



Social Work Intervention for the Empowerment of Transgender Community in Kerala, India

Popson Antony¹, John Colins Johny²



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ABSTRACT: Transgender is a term that not yet got much attention in our society. Various kinds of discrimination faced by transgender community are suppressed due to lack of awareness and knowledge. This article attempts to view the needs of the transgender community from the perspective of Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory. He used the terms 'physiological, safety, belongingness and love, esteem, self-actualization and self-transcendence' to describe the pattern of human development. This article tries to explain the limitations in transgender person's holistic development and harmonious functioning in the society. Article also put forward the suggestions on how to reintegrate transgender community and also points out how it will contribute towards the development of entire society.

Keywords: Transgender, Needs, Social Work Intervention, Empowerment, Holistic Development

1. INTRODUCTION

Transgender (TG) is an umbrella term consists of different meanings. According to Kerala transgender policy 'transgender person' means a person, whose gender does not match with the gender assigned to that person at birth and includes trans-men and trans-women (whether or not they have undergone sex reassignment surgery or hormone therapy or laser therapy etc.), gender-queers and a number of socio-cultural identities such as Kinnars, Hijras, Aravanis, Jogtas etc ("State Policy for Transgenders in Kerala 2015," n.d.).'

As per the Census 2011 revealed, the total population of transgender in India is 4.9 lakh. 55,000 belongs to 0-6 age group ("First count of third gender in census," n.d.) Kerala state's Department of Social Justice found out that number of transgender in the state at more than 25,000.

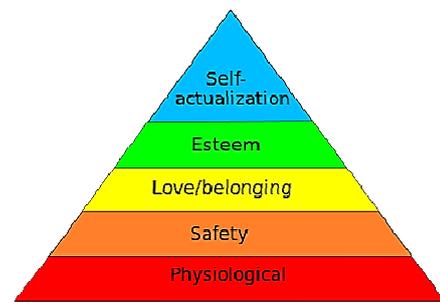
transgender can be broadly classified into two they are transvestite and transsexual. Transvestite refers to a transgender who wear dresses and behave like opposite gender but transsexual hates his/her body and resorts medical intervention to acquire desired gender's body. When a Male identifies his gender as female considered to be Trans women and if the female is doing the same, she is called Trans-men. Most of the time transsexuals use hormones to acquire secondary sexual characteristics. Sexual Reassignment Surgery (SRS) is the most effective way to tackle transgender issues with the help of medical support. The needs of TRANSGENDER are unmet due to society's ignorance about their needs. These needs can be interpreted with the help of Maslow's theory of hierarchy.

¹ MSW Student, Marian College, Kuttikkanam, Kerala, India; Email: popsonantonym@gmail.com

² BSW Student, Marian College, Kuttikkanam, Kerala, India; Email: colinsjohn1@gmail.com

Abraham Maslow defined a human being as a wanting animal. Desire is an unending process which makes life meaningful and satisfied. Motivations are the basic tenets of Maslow's hierarchy theory. Human desires are innate so Maslow arranged it in an ascending hierarchy of priority or potency. Only after fulfilling individual's primary needs s/he can move to next hierarchy of needs. If this process is interrupted it can hinder the personal growth of the individual.

Physiological needs refer to the need for physical survival. It includes food, drink, oxygen, activity, sleep, sex. When an individual fulfills the physiological need then the individual becomes concerned with a new set of needs, Often called as safety needs, primary motivating force here is to ensure a reasonable degree of certainty, order, structure and predictability in one's environment. The belongingness and love needs constitute the third hierarchy level, an individual motivation on this level longs for affectionate relationships with others, for a place in his or her family or reference group. Self-esteem needs dividing into self-respect and esteem of others. Self-respect includes a desire for competence, confidence, personal strength, adequacy, achievement, independence, and freedom - an individual needs to know that s/he is worthwhile. Esteem for others consists of prestige, recognition, acceptance, attention, status, fame, reputation and appreciation. Self-actualization is a vague term. It is a capacity of a person to become what s/he is. To reach this level every need has to be fulfilled. Self-actualization is only possible after the utilization of full strength and talents. (Hjelle Larry A & Others, 1981, pp. 368-373)



This paper tries to interpret the problems faced by transgender in Kerala society, as well explain how reintegration benefits the whole gender development in Kerala.

