH) and Hermaphroditism to develop a deeper understanding of intersex issues, point out the gaps in healthcare, and voice the rights of the intersex. Based on Formalist Theory and Social Learning Theory, this study engaged 60 participants who are 20 residents and informants from Sta. Ana, Manila, as well as in Taguig City, and three case studies from the organization of Intersex Philippines, above 18 years old. Experts in their fields were also tapped into the research. Descriptive qualitative and quantitative methods of interviews, focus group discussions, and survey questionnaires were utilized in the mixed-method approach. The post-evaluation involved both the residents and the experts who were actively involved in the validation and strengthening of the final output of the study. The documentary reportedly informed and impacted 94% of the participants and showed a strong agreement in 82%. The respondents were found to be open to a decrease in discrimination against the intersex population with the idea that 88% supported this. The stories presented in the documentary were moving for 82% of participants, creating empathy and understanding. Generally, the study shows that visual storytelling is a potent tool for creating awareness, removing stigma, and advocating for the rights of marginalized groups as it contributes to the ongoing discussion about intersex issues in the Philippines.

Keywords: Intersex, I Exist, Documentary, Congenital Adrenal Hyperplasia, Hermaphroditism.

Introduction

A person is said to be intersex if their biological features, including chromosomes, hormones, or reproductive organs, do not conform to societal expectations of male or female, instead exhibiting a unique combination of characteristics (Pikramenou, 2019). These are stigma, discrimination, and lack of access to the core medical services (Monro, *et al.*, 2024). At the same time, the absence of public knowledge and ineffective legal status ensure the exclusion of intersex persons. In the Philippines, the lack of formal statistics and laws on intersex matters further complicates these issues and leaves many intersex individuals without either proper support or visibility. Carpenter (2020) emphasizes the necessity of a unified term to address the heterogeneity within these conditions, facilitating service provision and ensuring continuity.

This work fills these gaps by designing and testing a three-component documentary, I EXIST, that can help empower intersex people and increase public visibility in Barangay New Lower Bicutan, Taguig City, and in Barangay 770 Zone 84, Sta. Ana, Manila. The documentary illustrates the lived experiences of intersex people and the systemic problems they encounter, including healthcare diaspora, legal discrimination, and societal prejudice. Based on formalism in film theory and social learning theory, this study examines the power of

visual narrative as a means of agitation and education. By presenting the documentary's effects on community knowledge and attitudes, this study plays a role in a much larger attempt toward inclusive and understanding of intersex persons in the Philippines.

Methodology

This research employed a mixed-method approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methodologies to assess the impact of the I EXIST documentary. It was carried out in partnership with Intersex Philippines, an NGO lobbying for the rights of intersex people, and took a multidisciplinary approach involving residents, health care providers, and community representatives.

Participants

The work involved 60 participants, recruited in a purposive way to provide diversity and context. This included:

50 residents from Barangay New Lower Bicutan and Barangay 770 Zone 84, participated in surveys to measure baseline and post-documentary awareness levels.

10 informants (6 barangay officials/youth leaders, 2 health workers, 2 teachers) took part in in-depth interviews and participated in 6 focus group discussions.

Participants of the Intersex Philippines group presented their personal stories and experiences.

Data Collection Tools

Surveys: Structured questionnaires were used to collect quantitative data on participants' awareness and perceptions of intersex issues before and after viewing the documentary.

These qualitative tools captured the lived experiences of intersex individuals, as well as the perspectives of experts, including endocrinologists, psychologists, legal professionals, and human rights advocates.

Pilot Testing and Post-Evaluation: The documentary was pilot-tested with audiences, and feedback was analyzed to refine its content. Post-evaluation sessions with experts evaluated the message lucidity of the documentary, its narrative approach, and the educational value it brought.

Documentary Design

The three-part documentary featured:

Episode 1: An account from the perspective of a mother of an intersex child born with congenital adrenal hyperplasia (CAH), on the topic of acceptance and advocacy challenges.

Episode 2: [F] The case of an intersex person (HP) with hermaphroditism, including the experiences and difficulties of self-discrimination and the process of self-discovery and acceptance.

Episode 3: The advocacy work of the executive director of Intersex Philippines, illustrating their resistance to legalization and policy change.

Expert commentary was provided with each episode to ground the stories and offer practical tips for influencing advocates.

Analysis

Quantitative data from surveys were analyzed using descriptive statistics to identify trends in awareness and perception changes. Qualitative data from interviews and FGDs were thematically analyzed to identify meaningful underlying information on the difficulties and requirements of intersex people. This mixed methods design enabled a thorough assessment of the documentary's impact.

