



BODHI

International Journal of Research in Humanities, Arts and Science

An online, Peer reviewed, Refereed and Quarterly Journal

Vol : 2

No : 2

January 2018

ISSN : 2456-5571



**CENTRE FOR RESOURCE, RESEARCH &
PUBLICATION SERVICES (CRRPS)**

www.crrps.in | www.bodhijournals.com

SOCIAL STIGMA AND DISCRIMINATION TOWARDS TRANSGENDER

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All societies assign specific adult roles based on sex which is emphasized in the process of socialization. For many people, the terms sex and gender are used interchangeably. However, although sex and gender are closely related, there is a subtle difference between the two. Sex refers to biological status as male or female. It includes physical attributes such as sex chromosomes, sex hormones, internal reproductive structures, and external genitalia. Gender is a term that is often used to refer to ways that people act, or feel about themselves, which is associated with boys/men and girls/women. While aspects of biological sex are the same across different cultures, aspects of gender may not be. Transgender is the state of one's "gender identity" not matching one's "assigned sex".

The term 'transgender people' is generally used to describe those who transgress social gender norms. The contemporary term — "transgender" arose in the mid-1990s from the grassroots community to designate gender-different people. Transgender is often used as an umbrella term to signify individuals who defy rigid, binary gender constructions, and who express or present a breaking and/or blurring of culturally prevalent stereotypical gender roles. Transgender people may live full- or part-time in the "gender role 'opposite' to their biological sex (UNDP, 2010). Transgender are variedly called in different places though they are essentially cross dressers. Sometimes they are referred to as transvestites", drag queens", or drag kings". In Tamil Nadu they are identified as Aravani. In Delhi, they are labeled as Kinnars.

Transgender - An over view

The number of transgenders identified by the census is almost 55, 000 are in the age group of 0-6 population (Census, 2011). This has come as a big surprise to the community as they did not expect so many parents to identify their children as belonging to the third gender. During the voter registration process only 28, 341 people registered as belonging to the third gender, said Kalki Subramaniam, transgender rights activist and founder of the Sahodari Foundation. Anjali Gopalan of Naz Foundation said that even the current figure of 4. 9 lakh was on the lower side as it was unlikely that the number of

people declaring themselves as transgender would ever give an accurate figure. (Times of India May 30, 2014) In India over 66% of the population identified as Transgender lived in rural areas, very close to the 69% of the overall population that lives in villages. The census data also revealed the low literacy level in the community, just 46%, compared to 74% literacy in the general population.

The highest proportion of the Transgender population, about 28%, was identified in Uttar Pradesh followed by 9% in Andhra Pradesh, 8% each in Maharashtra and Bihar, over 6% in both Madhya Pradesh and West Bengal and well over 4% in Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Odisha. Rajasthan accounted for over 3% of the total transgender population and Punjab for 2%. The proportion of those working in the transgender community is also low (38%) compared to 46% in the general population. Only 65% of the total working population is main workers — those who find work for more than six months in the year compared to 75% in the general population.

Transgender in Different Cultures

Transgender persons have been recognized in many cultures and societies from ancient times until the present day. However, the meaning of gender variance may vary from culture to culture. Every society comprises individuals who do not fit into the culture's dominant sex/gender categories - persons born intersexed (hermaphrodites), those who exhibit behavior or desires deemed appropriate for the "opposite" sex/gender, or those who, while conforming outwardly to culturally normative gender roles, experience themselves in conflict with these roles in some fundamental ways.

Historically, transgender communities have attempted to appropriate rituals, folklore and legends in order to obtain a sense of self-validation and carve out a niche for themselves in the traditional social structures. In various cultures, transgenders were seen as having special powers due to their assumed 'third sex' dimension, and were allowed to take part in semi-religious ceremonies. Often they were tolerated and allowed to live in the role of the other sex, to pursue their occupations (including that of sex work), cross-dress, and display other forms of transgender behaviour. Nevertheless they were often

segregated and excluded from many occupations and community practices, and even traded as slaves.

The hijra, an alternative gender role in India, is culturally conceptualized as neither man nor woman. Hijras are viewed with ambivalence in Indian society and are treated with a combination of mockery, fear, and respect. Although hijras have an auspicious presence, they also have an inauspicious potential. (Nanda, 2002) Their traditional occupation is to collect payment for their performances at weddings and the birth of a male child; today they also perform for the birth of girl children, collect alms from shopkeepers, act as tax collectors, and even run for political office. They also are widely known as prostitutes, both in the past and present.