2. Literature review

TG is not a mental disorder like personality disorders. It is like depression. The person who is suffering depression needs medical attention not a treatment for mental disorders. The mental condition of transgender is known as gender dysphoria. Gender dysphoria refers to the distress that may accompany the incongruence between one's experienced or expressed gender and one's assigned gender. Although not all individuals will experience distress as a result of such incongruence, many are distressed if the desired physical interventions by means of hormones and/or surgery are not available ("DSM-5.pdf," n.d., p. 451).

Sex and gender are the key terms in TG literature. Sex is biological and gender is cultural. An individual is identified by his/her external sex organs and secondary sex characteristics. Sex refers to the reproduction capacity. The male produces the sperm and female produce egg (ovum). Gender refers to how an individual should follow the norms and rules in society such as behavior, dressing style, manners. TGS are exceptions in this case because they are breaking the barrier of both societies notion on sex and gender. Sexual orientation refers to an enduring pattern of emotional, romantic and/or sexual attractions to men, women or both sexes. Sexual orientation also refers to a person's sense of identity-based on those attractions, related behaviors and membership in a community of others who share those attractions. ("Answers to Your Questions For a Better Understanding of Sexual Orientation and Homosexuality," n.d.).TG's

sexual orientation is difficult to interpret because of individual preferences.

It is not surprising that a review of the literature on trans-sexualism (De Cuyper et al. 2007) noted estimates that range from 1:2,900 to 1:100,000 for adults born male and 1:8,300 to 1:400,000 for adults born female. It means transgender existed in society for a long time yet they got recognition only after Supreme Court of India declared, on 15 April 2014, that transgender are a vulnerable group who need support to survive in the society and demanded states and union territories should create policies to protect their rights as Indian citizens. (Press, 2014). On 24 April 2015 Tiruchi Siva, DMK MP, introduced a transgender bill in Rajya Sabha which became Rights of Transgender Persons Bill, 2014 (Gandhi & Ramachandran, 2015). Even though this ensured equality and protection against discrimination it contains a lot of anomalies. So the Rights of Transgender Persons Bill, 2014 is an edited version. State Policy for Transgender in Kerala 2015 started the history of acceptance in Kerala State ("Kerala becomes first state to unveil transgender policy," 2015).

To implement the policy requires the identification of TG population in Kerala state. Based on snow ball sampling method, survey team identified 25000 TG populations. Soon after the implementation of policy, Kochi metro which will commence its functioning in 2017 promised jobs such as housekeeping, customer care, and crowd management sections (Philip, 2016). Surya, a mimicry artist, and Suji voted in the assembly elections in May 2016 ("Kerala elections," 2016). Kerala government promised to allot pension for elderly (60 years and above) TG people during the budget for 2016-17. 10 crore set apart for TG welfare programmes ("Kerala budget announces pension to TGs above 60," 2016). In order to curb the illiteracy among TG, State Literacy Mission Authority with the help of NGOs working among the TGs will identify the beneficiaries and commence classes in 2017. Social stigma increased the school dropouts. Programme ensure the maximum participation and equivalent examinations for the dropouts ("Kerala literacy mission reaches out to transgender," n.d.). These are the impacts of transgender policy.

