

# Attitude Towards Transgender Individuals At The Workplace In Three Cities of South India

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**ABSTRACT:** Transgender individuals are often ostracized by society and sometimes, even their own families view them as burdens and exclude them. In such a scenario, holding a respectable job is one of the few ways they can gain dignity and independence. Therefore, when they are discriminated against at their workplace too, they might feel helpless and frustrated. It is, hence, important to gain insights into how people actually feel about transgender individuals at the workplace. The aim of the research was to study people's attitudes towards transgender individuals at the workplace. For this, 3 hypotheses were proposed with respect to differences in attitudes between people in the age group of 21-35 years and 36-55 years, between males and females, and between people with an undergraduate degree and a postgraduate degree. A questionnaire measuring attitude towards transgender individuals at the workplace consisting of 21 questions was formulated by the authors. A total of 102 people aged 20-55 years filled the online questionnaire. Results revealed a significant difference in attitude between people in the age group of 20-34 years and people in the age group 35-55 years but no significant difference between males and females, and between people with an undergraduate and postgraduate degree.

**KEYWORDS:** transgender, workplace, discrimination

## I. INTRODUCTION

According to American Psychiatric Association (2013), transgender refers to the broad spectrum of individuals who transiently or persistently identify with a gender different from their gender at birth. According to Stryker (2004), transgender is an umbrella term that refers to all identities or practices that cross over, cut across, move between socially constructed sex/gender boundaries. Transgender individuals were seen as people with Gender Identity Disorder (GID). However, arguments were made for removing GID, because labeling expressions of gender as pathological was discriminatory and perpetuated stigma, causing harm to transgender individuals. The DSM V modified the name and language in order to minimize stigma and better reflect the experience of transgender people. The new name, Gender dysphoria, involves a conflict between a person's physical or assigned gender and the gender with which he/she/they identify. This condition is no longer seen as psychopathological, unless the person shows extreme distress with this condition.

In India, people have traditionally had a rigid understanding of the term 'gender'. People were boxed into the category of either male or female during birth and those who identified with a gender different from this were socially ostracized. The third gender was not recognized and, for a long time, was seen as a physical or mental defect. According to the 2011 census, there are 4.9 lakh transgender individuals in India. ("Transgender in India", 2015) However, the estimates by transgender activists and organizations put the figure between 60-80 lakh, as many avoid revealing their identity due to fear of discrimination. Almost 99% of the transgender individuals who participated in a study on 'Human Rights of Transgender as a Third Gender' (John, 2017) revealed that they had suffered social rejection in more than one occasion in the past. By and large, transgender individuals are excluded from their families and they do not get any support including livelihood support. They face a multitude of challenges on a daily basis

# International Journal of Innovative Research in Science, Engineering and Technology

(A High Impact Factor, Monthly, Peer Reviewed Journal)

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Vol. 8, Issue 1, January 2019

including absence of property ownership, low economic status, poor monthly income, poor housing, low education level, absence of legal documents of identity such as Aadhar card, poor physical health status, absence of family support, and hostile attitude of community and society (John, 2017).

Transgender individuals in India are denied the right to education despite the enactment of Right to Education Act in 2009. The previously mentioned study on 'Human Rights of Transgender as a Third Gender' showed that in the states of Delhi and Uttar Pradesh about 29.11% of transgender individuals in Delhi and 33.11% of transgender individuals in Uttar Pradesh had never attended school and only 5.33% of transgender individuals in Delhi and 4% in Uttar Pradesh had a graduate/postgraduate degree. Low levels of education and absence of vocational skills among transgender individuals in India forces them to take up low paying or undignified jobs such as begging or sex work. 89% of the transgender individuals who participated in the study said that there were no employment opportunities available even for skilled and qualified transgender individuals. In Delhi and Uttar Pradesh, only 6% of transgender individuals were employed and moreover, they were employed in the private/NGO sector. No transgender person was employed in the government sector. Majority of them were engaged in the informal sector; 24.44% were engaged in blessing, singing and dancing, about 4.56% were sex workers, and about 10.44% were engaged in begging. Around 3.8% of transgender individuals had monthly income of below ₹5000. Majority of them, about 52.81%, earned between ₹7500 and ₹15000. 1.11% had a monthly income of more than ₹25000. A study conducted in Chennai showed that only 10% of the transgender individuals surveyed were employed. The remaining 90% reported that nobody wanted to employ them thus forcing them to take up begging and/or sex work (Kisha, 2017). Even when transgender individuals do get employed in the formal sector, they face a lot of discrimination at the workplace. They are often forced to leave work in a short period of time and are exploited by clients.

