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SOCIAL ISOLATION OF TRANSGENDER PERSONS IN ANDHRA PRADESH

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ABSTRACT

Transgender persons are one of the most discriminated groups in society. As a result, they experience acute social isolation. This study using a questionnaire asked 120 transgender respondents in Andhra Pradesh of their experience of social isolation. The results show that a predominant number of transgender persons experience social isolation. Also, a major number of respondents in each district experiences social isolation. The various expectations from the society that the transgender persons express further underscore the social isolation of the respondents. These findings call our attention to the urgent need for better integrating transgender persons into mainstream society.

Keywords: Social isolation, transgender persons, sex, trans-women, discrimination.

INTRODUCTION

Human beings are a social species. They have evolved in social groups. Being part of a group is crucial for the survival and reproduction of the human species. For these reasons, humans have evolved behavioral, neural, hormonal, and genetic mechanisms to support social behaviors. Social isolation is not being able to be part of a group (Bradford et al., 2013). Previous studies show that transgender persons throughout their lives experience a wide range of problems. These range from their own feelings of inadequacy to physical violence. Transgender persons are one of the most discriminated and stigmatized groups (Clements-Nolle et al., 2006). They experience discrimination in families, schools, and workplaces. In families, parents fail to understand them and blame them for bringing shame on the family (Pfeffer & Jones, 2020). At schools transgender youth are stigmatized and that leads to academic problems and ultimately to them dropping out of school (Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006). It is difficult for transgender persons to get work and they are discriminated against at workplace (Sawyer et al., 2016). Because they cannot find a job, many of them end up doing sex work and begging.

Transgender persons are victims of transphobia—a general dislike and aversion of the public towards transgender persons. As a result, they face social isolation. They find it difficult to get housing. They do not get any financial support from others (Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006). They are often victims of physical abuse. Physical violence toward transgender persons includes physical injury, having objects thrown at them, unsolicited sexual

advances, and sexual violence (Lombardi et al., 2002). In schools, transgender youth are often ridiculed, punched, kicked, sexually harassed, and raped (Wyss, 2004). Transgender couples experience a higher rate of intimate partner exploitation and violence (Stiles-Shields & Carroll, 2015). Transgender persons are subjected to many other forms of abuse such as verbal abuse, insults, ridicule, and humiliation in public or private (Pitt & Dolan-Soto, 2001).

Transgender persons have difficulty disclosing their issues to others for fear of further discrimination and stigmatization (Mizock & Mueser, 2014). Sometimes they are hesitant to report violence against them for the fear of exposing their identity (Butler, 2004; Persson, 2009). Transgender persons being sex workers or their use of alcohol are things often used to justify violence against them (Mizock & Lewis, 2008). Police and other authorities do not take their complaints seriously and for these reasons, a lot of violence against them goes unreported (Moran & Sharpe, 2004).

The physical and psychological violence that transgender persons experience takes a toll on their mental health: Transgender persons always have to live with the feeling of being born into the wrong body. This feeling of being in the wrong body contributes to their low quality of life compared to other men and women (Newfield et al., 2006). Many of them report experiencing feelings of shame, unworthiness, and low self-esteem (Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006). They have a higher prevalence of substance-related disorders, anxiety, depression, self-destructive behaviors, suicide ideations, suicide attempts, and completions (Bradford et al., 2013; Carroll et al., 2002; Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006; Nuttbrock et al., 2014; Testa et al., 2012). Sex works make many of them at high risk for HIV. Transgender persons also have to face health issues (such as osteoporosis, breast cancer, liver disease, diabetes, or cardiovascular disease) resulting from their surgical and hormone treatments (Persson, 2009). All these issues contribute to their isolation in society.

The current study is on the experience of social isolation of transgender persons in Andhra Pradesh. When this study was conducted, the state of Andhra Pradesh was divided into 13 districts spread across two regions; Coastal Andhra and Rayalaseema. Coastal Andhra consisted of Prakasam, Nellore, Guntur, Krishna, West Godavari, East Godavari, Visakhapatnam, Vizianagaram, and Srikakulam. Rayalaseema consisted of Ananthapur, Kadapa, Kurnool, and Chittoor.