The policy has a very little impact on the public awareness. A TG care taker in an old age home of Social Justice Department from Trivandrum had been harassed because of her TG identity. In her words, she explained that "I was harassed by them for being a transgender. The women inmates were compassionate, though. During *Onam* celebration, I wanted to dress up, but my harassers threatened me with dire consequences if I entered the compound wearing a sari ("God's own country, but Kerala no 'country' for the third gender," n.d.)." Two transsexuals were alleged attacked by police officers in Ernakulam District ("Kochi police brutally attacks transgender people," 2016). SRS is a great issue among Kerala TG community. TGs opt for "prostitution to earn money for undergoing sex reassignment surgery... Prostitution will not be allowed. We should think about making sex reassignment surgery less expensive" told by Health Minister K K Shailaja Teacher ("Government taking steps to ensure justice to transgenders," n.d.). On 12 October 2016, PSC declined government jobs for TGs because of lack of laws to include them (asianetnews, 2016).

Even after the successful arrival of policy for TGs, government failed to reintegrate and mainstream them in several aspects. Policy ideals are only stuck in papers. The issue of needs of the TGs is identified prematurely that might be the failure of the implementation.

3. Method

For understanding the lives of TGs, case study method has been adopted and it was done through interview, which revealed the life situations of TGs.

4. Case Presentations

Case 1

Mx K is a 25 year female to male transgender student. She is an important figure in most of the transgender community meetings. Her fame is rest on anchoring queer pride programmes in Kerala. She is a student doing Masters programme in Education in Trivandrum. So she is one of the most educated TG in Kerala.

Her family consists of 3 members. Her mother, brother and she live together. She hails from a middle-class family. She is born with male sex organs. When she was a child she loved her mother very much. She behaved and dressed like her mother. She never liked boyish games and made friendship with girls. Later she liked dancing and learned classical dancing. So people thought that she behaves like a girl because of her dancing talent. Her academic excellence forced teachers to protect her from physical and verbal abuses. When she was studying in 9th standard she was confused with her gender identity which forced her to think she had a problem. One of her classmates advised her to meet a counselor. She met the counselor and the counselor convinced her that there are a lot of people like her. This gender identity problem is medically known as gender dysphoria. Because of the timely intervention of the counselor, she was saved from the 'psychological trauma' that could have affected her. During the time of college days, she has seen so many TGs walking in and around Trivandrum town she started to read books related to TG and met and made friendship with people like her. All these experiences encouraged her to come out of the shell created by the society around her. She proclaimed herself a TG in 2014. She had never been experienced prejudice and discrimination like other TGs in Kerala. People teased her but never ridiculed her. However, plethora of classmates avoided her companionship.

Case 2

Ms. X is a 40-year-old Male to female Transgender living in Trivandrum and hails from a middle-class family. She is the president of famous NGO in Trivandrum city which concerns about transgender welfare and mainstreaming. She completed her pre-degree education.

Currently, she has no job.

She was born in a family where her father and bothers never cared about her mother. She loved her mother very much. To make mother happy she did things for her and sometime wore her dresses also. Her family consists of six members, her father, mother, and four brothers. Because of her father's excessive drinking habit, she hated her father her affection for mother naturally grown strong.

Later in schools teachers attracted her attention. At home played like teachers and mother. A great aversion towards boyish games arises during the childhood. Adolescent years were full of confusion and ambiguity because of sexual attraction towards boys and men. Whenever girls were around she was happy but was afraid of boys.

A great turn happened during adolescent years was her affection towards one of her cousin. She proposed him but he refused with verbal abuse. She took over her family business as revenge to show her cousin that she can look after herself without any help.

Her father died when she was 25 years old. Funeral brought her old lover to her home. After the funeral at home, he consumed a lot of alcohol. While he was intoxicated by the alcohol she had taken advantage of him. She seduced him and had sexual intercourse. She reported that it was the fulfillment of 10 years of waiting. After the incident, he unofficially married to her. Later her husband fell in love with another woman. To fulfill his dream she let him marry her.

Separation from the husband was devastating effect on her. So her family accepted her on one condition that she should wear manly clothes around her neighborhood. She tried several jobs but most of them put her away because of her gender identity and family put her out from the family business. 35 years old penury life was a hardship for her.

