



“We Look Before and After, and Pine for What is Not”: Interview Narratives of the Transgender Workforce. A Qualitative Study

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Abstract Transgender individuals are those individuals whose identity, demeanor, and demonstrative behavior are alternative to mainstream gender binaries. In keeping with the subject’s sensitive nature, the mode of the interviews was face-to-face for data collection. The total number of participants in this qualitative research was 16, though around 35 people were approached. The age group of the assigned female at birth participants ranged from 25 to 40 years, from across India in different small and medium enterprises. The findings reveal the current gender-related issues that negatively affect performance in the workplace and a sense of abandonment from society. Suggestions are provided to address existing challenges, and future research implications are discussed. From the Indian perspective, research on transgender workforce members is limited. Thus, this research is a study of the issues pertaining to this minority workforce with an accompanying exposition.

Keywords Discrimination · Employment · Gender · Indian · Organization · Society · Transgender · Workforce

Introduction

Little attention has been given to the transgender workforce, irrespective of work sectors or profile. Transgender employees have been subjected to undisguised discrimination throughout all stages of employment. A transgender person can be defined broadly as an individual who does

not identify with their gender at birth (Munoz et al., 2011). Given the unique physical considerations and resulting psychological complexities, Human Resource departments should ensure suitable policies and practices (McPhail et al., 2014). This minority group constitutes an essential section of the world’s workforce. (Day & Greene, 2008). The following study aims to provide insights into assessing transgender employees’ workplace experiences and address deeper gender identity issues. In the diversity management domain of Human Resource Management (HRM), transgender workforce literature is minimal, and there exists a considerable gap in the research corpus (Law et. al., 2011). From an Indian perspective, transgender individuals survive as social outcasts, experiencing trauma and organizational neglect in professional growth. Research points to transgender individuals being more susceptible to mental health issues with a disposition toward suicide and self-damaging behavior (Mustanski & Liu, 2013). In the business professions, marginalization and discrimination are endemic, resulting in the current employee database being contracted, which subsequently curbs the market and results in sluggish economic growth. The paper aims to examine discrimination experienced at the personal and professional levels. Some interview questions were about the participants’ childhood and experiences of discrimination by people from their private network and were purposefully posed to explain the personal background and interactions that may have affected their future workplace behavior. According to organizational psychology, researchers emphasize the whole-person approach, which states that the management should reach out to the employees covering all the dimensions of their personhood. According to Scarduzio and Geist-Martin (2015), the employee should be considered in terms of the duties and functions they serve in the organization and their physical, social, psychological, and spiritual health. Hence,

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it becomes imperative to examine the childhood and other related experiences to understand the four different health states. The irony of the psychosocial issues experienced by these participants in their organizations has been overlooked by the management in myriad ways and should have been included in the workplace practices.

Background

Recent literature demonstrates that discriminatory and unequal treatment of transgender employees has led to low socioeconomic status, below-average income, and a lack of residential settlement (Meurer-Lynn, 2015). Although a certain amount of research has been undertaken in recent years concerning this particular workforce section (Bell et al., 2011; Wilkinson et al., 2014), transgender employees remain unheard and thus undermined. Findings reveal that transgender employees are subjected to various negative emotional experiences, including tension, frustration, sadness, and a sense of alienation. An extensive literature review highlights that the effect of contextual support is unclear (Curtis & Dreachslin, 2008). There is a paucity of empirical research and interconnectedness (Croteau et al., 2008), resulting in mixed findings and questionable models. Webster et al. (2017) suggest developing a well-connected model and analyzing the contextual parameters impacting workplace experiences.

The Supreme Court of India awarded transgender people the third gender in 2014. The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill (2019), was introduced to prohibit discrimination, including denial of service or unjust treatment during employment. It has been explicitly stated that the public and private sectors must treat transgender job applicants equally with other candidates, especially in recruitment and promotion. Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code of 1861 prohibited certain sexual acts, even where mutually consensual, as aberrant. This also applied to members of the transgender community. The Supreme Court invalidated Sect. 377 in September 2018. The report on page 6 by the two appointed judges is poignant:

An individual's natural identity should be treated as essential to his being. What nature gives is natural. That is called nature within. Thus, that part of a person's personality must be respected and not despised or looked down upon. The said inherent nature and the associated natural impulses are to be accepted. Non-acceptance by any societal norm or notion and punishment by law on some old idea and idealism affects the kernel of an individual's identity. Destruction of individual identity would be tantamount to crushing intrinsic dignity that cumulatively encapsulates the values of privacy, choice, freedom of speech, and other expressions (*Times of India*, September 8, 2018).

In the historical context, the revered position of transgender individuals is embedded in Indian mythology. In some regions of India, these individuals are placed in an esteemed position of blessing newborn children and newlywed couples (Michelraj, 2015).

