

SOCIAL EXCLUSION OF TRANSGENDER: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

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INTRODUCTION

Transgender individuals in India are variedly called Hijaras, Kinnars, Shiv-shaktis, Jogappas, Sakhi, Aradhis and Aravanis. Transgender is a general term applied to variety of individuals, behaviors and groups who tend to diverge from the normative gender roles. The term transgender itself is the symbolic representation of crossing boundaries, and it has been derived from two different languages; the Latin word 'Trans' and the English word 'gender'. There are preconceived notions that Hijara are "neither male nor female". In fact, there are many who do not belong to any of the groups but are transgender persons individually. Transgender fall under the LGBT group (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender). Transgender people should be treated with the same dignity and respect as anyone else and be able to live, and be respected, according to their gender identity. But transgender people often face serious discrimination and mistreatment at work, school, and in their families and communities.

SOCIAL EXCLUSION

Social exclusion is defined as the denial or unfulfillment of civil, political, and social rights of the citizens, paying special attention to the

mechanisms and effects of the discriminatory social practices as a reflection of individual experiences (Room, 1995). The European Union (1993) defines social exclusion as the inability to enjoy social rights with no help (because of the individual's limited self-esteem), to face the individual's own duties, because of the risk of being set aside as an assisted individual and being stigmatized in the cities and neighborhood where he or she lives. Some years later, the concept is extended to include all the different social spheres, relating it to the equality of opportunities and referring to all the people who are not allowed to benefit from the vital opportunities of a society. social exclusion is a process of gradual distancing from a situation of social integration, which structural mechanisms prevent social groups that are different from the heterocentric dominant position from actively taking part in the economic, social, political, and cultural spheres of a society.

Adapting the Social Exclusion Framework to the third gender community, one can understand how transgender communities have been excluded from effectively participating in social and cultural life; economy; and politics and decision-making processes.



Social Exclusion Framework Representing Problems Faced By Transgender

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EXCLUSION FROM SOCIAL AND CULTURAL PARTICIPATION

Exclusion from family and society

Most families do not accept if their male child starts behaving in ways that are considered feminine or inappropriate to the expected gender role. Consequently, family members may threaten, scold or even assault their son/sibling from behaving or dressing-up like a girl or woman. Some parents may outright disown and evict their own child for crossing the prescribed gender norms of the society and they are excluded from their family and society.

Discrimination in healthcare settings

Transgender face discrimination even in the healthcare settings. Often, healthcare providers rarely had the opportunity to understand the sexual diversities and they do not have adequate knowledge about the health issues of sexual minorities. Thus transgender face unique barriers when accessing public or private health services. Barriers in accessing HIV testing, antiretroviral treatment and sexual health services have been well documented. Humiliation faced in having to stand in the male queue; verbal harassment by the hospital staff and co-patients; and lack of healthcare providers who are not sensitive to providing treatment/care to transgender people.

Discrimination in education

Deprived by both family and school, transgender quit education and thereby limit career opportunities. Reports and discussions with community and stakeholders point to this deprivation as the main cause of rising drop-out rates among transgender community. The average qualification of a transgender is Secondary (Matriculation) or senior secondary level. The enrolment is significantly low and dropout rate at the primary and secondary level is still very high. Bridging the gap of gender disparity and social exclusion remains huge challenge for the community. The transgender person who is already excluded from the family and society do not get enough support with the teachers and

therefore forced to discontinue the education abruptly.

EXCLUSION FROM ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION AND LACK OF SOCIAL SECURITY

Lack of livelihood options

The main cause of lack of livelihood opportunities for transgender is due to maximum dropouts from school and family and zero level acceptances from the society. Lack of livelihood options is a key reason for a significant proportion of transgender people to choose or continue to be in sex work. Most employers deny employment for even qualified and skilled transgender people.