She knew that there is a Transgender community in Nagarkoil, Tamilnadu. She went there and they accepted her as their chela. Nayak is the leader of Hijra community. Chela is the adopted daughter of Nayak. When Nayak adopt a transgender, she becomes a member of the community. They also form a Jamaat (a meeting of Nayaks from another Transgender community) to adopt her as their member. They fix a price on her i.e. chela cannot leave the community unless the amount which jamaat decides on them. If chela decides to join another community or run away from the group, community or family members should pay the amount. Chela has to work for the Nayak. Works can be like begging, sex work, blessing the people at their homes or religious ceremonies. Ms. X did all sort of work for her Nayak. Every day she has to pay half of her earning. While life moved miserable, one of her friends introduced her to NGO working for the welfare of transgender. NGO as started by Ms. Y who is well educated from Kerala University.

Now Ms. X is the president of the Ngo and also is happily working under Nayak . Nayak gave her permission to work. When she is in Kerala she has to wear manly clothes but in NGO and Nagarcoil she can cross-dress. She is a volunteer in NGO but still she is working as a sex worker and do beg in the streets of Nagarcoil.

Case 3

Ms. Z is a 38 years old male to female transgender. She completed her hotel management diploma. Her parents died. She has two sisters and a brother. They are leading a happy married life. She realized that she is different from other boys. She walked and acted like a female. Great love for women dress and makeup made her a notorious personality in her community.

Love for dance made her learn some simple steps. When she turned 14 years old, she realized that she had interest towards boys. She fell in love with a boy in her neighborhood. After 7 years of relationship, it was broken. She always gets into new relationships. She is also a chela in Nagarcoil. Doing the same things what other chelas are doing such as begging, sex work. She likes Girls Company.

She still remembers how her neighbors always criticized her parents, that she became a transgender because of parent's upbringing was bad. But that did not affect her. She joined in a NGO because of the intervention of Ms. A.

Case 4

Ms. XY is a 31 years old female to male transgender. His family consists of 5 members which includes his father, mother and two sisters. He felt his gender identity problem when he was studying in 3rd. standard. But that time everyone around him felt that it is just a phase in childhood. Like play games and act like boys were his mischievous adventures during childhood. When he passed 6th standard he realized that he is trapped in a female body. He shortened his hair and always tried to wear male dresses. Friends, family, and teachers ridiculed him for his tomboy behaviors. Once parents forced him for a marriage, but fortunately, it was canceled by the bridegroom himself when they discovered his identity. Only the members of NGO know her identity. He is concealing the identity because of the threat from the religious institution. He also wants to undergo sexual reassignment surgery to fulfill his wish to be physically a complete man and to be with his partner.

5. Results and Discussion

With the information gathered from the case studies, the needs of TGs have been assessed with the help of Maslow's need hierarchy.

5.1 Physiological needs

Physiological need deals with the basic needs of human. Maslow states the needs that must be achieved are food, sex, sleep, and excretion. This needs to be identified can be further used to analyze and interpret the needs of transgender. Before discussing on or satisfying any other needs of TGs we must understand the prior needs so that a TG can move towards achieving other needs

Food: the basic need that is essential for the survival of any human, the social stigma, and discrimination they face is one reason they cannot earn their daily hood. It leads to unemployment. And poverty among them is another factor and TGs in rural areas affects the most. Two transgender activists from Kerala who shared their bitter poverty experience. Example,

Sex: Indian penal Code 377 prevents TG from marrying. Even though some transgender are practicing living together with their partner, marriage is the legal agreement to have sex and child. Legally they cannot marry and exercise the rights of the married couples. During an interview with a Malayalam channel, transgender shared their experience on Commercial Sex Work (CSW) for food and money.

Great politics is always happening in toilets. Kerala has no gender-neutral public toilets.

5.2 Safety needs

There are very limited employment opportunities for TGs in Kerala. So they migrate to another state. Private as well as government jobs prefer either male or female. Transphobia is the reason behind all the attacks against TGs in Kerala. Family ignores these people's existence and even the rights for their property are questioned. Health of the TGs is left behind with lack of ethical practices and laws regarding the same.