A Discriminated Category of the Workforce

A study on sexual inclination and gender identity (ILO, 2013) reveals that the transgender contingent workforce faces the highest degree of discriminatory practices in the workplace, many of which are suppressed. Recent research within the UK concerning transgender rights found that most transgender employees repress their preferred gender identity to avoid adverse reactions in the workplace. A substantial number switch jobs due to psychological pressure, abuse, and discrimination (Whittle et al., 2007). A study conducted in the USA (Levine & Leonard, 1984) revealed that transgender employees encountered discrimination at many different levels. A similar study was conducted in Australia on the transgender workforce in the educational sectors; the respondents were teachers, educators, and academicians. Most of these employees expressed that they had suffered mental torture, persecution and intimidation, and homophobic behavior from colleagues (Irwin, 2002), in some cases extending to physical and sexual abuse. Research also showed that the negative repercussions of revealing sexual identity resulted in great mental distress (Ragins et al., 2007).

Previous studies demonstrate that discrimination in the workplace is experienced by transgender employees more than any other minority group. In studies in two cities involving 402 transgender individuals, Bradford et al. (2013) revealed that a considerable percentage (37%) faced issues due to their gender identity. Research conducted with transgender workers also highlighted high career-oriented bias and prejudices within the age group of twenty-one to forty-eight years (Dispenza et al., 2012). The study revealed the gravity of discriminatory practices—13–47% were refused employment, 22–31% faced harassment in the workplace, 19% were constantly overlooked regarding promotion, and 13–57% had their employment terminated due to being transgender. This differential treatment experienced by the transgender workforce has resulted in anxiety disorders, addiction problems, and low or lack of self-esteem. The inclusion of transgender individuals in the workplace is of great importance (Robinson, 2014). Research on the Interpersonal Diversity Disclosure Model (Clair et al., 2005) and the Home-Work Disclosure Model (Ragins, 2004, 2008) derive their sources from the Stigma theory (Goffman, 1963). According to Stigma theory, immediate care

should be provided to individuals with adverse mental conditions (Webster et al., 2017). This, in turn, will foster positive orientation and reduce mental stress.

Mizock et al. (2018) note how transgender workers are denied proper assistance and career promotion prospects and how they suffer psychological isolation and point to the lack of customized work policies. Transgender individuals wish to recognize their true gender identities and be spared from bullying in the workplace (Martinez et al., 2017). Silva's (2018) research demonstrates that most transgender employees remain employed for extended periods in organizations where the management and colleagues are supportive.

Robinson (2014) found that expertise often went unrecognized due to a lack of support from management in integrating transgender workers into the workplace. Recent research on employee inclusivity shows a reduction in task-related differences and a high level of satisfaction in organizations that practice inclusiveness (Nishii, 2013). Despite some limited research, more empirical research is required to reduce the research gap (Hays-Thomas & Bendick, 2013; Sheridan, 2013).

Current research also reflects that imbibing customized Human Resource (HR) policies that recruit and retain competent employees results in effective performance (Combs et al., 2006; Subramony, 2009). It has been found that the performance of transgender workers is improved by implementing relevant policies, which then positively influence employee behavioral outcomes (Kehoe & Wright, 2013; Posthuma et al., 2013). Such policies and practices are framed to enable an understanding of the expected behavioral standards in any organization. However, the respective employees may not obtain the desired outcome (Dwertmann et al., 2016). This can be misconstrued as a false commitment by the management (Clair et al., 2005). Social support from workplace colleagues can significantly minimize issues of isolation encountered by transgender workers. Social support theory describes how personal associations with others can benefit other essential needs like attachment, association, and self-value (Thoits, 2011). Emotional support is of primary concern, including care, listening, concern, and help for transgender employees in filing complaints to the management (Webster et al., 2017). Research on the employment of transgender workers reflects how they are marginalized by workplace discrimination, hampering personal growth and development (Suriyasarn, 2014). A general sense of hopelessness among the transgender workforce dissuades employees from applying for more executive roles (Álvarez et al., 2013). Consequently, they are compelled to look for work with limited scope for advancement (Baral et al., 2011).

Discrimination Throughout the Life Cycle: The Indian Perspective

The discrimination against transgender individuals is pervasive throughout all stages of life. One experiences shame, isolation, and even disownment (Vernon, 2018). This fact is supported by a study conducted by the National Institute of Epidemiology.

Transgender activists are spread across the different geographical parts of India. In the rural regions, the plight is more because of ignorance and misconceptions. There have been cases of forceful separations due to the prevailing blind beliefs, and excerpts from the interview reveal the pain of being taken away from family and kept in isolation. The rural community considered even a case of genital disfigurement to be a case of transgenderism. This tragic situation was highlighted by one of the transgender activists and author in words:

“... We found that the villagers failed to understand the difference between a transgender person and an individual with genital disfigurement” (Kedia & Singla, 2017).

