

# Psychological Struggles of a Transgender- A Case Study Approach

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## Abstract

Transgender are a part of marginalized communities whose gender identity is different from the sex assigned to them at birth. Many transgender individuals begin to feel different from others during childhood or adolescence. As they grow older, these feelings may become stronger, especially when society expects them to behave according to the gender assigned at birth. The present study focuses on a 52-year-old transgender woman residing in a transgender community and runs a small business. The study highlights rejection, harassment, financial struggles and social isolation faced by her. The study focuses on the need for supportive relationships, counselling, and greater social acceptance for transgender to build confidence and develop a positive sense of self. Support from families, communities, and mental health professionals can play an important role in improving their psychological well-being.

**Key words:** Transgender, Harassment, social support

## Introduction

Transgender are a part of marginalized communities whose gender identity is different from the sex assigned to them at birth. Gender identity refers to a person's inner sense of being male, female, or another gender. For some individuals, this inner identity does not match their physical body, which may lead them to express their gender differently or seek medical transition. According to the World Health Organization, gender identity is an important part of a person's personal identity and psychological well-being (Canady,2019).

Many transgender individuals begin to feel different from others during childhood or adolescence. As they grow older, these feelings may become stronger, especially when society expects them to behave according to the gender assigned at birth. This situation can create confusion, emotional stress, and difficulty in openly expressing their identity, particularly when there is limited understanding or support from family members or society.

One of the common psychological challenges faced by transgender individuals is gender dysphoria, which refers to the distress that occurs when a person's gender identity does not match their biological sex (Coleman et, al., 2022). This emotional discomfort may lead to feelings such as sadness, anxiety, low self-esteem, and social withdrawal. Many transgender individuals also face ridicule, rejection, or discrimination from others, which can further affect

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their mental health and sense of belonging (Kiyar et al., 2025). Another important challenge occurs during the process of gender affirmation or transition, especially when individuals decide to undergo gender-affirming surgery. Although this step can help individuals feel more comfortable with their identity, the journey can be difficult for many people. In some cases, transgender individuals face financial hardship because the cost of surgery is high and there is little family or social support (Koch et al., 2019). As a result, some individuals are forced to depend on begging or other unstable means of earning money in order to save for the procedure. During this period, they may also experience harassment, exploitation and harsh treatment from others, including people who are expected to provide protection or support (Muwanguzi et. al., 2025). Such experiences can increase emotional stress and make the transition process even more challenging. Apart from medical and financial difficulties, transgender individuals often face challenges in education, employment, and social acceptance. Due to stigma and discrimination, many are unable to continue their education or find stable jobs, which can lead them into financial trouble and social isolation (Jilisser & Lakshamanan, 2025). Therefore, the present study focuses on a case study of a 52-year-old transwoman and her struggles faced by her in society.

### **Methodology**

Single case research design was used to gain in-depth information about the personal and emotional struggles of the participant. Using a purposive sampling technique, the subject was chosen. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect information and it recorded verbatim. Clinical and social records were collected to ensure reliability of information. Content analysis was used to analyse the data obtained. Informed consent was obtained from the subject and confidentiality of the data was maintained.

### **Case Presentation**

SA is a 52-year-old transgender woman from Chennai who currently lives in a transgender community and runs a small business. She lost her father at the age of three and was raised by her mother. During adolescence, she began expressing feminine characteristics, which led to teasing from peers. Although her mother was supportive, SA experienced harassment and social rejection due to her gender identity. In addition, around the age of six she was harassed by her uncle and threatened her not to disclose it. During her early teenage years, when her family was facing financial difficulties, she experienced sexual harassment by her relative. Although he later offered to support her education financially, she refused to accept his help and eventually led to discontinuation of her studies. Because of social pressure and emotional distress, she left her family at the age of 18 and faced financial difficulties. She underwent gender-affirming surgery at the age of 21 and depended on begging to repay the money. Although she tried various jobs, due to harassment and criticism, she resorted to begging. During the same period in which she was engaged in begging, she experienced repeated incidents of sexual harassment. Around the same time, she experienced severe depressive symptoms and received treatment for nearly two years. Major psychological causal factors as stated by SA was financial stress, harassment and ill-treatment by society. She did not engage in any romantic or marital relationship, as she is scared that people will reject her. She remained unmarried and worked in different jobs, including packing work and with the support of a non-

governmental organization, she later started her own small business, which she currently manages independently. She continues to live independently and maintains hope by focusing on her work and daily life.