Thus, it becomes important to understand what employers and fellow employees think of transgender individuals because private attitudes have a significant impact on behaviour exhibited towards these people. This study aims at understanding the attitude towards transgender individuals at the workplace. It also aims to explore the relationship between age and attitude, gender and attitude and level of education and attitude.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Research in the area of attitude towards transgender individuals has primarily focused on the attitudes of family and society. Several studies have been conducted in India as well as other countries with regard to personal attitudes and acceptance of transgender individuals.

### Attitude towards transgender individuals in India

Gender and sexuality have always been varied and rooted in traditions of pluralism in India and other South Asian cultures. One manifestation of this pluralism is the hijra community in India. Hijras are considered to be a separate third gender (Elichberger, Glazier, Hill &Verduzco-Baker, 2017). Even though the Hijra community is acknowledged by society, there are not fully accepted. "Most Hijras belong to the poorer castes and classes, and economic marginalisation structures their experiences very heavily (Monro, 2007)." In 2003, Monro conducted a study in India where ten sex/gender diverse people were interviewed. One interviewee pointed out that "Hijras occupy a position in society that is simultaneously revered and stigmatized. They are seen as having the power to curse or bless people, due to their spiritual heritage, and they are also seen as having a huge potential for embarrassment because they threaten to expose themselves physically if they are not paid for attending events such as weddings (Monro, 2007)." According to Preston (1987), British colonial rule resulted in a decline in the community's social and economic status and many Hijras were forced into begging or sex work (Elichberger, Glazier, Hill &Verduzco-Baker, 2017). Apart from Hijras, there are several other transgender-related identities or cultures in India including 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(Kisha, 2017).

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Vol. 8, Issue 1, January 2019

Despite India's gender pluralism, the country's gender nonconforming youth are targets of various forms of maltreatment by society which opposes and reacts against stereotypically feminine traits in men (Verma et al., 2006). These youth are "shunned by their own families (especially by male relatives)", and experience familial physical violence (Elischberger, Glazier, Hill &Verduzco-Baker, 2017). Many children who adopt a transgender identity are forced to drop out from school because they are unable to survive the rigid gender norms imposed on them by their school authorities. In workspaces, "trans-men especially are often stereotyped by their colleagues because of their visible "masculine" appearance and/or gender assertion/s. Hence, they easily become soft targets of violence and/or violation". "Furthermore, reports have shown that there is a severe lack of knowledge about the health issues of trans-men among medical professionals as well as the concerned individuals (Bhattacharya, 2014)." A 2017 study revealed that scores on a measure of attitude towards transgender individuals showed that for Indian participants, attitudes were significantly more negative than the mid-point or neutral point. Participants in India also had significantly higher GTS (Genderism and Transphobia Scale) scores compared to participants in the United States of America (Elischberger, Glazier, Hill &Verduzco-Baker, 2017).

## Attitude towards transgender individuals in other countries

Transsexualism is the "desire to live and be accepted as a member of the opposite sex, usually accompanied by a sense of discomfort with or inappropriateness of one's anatomic sex, and a wish to have surgery and hormonal treatment to make one's body as congruent as possible with one's preferred sex" (World Health Organization, 1992). Systematic research addressing public attitudes toward transgender individuals has been limited since early empirical studies in this area generally focused on attitudes toward transsexuals. Green et al.'s (1966) survey of medical and psychiatric professionals in the United States of America revealed widespread endorsement of the view that transsexuals were "severely neurotic" (Norton &Herek, 2012). However, later research found more positive attitudes among mental health care providers in the USA (Franzini&Casinelli, 1986).

Winter, Chalungsooth, Teh, Rojanalert, Maneerat, Wong &Macapagal (2009) conducted a multi-nation study with regard to the nature of attitude towards transgender individuals- acceptance or prejudice. Prejudice was evident in all countries, especially when it came to the rights of transgender individuals. For example, it was found that 62.7% of Malaysians, 50% of Americans, 52.9% of Filipinos and 22.1% of people from the UK rejected transgender women's right to marry men (Winter et al., 2009). A study conducted by Ipsos (2018) showed that a strong majority of people around the world would like their country to do more to support and protect transgender individuals, with those in Spain and Argentina most likely to agree. Approximately 2 out of 5 people in the countries studied reported referring to transgender men as 'he' and transgender women as 'she', rather than using the pronoun used at their birth. A majority of people in countries surveyed (52%) believed that transgender individuals are a natural occurrence. Among western countries, people from the United States were most likely to believe that transgender individuals have a mental illness and that they are committing a sin.