Section 13 of the Transgender Bill Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill, 2016, has emphasized the separation of a transgender person from the parents or family because being a transgender person can only be allowed under certain particular circumstances (order of a competent court or inability of parents or immediate family to take care). This view has also been strongly expressed by Dr. Sarasu Thomas, a senior faculty and a Human Rights lawyer who had termed such a separation as kidnapping.

“Separation is still rampant, but the main problem is that nobody takes action against these powerful bodies and communities.

Further, Professor Thomas held that a child's sexual identity is not rigid until adulthood, and the clash and contradictions exist between social and legal norms.

Hence, the strategic and supportive role of the social activists, human rights representatives, and the aware transgender community members is the need of the hour for gender sensitization (Kasera, 2020).

Even the transgender activist Laxmi Narayan Tripathi reinforces the social exclusion of the transgender population in India:

“We just didn't fit in those boxes of male and female, and then we became an outbox for everybody in the society.” Tripathi discussed her plight in the interview (Banerjee, 2016), especially from birth; the world points out their differences from others. They are abused multiple times, so the public laws and places should be aligned according to the community.

Rachna Mudraboyina, another transgender activist, spells out the typical gender stereotyping done to transgender people:

“Due to stereotypes, we are often portrayed as criminals; nobody talks about what happens to trans people.”

There is, at present, a disconnect between the above-cited unfair practices and the enforcement of progressive measures and policies for the transgender population, including loans, healthcare, and training facilities. The law implementation agencies appear to be the trustworthy source of physical and personal difficulties for the transgender community in India due to a mindset related to the involvement of transgender individuals in the flesh trade or begging. The LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Queer) community in India has immense potential, and it is estimated that only 6 percent of GDP (Gross Domestic Product) can be earned from this population (Firstpost, 2014). A World Bank Report (2016) highlighted that India loses a substantial GDP due to homophobia and transphobia (Radcliffe, 2016). Research demonstrates that major companies have positively embraced transgender inclusivity. Nevertheless, many medium and small enterprises are not receptive to the inclusion of transgender employees due to a societal disconnect between policy-makers and the extent of implementation at the foundation level. The following qualitative research explores transgender applicant and employee responses through open, candid interviews, highlighting the challenges and issues experienced by this section of society.

Method

A qualitative methodology has been deployed for research on marginalized and underrepresented sections of the population, one widely used in recent years (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Fassinger, 2005). This method helps reveal the importance of analysis coherence of participants regarding social contexts, frameworks, and support systems within which participants occupy an active role (Smith & Elger, 2014). Elliott (2005) asked questions based on the underlying research themes instead of obtaining the following details of past, present, and upcoming future events. The emphasis was on major life events, social associations, and the monitoring role of the individual. Understanding the potential of transgender individuals to make choices and implement those choices over time was recorded through personal interactions (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). The research was primarily aimed at understanding the discrimination that transgender employees experience professionally and personally using critical inquiry. This method emphasizes the power dynamics embedded in society and interactions

with various marginalized groups regarding tolerating unfair treatment (Crotty, 1998). The literature has combined grounded theory and critical analysis to explore the personal experiences of transgender individuals (Ekins, 1997).

Sampling and Procedure

A snowballing technique was used by a few transgender employees in some start-up organizations in a metro city in India. These group employees were known through professional sources and were approached with permission from the management. Snowballing type of convenience sampling is conducted when participants are difficult to access because of their distinctive characteristics. The prospective participants who had agreed to participate in the study communicated with the future subjects from their circle, and the sampling continued till saturation.

In this study, the participants were interviewed between February and November 2019. Initially, around 35 transgender workers in India were approached for face-to-face interviews. However, only 16 consented, and the remainder refused to participate. Due to respondents' hesitancy in giving telephone interviews, face-to-face meetings were arranged. Interviews were conducted in Bengaluru, Delhi, and Mumbai cities of India. These respondents were aged between 25 and 40 years. Each participant gave voluntary consent, and there was no financial remuneration involved. Additionally, it was clearly stated that anonymity would be guaranteed; only the discussion contents would be shared. The average interview duration was 30 min per person (Table 1).

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to give participants autonomy (Longhurst, 2016). In-depth interviews are conventionally conducted with few participants, yielding more intense and profound results (Legard et al., 2003). The transgender employees interviewed were mainly from the fashion, entertainment, retail, and healthcare sectors and

Table 1 Demographic profile of the participants

Parameters	Sub-parameters	No. of respondents	Responses	%age (%)
Age	Below 30 years	16	3	19
	31–35 years		9	56
	36–40 year		4	25
Education	Undergraduate		1	6
	Graduate		11	69
	Postgraduate		4	25
Experience	Below 5 years		3	19
	6–10 years		10	63
	11 years and above		3	19

comprised several blue-collar workers. To ensure the privacy of each participant, a number code was provided, for example, participant 1, participant 2, and so on.

