

PSYCHOSOCIAL PROBLEMS OF TRANSGENDER INDIVIDUALS' IN TRANSITION PERIOD: AN INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract

Transgender is an umbrella term that describes people whose gender identity or expression does not match the sex they were assigned at birth. They face many psychosocial problems throughout life from early childhood and in their transition period as well. Transitioning is the period during which a person begins to live according to their gender identity, rather than the gender they were thought to be at birth. So the objective of the study is to understand the psychosocial problems of transgender individuals in the transition period. The sample for the present study consists of 10 transgender individuals among them seven male to female and three female to male. The semi-structured interview method is used for this study. The study utilizes the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to gain an in-depth understanding of transgender individuals' transition period. Following an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, the result revealed twelve subthemes within four central themes: gender expression, abuse, social exclusion, and negative feelings regarding the transition process.

Keywords: Transgender, Transition period, Psychosocial problems

Introduction

In social psychology, the concept of gender is significant in the way of assessing an individual's social status. American Psychological Association defines gender as "socially constructed roles, behaviors, activities, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for boys and men or girls and women" (APA, n.d.). The participants for the current study are transgender individuals. Transgender people are people who have a gender identity or gender expression that differs from their sex. Transgender people are sometimes called transsexual if they desire medical assistance to

transition from one sex to another. Transgender is also an umbrella term: in addition to including people whose gender identity is the opposite of their assigned sex (trans men and trans women), it may include people who are not exclusively masculine or feminine (people who are genderqueere, eg. bigender, pangender, genderfluid, or agender). Other definitions of transgender also include people who belong to a third gender or conceptualize transgender people as a third gender. Infrequently, the term transgender is defined very broadly to include cross-dressers, regardless of their assigned gender identity.

Being transgender is independent of sexual orientation: transgender individuals may identify as heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, asexual, etc., or may consider conventional sexual orientation labels inadequate or inapplicable. The term transgender can also be distinguished from intersex, a term that describes people born with physical sex characteristics "that do not fit typical binary notions of male or female bodies".

The degree to which individuals feel genuine, authentic, and comfortable within their external appearance and accept their genuine identity has been called transgender congruence. Many transgender people experience, gender dysphoria, and some seek medical treatments such as hormone replacement therapy, sex reassignment surgery, or psychotherapy. Not all transgender people desire these treatments, and some cannot undergo them for financial or medical reasons.

The definition of gender dysphoria includes the following statement: "The condition is associated with clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning"(APA, 2013 pp. 451-453). This definition is questionable in terms of its use the term "distress." The main issue here is that the potential source of the distress is not specified in this definition. According to the minority stress

theory, sexual and gender minority populations experience chronic stress due to discrimination and prejudice in societies which leads marginalized individuals to experience emotional and behavioral issues (Meyer, 2003). When the dichotomy of pro-pathologization and anti-pathologization arguments are read with the minority stress theory, the question, then, arises: what is the source of transgender individuals' distress? Bartlett, Vasey, and Bukowski (2000) conducted a cross-cultural and historical series of longitudinal case studies about the association between the sense of discomfort of the biological sex and the diagnostic category of Gender Identity Disorder (GID) in children. According to the findings, only a minority of the children diagnosed with GID were found to have a sense of discomfort with their biological sex. The overall data suggest that gender nonconformity cannot be interpreted as an inherent dysfunctional disorder. Rather it is argued that the main reason for the experienced distress in children has resulted from a conflict between self and societal expectations (Bartlett et al., 2000). That is to say, the diagnosis was found to derive from a conflict between the individual and the society rather than from the individual's mental health. In this regard, when the distress of transgender individuals is read with the minority stress theory (Meyer, 2003) it becomes reasonable to argue that the source of distress that transgender people experience are a stigma, prejudice, and discrimination. Most transgender people face discrimination in the workplace and in accessing public accommodations and healthcare. In many places, they are not legally protected from discrimination.

For transgender and transsexual people, this process commonly involves reassignment therapy (which may include hormone replacement therapy and sex reassignment surgery), with their gender identity being opposite that of their birth-assigned sex and gender. Transitioning might involve medical treatment, but it does not always involve it. For gender queer people, it is neither solely female nor male. Cross-dressers, drag queens, and drag kings tend not to transition since their variant gender presentations are (usually) only adopted temporarily.

The transition must begin with a personal decision to transition, prompted by the feeling that one's gender identity does not match the sex that one was assigned at birth. One of the most significant

parts of transitioning for many transgender people is coming out for the first time. Transitioning is a process, not an event, that can take anywhere between several months and several years. Some people, especially gender queer people, may spend their whole life transitioning as they redefine and re-interpret their gender as time passes. Transitioning generally begins where the person feels comfortable: for some, this begins with their family with whom they are intimate and reaches to friends later or may begin with friends first and family later. Sometimes transitioning is at different levels between different spheres of life. For example, someone may transition far with family and friends before even coming out at work.