## Factors associated with attitude towards transgender individuals

There are several factors that have found to be correlated with attitude towards transgender individuals. One study showed that having met a transgender person, having had a relationship with a transgender person, and having had previous contact with a wide variety of trans-related information sources in the media were associated with lower levels of transphobia (Kooy, 2010). Yet another study found that respondents who reported being more informed about transgender individuals had more supportive attitudes towards them. The study also concluded that interpersonal contact with someone who is lesbian or gay leads to a secondary transfer of positive attitudes. One suggested cause for this secondary transfer was attitude generalization: contact positively affects the opinions people have on gay rights that then broaden to affect attitudes on transgender rights (Flores, 2015). Another study confirmed that a secondary transfer effect may operate with attitudes toward sexual and gender minorities (Tee & Hegarty, 2006).

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Another study showed a correlation between religious fundamentalism and negative attitudes towards transsexuals (Rosichan, 2015). A study examining the attitude of heterosexual males towards lesbian, bisexual and transgender individuals found that those who held conservative political and religious beliefs had significantly different attitudes than those who held liberal and moderate beliefs (Medley, 2005). Kisha (2017) conducted a study where she examined attitudes of people who identified with the religions Christianity and Hinduism. No significant difference in attitude towards transgender individuals was found between the two groups.

Several studies have found more negative attitudes toward transgender individuals among men as compared to women (Hill & Willoughby 2005; Tee & Hegarty 2006; King et al., 2009; Winter et al., 2008). In India, Kisha (2017) found similar results; females had a significantly more favourable attitude towards transgender individuals than males. Other factors that have found to be associated with more negative attitudes towards transgender individuals are lower levels of education, older age, authoritarianism and less support for general egalitarian ideals (King et al., 2009; Tee & Hegarty, 2006; Norton & Herek, 2012).

Several studies have investigated the attitude towards transgender individuals in society but there has been little research on the attitudes towards transgender individuals in a professional setting. The study will be the first of its kind in India, and highlights the need for more research examining people's perception of a transgender individual's abilities, efficiency and contribution in a workplace.

### III. HYPOTHESES

1. There will be no significant difference between males and females in their attitudes towards transgender individuals at the workplace.
2. There will be no significant difference between people with an undergraduate degree and people with a postgraduate degree in their attitudes towards transgender individuals at the workplace.
3. There will be no significant difference between people in the age group of 21-35 years and people in the age group 36-55 years in their attitudes towards transgender individuals at the workplace.

### IV. METHODS/APPROACH

#### Sample

The sample consisted of 102 individuals. There were 60 male participants and 42 female participants. 81 participants were between 20-34 years of age and 21 participants were between 35-55 years of age. 70 participants had the highest qualification of an undergraduate degree and 32 participants had the highest qualification of a postgraduate degree. All participants were at the time employed in Chennai, Bengaluru or Hyderabad. These participants were employed in various sectors like Information Technology, Retail, Business, Healthcare, etc. Snowball sampling was used to select the participants.

#### Variables

The independent variables were age, gender, and educational qualification. The dependent variable was the attitude towards transgender individuals at the workplace.

#### Materials

An online questionnaire to measure attitude towards transgender individuals at the workplace was formulated since, no existing tool was available to measure workplace attitudes in specific. Some of the broad areas covered by the questionnaire were: perception of capabilities of transgender individuals, attitude towards personal interaction with transgender individuals, attitude towards bullying of transgender individuals and attitude towards transgender rights. Face validity was demonstrated by 2 professors of Psychology. The questionnaire consisted of 21 statements and the

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Vol. 8, Issue 1, January 2019

participants indicated the extent to which they agreed using a 5-point Likert scale. (1- Strongly disagree, 5- Strongly agree)

### Procedure

The questionnaire was administered to the participants as an online survey. Informed consent was obtained.

### Analysis

T- test was used to compare the differences in attitudes towards transgender individuals at the workplace between males and females, and between people with an undergraduate degree and postgraduate degree.

To compare the differences in attitudes towards transgender individuals at the workplace between people in the age group 20-34 years and 35-55 years, a non-parametric test (Mann-Whitney U test) was conducted, since the sample size of the age group 35-55 years was less than 30.

## V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

TABLE 1: t-test to assess differences in attitude towards transgender individuals at the workplace between males and females.

Group (Gender)	N	Mean	SD	t	Level of significance
Male	60	88.82	10.310	0.193 <sup>ns</sup>	0.848
Female	42	89.24	11.651		

ns- not significant

The above table shows that there is no significant difference between males (M=88.82, SD=10.310) and females (M=89.24, SD=11.651) in their attitudes towards transgender individuals at the workplace.  $t(100) = 0.193, p = 0.848$ . The hypothesis which states that there will be no significant difference between males and females in their attitudes towards transgender individuals at the workplace is accepted. However, past research has found more positive attitudes among females. (Hill & Willoughby 2005; Tee & Hegarty 2006; King et al., 2009; Winter et al., 2008; Kisha, 2017). To obtain a cut-off score for positive attitudes all possible scores that could be obtained were divided into four quartiles and people who obtained scores in the last quartile were taken to have positive attitudes. The present study found that 61.9% of females and 56.7% of males had a positive attitude towards transgender individuals at the workplace.