Results

Awareness Levels and Perception Shifts

Results of the surveys showed a marked rise in both levels of awareness and understanding by participants:

- ✓ Pre-documentary Awareness: Only 22% of residents were aware of intersex issues, with many holding misconceptions.

- ✓ Post-documentary Awareness: 94% of participants reported that the documentary provided essential information about intersex individuals and their challenges.
- ✓ Discrimination Reduction Potential: 88% of respondents believed that the documentary could help reduce discrimination in their communities.

Empathy and Attitudinal Changes

Using the personal stories in the documentary material it created, the viewers experienced intense emotional reactions, which promoted empathy and attenuated stigma:

- ✓ 82% of viewers reported that the stories did so by promoting greater empathy toward intersex people.
- ✓ Participants indicated a transition from the perception of intersex disorders as a medical deviation, to recognizing them as a normal part of human biology.

Expert Evaluations

Post-evaluation by technical consultants highlighted the following strengths:

Message and Content: Experts commended the documentary's ability to communicate complex issues in an accessible and relatable manner.

Design Strategy: The combination of visual storytelling, sound design, and structured narratives effectively engaged audiences.

Educational Value: The documentary successfully closed the knowledge gap and created a platform for advocacy.

Challenges Identified

The study also uncovered systemic challenges, including:

Data Gaps: The absence of official data on intersex individuals in the Philippines hindered targeted advocacy efforts.

Resource Constraints: Limited funding and logistical challenges impacted the scope of the study.

Cultural Barriers: Co-cultures that affect the line of thinking of the informants.

Discussion

Results demonstrate the transformative power of visual storytelling in solving social problems. The I EXIST documentary successfully blended narrative approaches based on Formalist Film Theory by Hugo Münsterberg with the agency of Social Learning Theory of Alber Bandura to draw in audiences and raise awareness. Using personal accounts and expert commentary, the documentary softened intersex experiences to create empathy and challenge social prejudices.

The documentary's success underscores the importance of integrating local contexts and community voices in advocacy efforts. Partnerships with organizations such as Intersex Philippines provided a degree of cultural relevance and authenticity and served to bolster the voices of marginalized groups. In addition, the mixed-method design offered a strong design matrix to examine the documentary's impact, recording these types of changes in levels of awareness and the qualitative richness of attitudinal changes.

Nevertheless, the work also demonstrated systemic barriers that necessitate more widespread institutional and societal interventions. These include:

- ✓ Integrated healthcare programs that cater to the unique conditions of intersex people.
- ✓ Public awareness campaigns to decrease stigma and foster acceptance.
- ✓ Legislative changes to enable intersex people to be recognized and have their rights protected.
- ✓ The findings contribute to the growing body of research on the role of media in social advocacy, demonstrating how documentary storytelling can serve as a powerful tool for education and empowerment.

Conclusion

The I EXIST documentary media created significant media attention and decreased stigma about intersex people in the Philippines. By combining compelling narratives with expert insights, the documentary

provided a model for using media to address marginalized issues. The work highlights the importance of ongoing advocacy, policy legislation, and public participation to protect the rights and dignity of intersex persons. Future work should scale these efforts, examine the long-term consequences, and use digital platforms to engage larger audiences.

Declarations

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Author Contributions: Lipata, Reign Niñel R.: Team leader, provided strategic direction and oversight, defining the content, implementing the study protocol, reviewing the manuscript, and revising it to ensure the research met the highest standards of quality, validity, and academic excellence; Camangon, Mark Joshua P.: Conceptualization and literary review phases, providing astute insights; Diancin, Jethro A.: Conducted the literature review, developing the theoretical framework, and preparing the manuscript; Dimagiba, Sharmaine S.: Literature review, survey development, data collection, analysis, and statistical analysis; Javier, Cristha Eiona O.: Contributed in literature review, manuscript preparation, and data analysis; Liwanag, Jorell Rowddy R.: Contributed in literature review, data analysis, statistical analysis, and manuscript review, revision, and editing; Nicole Rose DJ.: Design development, literature survey, manuscript review, study design, data collection, data analysis, statistical analysis, and interpretation; Yayon, Justine N.: Literature review, preparing the manuscript, and revising and editing the final document; Florentino G. Pineda, Jr: ADVISER-Collaborated with students to select and develop a good research topic, and gave regular feedback on research progress, writing, and presentations. Discussed and ensured compliance with ethical standards and university regulations.

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