Transitioning is a complicated process that involves any or all of the gendered aspects of a person's life. Below are some common parts of transitioning. People may choose elements based on their own gender identity, body image, personality, finances, and sometimes the attitudes of others. A degree of experimentation is used to know what changes best fit them. Transitioning also varies between cultures and subcultures according to differences in the societies' views of gender. They face many social, psychological, legal and physical problems during the transition period.

Social and psychological problems include Socially choosing a new name or nickname to be referred , Asking others to use a set of pronouns different from before; for example, a trans man would ask to be referred to as he rather than she, or a gender queer/non-binary person might ask to be referred to as they or by a pronoun like , Personal relationships take on different dynamics in accordance with gender, Altering objects and clothing worn to better represent gender identity, Adopting new grooming or makeup techniques, Having one's hair styled differently, Adopting mannerisms consistent with the new gender role, Adopting a new sexual role and/or performing new sexual acts, especially if the body's sex organs have changed, A person's ideas about gender, in general, may change which may affect their religious, philosophical and/or political beliefs.

Legal problems include, legally changing their name to something consistent with their gender identity. Having one's legal sex marker changed on documents such as driver licenses, birth certificates, passports, and in the US, Social Security cards. In

some countries, being exempted from the military draft for MTF individuals, or being required to register for it for FTM individuals. Physical aspect problems include surgical procedures, including on the genitals, face, Adam's apple, chest, vocal cords, and others. Hormone replacement therapy, permanent hair reduction with laser hair removal, electrolysis, or intense pulsed light (IPL), changing one's speaking and/or singing voice with voice training.

Need and significance of the present study

Transgender people are people who have a gender identity or gender expression that differs from their assigned sex or gender role. The period of changing their assigned gender role into identified gender role is very difficult. This changing period is called the transition period. Leading a life as a transgender is far from easy because such people can be neither categorized as male nor as female and this deviation is unacceptable to society.

One of the important problems transgender people face in society is the lack of social acceptance, insecurity feeling, emotional conflict, and adjustment problems. They also experience personal and family conflicts. As the visibility of transgender people increases in present days and it is the time to help them join the mainstream of society. To achieve this intention it is necessary to understand the psychological and social issues and challenges they face as well as examine the prevailing attitudes in the society. In this process, the major challenges are to motivating and empower the transgender people to actively demand rights and services. For this purpose, the study is to help such a movement to understand the psychosocial problems affecting the transition period. Psychosocial problems refer to issues related to rejection by family and society as seen in discrimination at work, harassment, and problems related to housing and influence psychological being.

Statement of the problem

To understand the psychosocial problems of transgender individuals in the transition period

Objectives

1. To explore the personal experience of the transgender individuals

2. To describe the central and subtheme of the psychosocial problems of transgender individuals in the transition period

Definition of Key Terms

Transgender

Most commonly used as an umbrella term for individuals whose gender identity and/or expression is different from the gender assigned to them at birth.

Transition Period

The process by which a transgender individual strives to have physical presentation more closely align with identity. Transition can occur in three ways: social transition through nonpermanent changes in clothing, hairstyle, name and/or pronouns; medical transition through the use of medicines such as hormone "blockers" or cross hormones to promote gender-based body changes; and/or surgical transition in which an individual's body is modified through the addition or removal of gender-related physical traits.

Method

Participants

The study mainly focuses on the psychosocial problems of transgender in the transition period. So for the study the participants that transgender people need to take hormones the whole life, "transition process" will be used in the current study for indicating the period of each participant's first and the final meetings with medical professionals. 10 subjects are interviewed for this study, where 7 are male-to-female transgender individuals and 3 female-to-male transgender individuals selected from different districts of Kerala. Their age ranged from 27 – 54. They all had received primary education. Table 1 shows the characteristics of the sample included in the study.

Data collection technique

The snowball sampling technique was selected for this study. It is a non-probability sampling technique. Because it is a rare group and so the probability sampling technique is not apt for this study. Semi-structured interview technique is

used for this study which aims to explore the psychosocial problems of transgender in the transition period. Interviews had been held in different cities in Kerala state. Before starting the interviews, the consent form was provided to each participant. Participants were informed that they were invited to take part in this research. The interviews were held in Malayalam and each took around one hour and more.