### **Tools used**

1. Brief coping inventory (Carver, 1997) was administered to measure her coping strategies during stress or difficult situations. She obtained a score of 32 in the subscale emotion focused coping which might indicate that the individual manages stressful experiences by regulating emotional responses rather than directly altering the stressful situation. Her low score of 32 in problem-focused coping shows that she might not directly solve problems. At the same time, the presence of a dysfunctional coping score of 20 indicates a tendency to avoid or withdraw from stressful situations.
2. The Learned Helplessness Scale (Quinless & Nelson, 1988) was used to assess her sense of control over life situations. The subject obtained scores of 25 in the cognitive component, 20 in the motivational component, and 15 in the emotional component. The results show higher scores in the cognitive component, followed by motivational, and comparatively lower scores in the emotional component, suggesting that her helplessness is more reflected in negative thinking and reduced effort than in emotional distress.
3. The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (Zimet et al., 1988) was assessed to understand the perception of social support. She scored a low score of 12 and 10 in family and friends support respectively, which indicates limited support from the same. However, she scored 23, which is higher in significant other support, suggesting better support from her transgender community. The overall score 45 indicates a moderate level of perceived social support.
4. The Gender Minority Stress and Resilience Measure (Testa et al., 2015) was used to assess discrimination and stress a transgender person experiences because of their identity. She scored 22, 20 and 18 in discrimination, rejection, and victimization, respectively indicating frequent experiences of unfair treatment, social isolation, and harassment. She showed a score of 12 internalized transphobia, suggesting distress for her own identity.
5. The Beck Depression Inventory-II (Beck et al., 1996) was used to assess severity of depressive symptoms like sadness, negative thoughts, and physical changes. The subject obtained a total score of 28, which falls in the moderate range of depression. This indicates the presence of a moderate level of depressive symptoms, which may be associated with her experiences of harassment, social rejection, and physical health difficulties.

### **Case Discussion**

Individuals with marginalised gender identities frequently face stigma and discrimination in society, which can influence their mental health and overall psychological wellbeing. Minority Stress Theory suggests that people from stigmatized minority groups experience chronic stress

due to prejudice, discrimination, and lack of social acceptance (Cyrus, 2017). A study by Meyer (2003) found that gender and sexual minorities often experience higher levels of psychological distress because of persistent social stigma and social exclusion. In this case, SA experienced repeated rejection, and discrimination from society due to her gender identity. These experiences created emotional distress and social isolation, which might be the cause of psychological disturbances. According to Complex Trauma Theory, individuals who experience abuse, exploitation, or violence during childhood and adolescence may develop long-lasting emotional distress and difficulties in trusting others. The theory posits that such experiences disrupt foundational processes of brain maturation and emotional regulation, leading to pervasive and often lifelong consequences. Herman (1992) found that traumatic experiences often lead to feelings of fear, mistrust, and emotional vulnerability later in life. In the present case, SA reported experiencing harassment and abuse during her childhood and adolescence, including mistreatment by relatives and unsafe experiences after leaving home. These traumatic events influenced her emotional well-being and the difficulty in trusting others. The Approach-Avoidance Theory suggests that individuals are motivated to approach desirable stimuli and to avoid undesirable ones. Avoidance coping involves efforts to evade or distance oneself from the stressful situation (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In the present case, SA appears to have engaged in avoidance coping during childhood, as she remained silent about the harassment by her relatives due to fear and avoided interpersonal relationships. She did not confront the harassment in the workplace and engaged in begging. SA appears to have used emotion-focused coping to manage the emotional impact of repeated trauma, discrimination, and social rejection by distancing herself from harmful environments and not confronting the stressful situation. The sexual harassment from relative, societal misconduct, discrimination has led to a state of learned helplessness. There seems to be a performance deficit (reduced motivation) to alter the situation and perception that there is no control over the future.

### **Conclusions**

The study highlights the need for supportive relationships, counselling, and greater social acceptance for transgender to build confidence and develop a positive sense of self. Support from families, communities, and mental health professionals can play an important role in improving their psychological well-being. Creating an understanding society can help transgender individuals live with dignity, acceptance, and improved mental health. Mental Health professionals working with marginalised communities should understand the complex psychological state of the transgender individual taking into account early childhood experiences and conditioned responses. Future research can employ longitudinal research design to understand the complex psychological picture of transgender community with larger samples to ensure generalizability.

### **Declaration**

Informed consent was obtained from participant

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