In terms of their gender identity and role, kothis like hijras are transgender persons who identify themselves with the feminine gender. However, whereas hijras often settle into a fixed gender role after castration, kothis display a dual gender identity alternating between the masculine role of the husband demanded in the marriage relationship and the feminine role in the same-sex relationship outside. There are roughly one million Hijras in India, representing approximately one in every 400 post pubertal persons born male. This very large prevalence (1:400) of the Hijra in India, most of whom have undergone 'nirvan' (a sex change by ancient surgical means), is strong evidence that the intense transgender condition is far more prevalent than traditional western psychiatrists and psychologists have ever been willing to admit. Community members generally live in groups of five to ten people who function as a family. The community is organised around the 'guru-chela' (teacher-student or leader-follower) relationship, one based on hierarchy and power. (Pisal & Bandewar, 2005).

Attitude towards Transgenders in India

An attitude is a hypothetical construct that represents an individual's degree of like or dislike for something. Attitudes are generally positive or negative views of a person, place, thing, or event. Attitudes are judgments which develop on the affect, behavior, and cognition. The affective response is an emotional response that expresses an individual's degree of preference for an entity. The behavioral intention is a verbal indication or typical behavioral tendency of an individual. The cognitive response is a cognitive evaluation of the entity that constitutes an individual's beliefs about the object. Most attitudes are the result of either direct experience or observational learning from the environment. Unchecked

negative attitudes toward transgender persons may result in transphobia as well as discriminatory treatment of transgender individuals. In our country there is a bias against transgenders and a fair amount of ignorance. The common man in India is exposed more to eunuchs. There is a lot of prejudice against eunuchs in our society and they face a huge amount of job discrimination and are often forced to beg. There are people with a wide range of transgender-related identities, cultures, or experiences including Hijras, Aravanis, Kothis, Jogtas/Jogappas, and Shiv-Shakthis. In Tamil Nadu, some Aravani activists want the public and media to use the term 'Thirunangai' to refer to Aravani. These people have been part of the broader culture and treated with great respect, at least in the past, although an estimated 10 lakhs population in India has been more often socially ostracized.

The Issues, faced by Transgenders are discrimination, lack of educational facilities, unemployment, lack of shelter, lack of medical facilities like HIV care and hygiene, depression, hormone pill abuse, tobacco and alcohol abuse and problems relating to marriage, property, electoral rights, adoption

Review of Literature

Mustanski, Garofalo and Emerson (2010) sought to address some of the gaps in past research by conducting structured diagnostic interviews in a community-sample of 246 LGBT youth. Participants in the study were very diverse in terms of ethnicity and were between the ages of 16-20 years old, with an average age of 18. It was found that nearly 10% of study participants met criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and about 15% met criteria for major depression. A third of the participants had made a suicide attempt at some point in their life.

Grant et al (2011) released a comprehensive study on discrimination with 6, 450 transgender and gender non-conforming study participants for the National Center for Transgender Equality and National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. Discrimination was found to be pervasive throughout the entire sample. Respondents lived in extreme poverty. A staggering 41% of respondents reported attempting suicide compared to 1. 6% of the general population, with rates rising for those Print to PDF without this message by purchasing novaPDF (<http://www.novapdf.com/>) 35 who lost a job due to bias (55%), were harassed /bullied in school (51%), had low household income, or were the victims of physical assault (61%) or sexual assault (64%). Ninety percent of transgender individuals have encountered some form of harassment or

mistreatment on the job. Respondents reported various forms of direct housing discrimination. Almost half of the respondents (46%) reported being uncomfortable seeking police assistance. Nineteen percent of the sample reported being refused medical care due to their transgender or gender non-conforming status, with even higher numbers among people of color in the survey.