METHOD

Respondents: Respondents are 120 male to female transgender persons from Andhra Pradesh. The researcher has chosen male to female transgender persons because they are the most visible group of transgender persons in Andhra Pradesh. The data has been collected through the snowball sampling method by using an interview schedule. The first question asked whether the respondents experience social isolation or not. The second question asked whether the respondents frequently experience the following: loneliness, shyness in interacting with others, uncomfortable in the presence of others, inferiority, lack of self-worth, thoughts of suicide, no one for support, not belonging to family, stress, and mood swings. For each question, respondents answered "yes" or "no". One can frequently see them engaged in begging at traffic stops, on trains, in shops, and in other public places. As the population is unknown, the researcher collected the data through the purposive

sampling method and by contacting primary respondents through a snowball sampling technique. The researcher met the respondents in person and those consenting to participate in the Study took part in the Study.

Table 1. Distribution of respondents by the age group and Religion

Characteristic	Frequency N=120	Percentage
Age group (in years)		
14-19	5	4.2
20-29	57	41.7
30-39	39	32.5
40-49	19	15.8
50-59	9	7.5
60-70	7	5.8
Religion		
Hindu	83	69.2
Christian	24	20.0
Muslim	13	10.8

Overall, the respondents are younger. Most respondents (91.8%) are below the age of 50. The mean age of the respondents (N = 268) is 32.38 years (range: 14-70 years). From Table 1, it is evident that 46.3% of the respondents are in the age group between 20-29, followed by 24.2% between 30 and 39, 16.1% between 40 and 49, 5.2% between 14 and 19, 4.5% between 50 and 59, and 3.7% between 60 and 70.

Analyses: The study examines the frequency of the respondents' "yes" or "no" responses.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A predominant number of the respondents in this study experience social isolation. Of the 120 respondents, 112 (93.3%) said that they experience isolation in society. Figure 1 illustrates the percentage of respondents who experience social isolation.

Figure 1. Percentage of respondents who experience social isolation

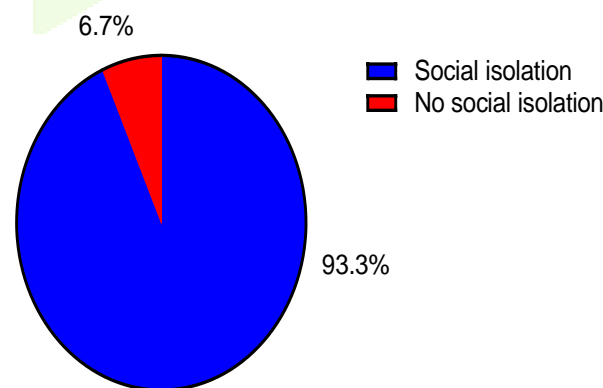


Table2. Distribution of respondents by a specific experience in the society

Expectation	Frequency (N = 120)	Percentage
Loneliness		
Yes	105	87.5
No	15	12.5
Shyness in interacting with others		
Yes	75	62.5
No	45	37.5
Uncomfortable in the presence of others		
Yes	68	56.7
No	52	43.3
Inferiority		
Yes	65	54.2
No	55	45.8
Lack of self-worth		
Yes	78	65
No	42	35
Thoughts of suicide		
Yes	62	51.7
No	58	48.3
No one for support		
Yes	88	73.3
No	32	26.7
Not belonging to family		
Yes	102	85.0
No	18	15.0
Stress		
Yes	90	75.0
No	30	25.0
Mood swings		
Yes	70	58.3
No	50	41.7

The majority of respondents reported experiencing social isolation. Because of the social discrimination, the desire for a more inclusive society where they are accepted as human beings. To a question on what the respondents expected from the society, the following were the major responses: consider as humans, acceptance in family, employment, recognize the gender, and equal opportunity. Table 2 makes it clear that 82.1% of respondent want the society to consider them as human beings, 75.4% is looking for acceptance in the family, 61.2% is expecting employment, 33.6% wants their gender to be recognized by society, and 11.2% is looking for equal opportunity in the society. Each of these expectations underscores the severity of the discrimination they face in society and their social isolation.

CONCLUSION

The study points to the social isolation that transgender persons face in Andhra Pradesh. A predominant number of them experience social isolation. Also, a predominant number of respondents experience social isolation. These findings call attention to the urgent need for better integrating transgender persons into mainstream society. This can be done by organizing awareness programs about transgender persons to the parents, family members, and society at large. This awareness can enlighten the individuals to better accept transgender persons as they are this can curb the problems faced by the transgender community.

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