5.3 Love and belongings needs

Friendship, family, sexual intimacy: the innate want to be in a relationship with people is very important for the survival of any human. The first thing here is to love oneself, and transgender find it hard to love one's own body or their identity they are living in. Emotional and

physical abandonment, and physical isolation, were transgender don't experience any love or belongingness. Even the legislation restricts them from getting married and their need to mate is questioned here.

5.4 Esteem needs

Transphobia is the byproduct of ignorance on TGs. They have been ridiculed and ignored in society and institution. So they devalued a self-stigma which made them behave hostile towards the general public. TGs are labeled as *9*, *Sigandi* (neither male nor female), *Kundan* (a person who is having anal sex) which derogatory terms to pull down the self-esteem of TGs in Kerala.

5.5 Self-actualization

The final need to be achieved, were a TG can only be at actualization when s/he is able to stop measuring him/her against others and only this can be achieved when both the general public as well as the TG gets proper awareness about them, and it can be when a TG learns to accept themselves holistically, being aware about the uniqueness the person has.

6. Scope for Social Work Intervention

According to IFSW 'Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work (IFSW, 2016)'. In a nutshell, social work is a helping profession. Unfortunately, due to the negligence, social workers have no role in transgender community as per the records.

Gender dysphoria arises in a child from age 3 onwards (Katie Hearn, Plus, 2015). Parents must have an idea about this phase; otherwise it has a great impact in the child's later development stages. Early identification is necessary in the case of transgender because gender dysphoria has no cure it can only assist with the help of some medical intervention. If parents cannot accept the child as s/he is. This atmosphere in a family leads to family problems. Transgender awareness counseling should be given to parents during the prenatal period. Even after identification of gender dysphoria parents and child needs counseling as well as casework intervention. The caseworker can help to mitigate the needs of TG child as well as the capacity building of a family.

The school is not only a place for learning; it has great importance in the socialization of an individual. Due to transphobia and ignorance on transgender leads to stigma, prejudice, and discrimination in schools. Awareness class for school authority, teachers, students and parents is the first step to curtail the issues of transgender in school. If teachers can identify the children and refer to school counselor can solve problems in family and school simultaneously. So a trained school counselor is an asset for the school. To make a school gender neutral and friendly is the responsibility of school social worker. Based on the culture context social worker can use discretion to avoid cultural and religious conflict.

District level summer camps for transgender to come together and share their experiences where guidance can be given by social workers, medical professionals, and law and order personnel. It divided into children (10 -15), youth (16 – 25) and adult (25+). This camp helps in understanding and solving the problems of transgender. Group work can improve the confidence and self-esteem.

Transgender literacy in Kerala is very low, so only limited transgender can enter in to white collar jobs. So, introducing skill development programmes are necessary to mitigate the existing financial crisis through creating certified skilled TG labors. So they can also form their own SHG (self-help groups), JLG (Joint Liability Group) to start their own business. Community-Based Organization methods can be employed to build groups which empower them. Social workers help them to market products through social marketing.

Elder transgender statistics are not available. Yet they are the most vulnerable and discriminated group. So transgender elderly homes are necessary to mitigate this issue of integrating all the life cycles of transgender.

Social work research in this field is a must for the continuation of adding knowledge in academia which can equip better social workers with sufficient knowledge on transgender.

7. Conclusion

Analyzing the quality of life among transgender with the help of Maslow's need hierarchy, we were able identify the areas to be improved for helping transgender. In this paper the authors tried to consolidate the problems and challenges of TGs especially in Kerala and it is very clear that the life of transgender are not satisfactory enough to fulfill their needs. The study makes it evident that there is huge demand or scope for social work interventions and it calls for providing proper education and training. Teachers, practitioners, learners, government and the general public should come together with collective vision and mission for the holistic development of TGs and to empower them.

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