Lack of specific social welfare schemes and barriers to use existing schemes

Social welfare departments provide a variety of social welfare schemes for socially and economically disadvantaged groups. However, so far, no specific schemes are available for transgender except some rare cases of providing land for Aravanis in Tamil Nadu. Stringent and cumbersome procedures need for address proof, identity proof, and income certificate all hinder even deserving people from making use of available schemes. In addition, most transgender communities do not know much about social welfare schemes available for them.

Lack of access to Life and Health insurance schemes

Most transgender are not under any life or health insurance schemes because of lack of knowledge; inability to pay premiums; or not able to get enrolled in the schemes. Thus, most rely on the government hospitals in spite of the reality of the pervasive discrimination.

EXCLUSION FROM POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Legal, civil, and political rights

Legal issues include: legal recognition of their gender identity, same-sex marriage, child

adoption, inheritance, wills and trusts, immigration status, employment discrimination, and access to public and private health benefits. Especially, getting legal recognition of gender identity as a woman or transgender woman is a complicated process. Lack of legal recognition has important consequences in getting government ration (food-price subsidy) shop card, passport, and bank account.

Lack of funding support

There is lack of funding support from the state as well as from the central government. Transgender associations rarely get external financial support. Even those funders who might want to support primarily want to fund for HIV prevention activities. Through the National AIDS Control Programmed, only a few community based organizations of transgender have been granted Targeted intervention projects.

PROSPECTS FOR THE TRANSGENDER

Multiple problems are faced by transgender, which necessitate a variety of solutions and actions. While some actions require immediate implementation such as introducing transgender-specific social welfare schemes, some actions need to be taken on a long-term basis changing the negative attitude of the general public and increasing accurate knowledge about transgender communities. The required changes need to be reflected in policies and laws; attitude of the government, general public and health care providers; and health care systems and practice.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:

- Free and compulsory education up to the age of 14.
- Sensitization towards Transgender should be included in student counseling at schools.
- A chapter on transgender community can be included in the school curriculum to sensitize the larger society on Transgender.
- It is advisable to advocate with and build capacities of people and organizations working

in education sectors to facilitate the mainstream efforts.

- State and Central Education Board and the University Grants Commission (UGC), National Council for Vocational Training (NCVT) and other relevant authorities should be encouraged to evolve a system to sensitize schools/universities/educational institutions with respect to the need of the community and mainstream them into the system.
- Train health care providers should be competent and sensitive in providing health care services to transgender.
- Mass media awareness can be given for the general public about the third gender community.
- Sensitization programmes can be provided for police and health care providers.
- It is advisable to open up the existing Social Welfare Schemes for needy transgender and create specific welfare schemes to address the basic needs of transgender including housing and employment needs.
- It is advisable to clarify the ambiguous legal status of sex reassignment surgery and provide gender transition and SRS services for free in public hospitals in various parts of India.
- State and central government should provide scholarships for higher education.
- Special or separate schools for transgender should be building in each regional area of India.
- Guidance and counseling service should be providing at school and health care centers.

CONCLUSION

The Transgender community is a part of the social order and they have an equal right in everything that is available to all others in the world. The presence of such transgender is not new and is etched in history from time immemorial. In fact, proof the existence of the transgender community can be seen in several scripts, probably because nature requires such a class to maintain the

equilibrium. Many members of the transgender community were torch bearers of changes in the events of history even if they aren't specifically noted. Their discrimination has been a perennial issue and has only proven to be more spurious with time. The discrimination the members of the transgender community face based on their class and gender make them one of the most disempowered groups in Indian Society. Despite all constitutional guarantees, the Transgender Community is denied even their basic rights, which include Right to Personal Liberty, Dignity, Freedom of Expression, Right to Education and Empowerment, Right against Violence, discrimination and exploitation.

Every human being in this universe is indeed unique, and an integral part of the nature. It would thus be wrong to judge and discriminate people who may be different from the stereotype, which again

is man-made. It is the time that India realized that every individual in this country has rights and privileges, and follow the policy of "live and let live".

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