Gerhardstein (2010) investigated factors that contribute to negative attitudes toward, and discrimination against this consistently marginalized group of people. The sample included 251 heterosexual undergraduate students, including 131 men and 120 women. Participants rated one of two vignettes, which were paired with one of four different pictures. The vignettes described either a male-to-female or female-to-male transsexual, and the corresponding picture depicted an individual whose appearance was stereotypically consistent with either the vignette character's post-operative sex or his or her biological sex. Participants reported more positive general perceptions and more positive evaluations of the transsexual character's attractiveness as a friend or romantic partner when his/her appearance was congruent with the desired sex. Compared to women, men rated the transsexual character more negatively. There was also a significant interaction for gender of the participant and sex of the transsexual, such that females rated the attractiveness of the FTM transsexual significantly more positively than the MTF transsexual, whereas men's attractiveness ratings for the FTM and MTF transsexuals were not significantly different.

Objectives of the Study

The present study was undertaken with the following objectives:

- To find out the Family and living conditions of male-to-female transgender persons
- To analyze social stigma and societal attitude towards transgender
- To study the Social and employment problems of MTF transgender person

Methodology

The respondents were selected from Trichy in Trichy District. The transgender were socially disadvantaged, economically deprived and politically disenfranchised. The present study is empirical exercise based on primary data with a main focus on analyzing living conditions and social and employment problems of transgender. Descriptive method has been adopted in the present study. A

comprehensive interview schedule has been prepared in the study area by the researcher and used convenient sampling method to collect data from transgenders. Four transgenders who were working in a NGO were contacted at first. With their help it was possible to locate other transgenders who lived in a particular locality. The respondents were in the age group of 20 to 50 years.

Major Findings

Family and living conditions

- About one fourth of the sample lived with their parents and the rest (77. 23%) of them lived with their community. Many of them (60. 32%) did not have any relationship with their family. Non acceptance by parents was an important step in isolate them from society.
- Financial problems were reported that majority of them (85. 22%) were not getting financial help from their parents/family members.
- Only 10% of the Male to Female transgender were employed. The rest of 90% reported that nobody wanted to employ them. This resulted in their taking up to beggary, indulging in anti-social activities and /or becoming sex workers.

Problems in their Development and Relationships

- 50% of the respondents realized their difference in their childhood and the rest of them realized their gender variant feelings in their adolescence. 85. 22 % of the sample was treated badly by their parents when they disclosed this.
- 50% of them have said that they had undergone sex reassignment surgery. About 40% of them had taken hormone therapy. Only two of them dressed sometimes in male clothes.
- More than half the sample (59. 22%) experienced a kind of loneliness. 30. 77% of them were troubled by feelings of guilt and shame. However 76. 66% of them felt happy that they were transgender and some even said that they felt proud to be one. This shows that in spite of the discrimination they face in the society they were not unhappy that they were transgenders. About 25. 23% of them faced problems in relationship and/ or sexuality. Only 5. 23% of the sample was married and even that did not last for a long time.

Social and employment problems

- 75% of them said that they did not experience any religious conflicts as a transgender person. Majority

(95%) of them revealed that they depend upon their own community for all their needs. Most of them felt that they were being discriminated by society. Whether it was a happy event or a sad one like death they were not generally welcomed.

- 50% of them mentioned that they wanted to be accepted and 25% of them wanted to be treated like human beings. The other 25% of them had no expectations from the society. Among the problems which bothered them 50% of mentioned problems with their family. They wanted to join their family but were not accepted by them.
- 50% of them had problems with the police and rowdies. 10% of them said that they found it difficult to rent a house and as such even their basic needs for shelter were not fulfilled.

Suggestions

- Centre and State Governments should seriously address the problems being faced by Hijras/Transgenders such as fear, shame, gender dysphoria, social pressure, depression, suicidal tendencies, social stigma, etc.
- Centre and State Governments should also take steps for framing various social welfare schemes for their betterment.
- To improve their employability through Functional literacy programmes
- The Government should provide more skill training programme to Transgender which will help them to be self employed is the need of the hour since the study shows that finding employment is one of their major problems.
- The negative attitudes held by people can help us understand the barriers faced by them in gaining social acceptance. Future awareness programmes should focus on removing these barriers. Better understanding of the problems and challenges faced by transgenders will help in bringing about the changes in policies and give them their due rights.

- More programmes must be planned especially for the students since it will sensitize them to the problems of marginalized groups like the transgenders.

Conclusion

Transgender persons still struggle to access basic services and support that other persons rely upon or even take for granted. Ingrained stigma has maintained their struggle in accessing housing, land, education and employment. As a matter of priority, these directions must be implemented and the issues raised that transgender persons may enjoy a quality of life that is determined by their choices, hard work and ideas – not by their gender.

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