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TABLE 2: t-test to assess differences in attitude towards transgender individuals at the workplace between people with an undergraduate degree and with a postgraduate degree

Group (Educational qualification)	N	Mean	SD	t	Level of Significance
Undergraduate	70	89.64	10.505	0.9 <sup>ns</sup>	0.371
Postgraduate	32	87.56	11.545		

ns- not significant

The above table shows that is no significant difference between people with an undergraduate degree (M=89.64, SD=10.505) and people with a postgraduate degree (M=87.56, SD=11.545) in their attitudes towards transgender individuals at the workplace.  $t(100) = 0.9, p = 0.371$ . The hypothesis which states that there will be no significant difference between people with an undergraduate degree and people with a postgraduate degree in their attitudes towards transgender individuals at the workplace is accepted. However, past research has found that more negative attitudes towards transgender individuals are associated with lower levels of education. (King et al., 2009; Tee & Hegarty, 2006; Norton & Herek, 2012). The present study found that 50% of people with an undergraduate degree and 62.8% of people with a postgraduate degree had a positive attitude towards transgender individuals at the workplace.

TABLE 3: Mann-Whitney U test to assess differences in attitude towards transgender individuals at the workplace between age groups 20-34 years and 35-55 years.

Group (Age)	N	Mean Rank	Mann-Whitney U	Level of Significance
20-34 years	81	56.37	456*	0.001
35-55 years	21	32.71		

\*significant at the 0.001 level

Since the sample size of the age group 35-55 years was less than 30, a non-parametric test (Mann-Whitney U test) was conducted. The Mann-Whitney U test showed that there is a significant difference ( $U = 456, p = 0.001$ ) between people in the age group of 20-34 years and people in the age group 35-55 years in their attitudes towards transgender individuals at the workplace, with younger people showing more positive attitudes. The hypothesis which states that there will be no significant difference between people in the age group of 20-34 years and people in the age group 35-55 years in their attitudes towards transgender individuals at the workplace is rejected. The present study found that 67.9% of people in the age group of 20-34 years and 23.8% of people in the age group of 35-55 years had a positive attitude towards transgender individuals at the workplace.



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The lack of significant differences in the present research with respect to the variables gender and educational qualification can be explained by the fact that the current research focused on workplace attitudes as compared to past studies which focused on general attitudes. Since majority of the mentioned studies were conducted out of India, another reason for the lack of significant differences could be cultural differences although this needs further exploration.

A descriptive thematic analysis showed that the age group 20-34 years had a slightly more positive attitude (Mean = 26.27, SD = 2.91) than the age group 35-55 years (Mean = 23.90, SD = 3) with respect to the theme attitude towards personal interaction with transgender individuals. The younger age group also had a slightly more positive attitude (Mean = 26.38, SD = 3.02) than the older age group (Mean = 24.14, SD = 3.66) with respect to the theme attitude towards transgender rights. Age was also the only variable which showed a significant difference with respect to overall attitudes. This could be because older adults were more exposed to transgender individuals who engaged in begging and sex work and less exposed to those in mainstream jobs which could have influenced their attitude towards transgender individuals at the workplace.

58.82% of respondents seem to have an overall positive attitude towards transgender individuals at the workplace as their scores fell in the last quadrant. This percentage increased to 83.33% among those who had transgender individuals employed at their workplace. This finding supports the study which showed that contact with transgender individuals was associated with lower levels of transphobia (Kooy, 2010). The overall positive attitude could be because this research was conducted when the debate regarding the verdict of Section 377 was ongoing, which increased awareness about the rights of the LGBTQ+ community. Also, out of 102 respondents, only 6 of them had transgender individuals employed at their workplace. Therefore, for the remaining respondents, the questions were based on hypothetical situations and their behaviour in the given situations might not correspond to their reported attitudes.

## VI. CONCLUSION

The study found a significant difference between people in the age group of 20-34 years and people in the age group 35-55 years in the attitudes towards transgender individuals at the workplace. However, no significant difference was found between males and females, and between people with an undergraduate and postgraduate degree with respect to attitude towards transgender individuals at the workplace. One limitation of the study was the possibility of participants answering in a socially desirable manner. Also, the questionnaire used was not standardized and the sample studied was small and limited to the English-literate population with access to the internet. Future research can use alternative methods like face-to-face interviews or projective tests to test true attitudes. Also, information regarding attitudes towards transgender individuals can be gathered from the transgender individuals themselves. This research also lends itself to application-oriented implications like sensitization workshops for employees and managers.

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