Procedure and data analysis

Table II

Central Themes, Subthemes, and Number of Participants with Themes of the subject

No:of themes	Central Themes	Subthemes	No: of Participants with Themes
1	Gender expression	Gender identity	10
		Sexual orientation	10
2	Abuse	Sexual abuse	10
		Physical abuse	10
3	Social exclusion	Exclusion from socio-cultural participation	10
		Exclusion from economic participation	10
		Exclusion from decision making	10
4	Negative feelings regarding transition process	Isolation	10
		Stress	10
		Depression	10
		Frustration	10
		Suicidal tendency	10

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was conducted for the data analysis. Accordingly, transcribed each interview during the data analysis. After transcribing each interview, the researcher identified themes in the text by finding out

similarities and differences of the accounts. The themes that arose as commonly from all subjects were grouped.

Results and Discussion

The objective of the study is to understand the psychological and social conflict during the transition period and the personal experiences of the transgender people. To understand themes the interpretative phenomenological analysis is used for this study and the themes and subthemes are presented in table II.

Table II shows that the central theme, subtheme, and the number of participants with the theme. Table II shows that there are mainly four central themes and having twelve subthemes. This classification is based on the interpretative phenomenological analysis.

The first central theme is gender expression, which contains two subthemes the gender identity and sexual orientation. Six out of ten participants reported that the age of realization of gender identity differences is 12 year, two out of ten participants reported 11 years, one out of ten participants reported that her age of gender realization is 13 years. Only one among them reported that they realized her gender identity difference in 9th year. Gender expression is that the external appearance of one's gender identity, usually expressed through behavior, clothing, haircut or voice, and which may or may not accept to socially defined behaviors and characteristics typically associated with being either masculine or feminine or both. There are many problems face the participants because of the social norms. The society and family members insist them to follow as their assigned sex which leads to psychological conflicts in transgender people. Another major problem faced by transgender people is sexual orientation. The society had limited knowledge and understanding about same-sex sexual orientation. All participants reported that they all want to carry a normal married life and want a child. All participants described that they were all worried about their future in the transition period. They all had multiple relationships in the past. Six out of ten are in the romantic relationship and 4 were neither married nor in the relationship. They all had sexual attraction towards same-sex individuals, but this is not acceptable in Indian culture so their family not accept them as they

are. This led to both psychological and social conflict in transgender individuals.

The second central theme is abuse contains two subthemes the physical abuse and sexual abuse. All participants of the study reported that they were the victim of multiple physical and sexual abuses by family members, friends, and same-sex teachers. Physical and sexual abuse by friends and teachers lead to dropout from the school. Some members of the society even hostile towards the transgender people for being different. Even from police officers, they face physical abuse, verbal abuse, and forced sex. A 2007 study documented that in the past one year, the percentage of those MSM and transgender who reported that forced sex is 46%; physical abuse is 44%; verbal abuse is 56%; blackmail for money is 31%, and the threat to life is 24%.

The third central theme social Exclusion Framework to Transgender people is the main focus of the study the communities have been excluded from effectively participating in social and cultural life; economy; and politics and decision-making processes. There are three main areas of social exclusion, the exclusion from socio-cultural participation, the exclusion from political participation and the exclusion from decision making.

Exclusion from socio-cultural participation in general, most families do not accept if their child starts behaving in ways that are considered as inappropriate to the expected gender role. Accordingly, family members may threaten, scold or even assault their son, daughter or siblings from behaving or dressing-up like a girl or men. Parents may grant several reasons for doing so: bringing brings shame to the family; reduced chances of their child getting married to a woman in the future and thus end of their generation (if they have only one male child); and perceived inability on the part of their child to take care of the family. Thus, later transgender people may find it difficult to claim their share of the property. In all cases or teenager run away from the family because they are not able to tolerate the discrimination by the family members. The transgender people face even discrimination in healthcare settings.

All participants are excluded from the economic participation and decision making, were

described that they face a variety of social security issues. The transgender participants repowered that they all run away from their home because they do not get any support from their biological family. Consequently, they face a lot of challenges especially when they are not in a position to earn due to health concerns, lack of employment opportunities, or old age. Most employers deny employment for even qualified and skilled transgender people. However, Lack of earning options is a key reason for a significant proportion of transgender people to choose or continue to be in sex worker.

This central theme aims to capture the ideas that the participant's negative feelings regarding the transition process, all participants experienced isolation, stress, depression, frustration, and suicidal tendency. Almost all participants in the study described their transition process as made them feel isolated from family, society, workplace, and school. Some of the participants experienced stress during the transition period because of the lack of social support and economic crisis. All participant of the study has been diagnosed with depression in their transition period as well as suicide. Frustration is another negative feeling regarding the transition process, they feel frustrated when they encounter with people who have a negative attitude towards the transgender people and inability to express the perceived gender also led to frustration and aggression.

Conclusion

The present study aims to understand the psychosocial problems of transgender in the transition period. The study revealed that there are twelve subthemes within four central themes. The gender expression, abuse, social exclusion, and negative feelings regarding transition are the main psychosocial problems of the transgender individuals in the transition period.

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