The participants were given information about the research, and their participation was requested through informed consent. The participants were also informed that they were free to opt-out during the interview process. Before each meeting, the researcher and the participant discussed the ethical considerations and the project's anonymity to feel at ease during the interview process. Upon completing the interview, the participant was given full access to assess the project, ask questions, and add valuable insights.

The research questions covered in the interview sessions comprised:

1. Tell me briefly about your background.
2. Describe your childhood in terms of sexuality, inheritance, and choice.
3. How were you responded to and treated by members of your personal and broader social circles?
4. Elaborate on the career aspirations you have and the obstacles you have subsequently faced.
5. How did you approach seeking employment? Describe the experiences you have faced as you undertook this process.
6. Do you feel you have experienced discrimination in the selection process because of your sexuality? Illustrate with examples, if applicable.
7. Can you elaborate in detail about the work environment you are involved in and your experiences there?
8. Are you confident and satisfied with your work, career, and life as an individual?

Analysis

Responses were categorized according to different codes. These codes corresponded with a concordance to analyze the number of times a reply containing certain information variables was supplied and the number of corresponding circumstances mentioned by participants in general.

These codes synced with the principal words used to analyze the number of times the responses contained similar points and circumstances.

A subject evaluation was conducted by asking questions relating to specific situations. For example, "Do you feel there has been any discrimination in the employment selection process as a direct response to your sexuality? Illustrate with examples, if applicable." A coding system was created following how participants experienced discrimination. The transcripts were then scanned, and initial codes were created based on the interviews, utilizing a methodological comparison to ascertain differences and commonalities. The coding schemes were then amalgamated deductively into a

single coding scheme resulting in four main threads: self-identity, attitudes of others involved in mental health issues, and workplace experiences.

The textual data was rigorously analyzed; a time-consuming task as the information provided was voluminous. The contents were then divided into appropriate segments and coded accordingly. 30 to 40 codes were initially reduced to 20 after a filtering process that discounted redundant information. The codes were then classified by theme, as stated above.

Table 2 presents a general overview of the results accompanied by the coding scheme: coding category, code description, and example, the total amount of resulting codes within each respective group, and the corresponding quotes and frequency of repetitions for such. It is to be noted that as the coding process was continual, some codes were adjusted during codification.

Self-identity

The key codes were physical appearance, body structure, gender revelation about sexual identity, self-perception, fear, and rejection at personal and professional levels. The physicality of an assigned male at birth (AMAB) and its resulting appearance characteristics is a severe concern for many transgender employees when attending initial interviews, and many participants experienced social stigma:

"My gigantic height with a broad female appearance makes interviewers judgemental. The way the interviewer gives the first look ... points out to the outcome beforehand."

The extent to which the employees feel they must compromise their sense of self to procure a job successfully is also a major concern during interviews:

"I have not disclosed my sexual identity because I fear that I will be completely ostracised...I do my work but do not mingle much with my colleagues."

Most of the participants in this study underplayed the real significance of HR (Human Resource) policies and guidelines due to their dissatisfaction with implementation processes. This attitude is more prevalent within the service and hospitality industries. It was also found that transgender employees fear the negative repercussions of gender disclosure in the workplace. This implicitly affects HR practices, which become less coherent and enforced. Refrainment from disclosure is directly related to the expected sense of isolation and frustration from superiors and peers. There is no perceived sense of organizational and social support. Ozturk and Tatli (2016) found similar results and have categorically stated that transgender employees suffer from an inferiority complex in seeking employment and are highly

Table 2 Codes and theme categories

Theme category	Supporting sub-themes	Description	Example quote	Total
Identity	Physical appearance	Structure of body	“I am teased for my large-sized body.”	124
	Gender	Revelation about sexual identity	“I am scared to reveal the gender.”	
	Fear	Negative	“I am afraid of my future.”	
	Rejection	Personal and professional	“I have been rejected in interviews because of my sexual identity.”	
Attitude	Self	Perception of self	“I feel low.”	72
	Of family	Family members and relatives	“We feel ashamed and embarrassed.”	
	Of personal circle	Friends	“I have been harassed initially,” “They accepted me in the group later, and we have a good association.”	
Mental issues	Abuse	From different circles	“I have experienced physical abuse due to my gender.”	88
	Isolation	Disconnect	“I cannot mingle with the normal-gendered people easily.”	
	Depression	Low morale, sadness	“I suffer from feelings of sadness,”; “have been taking substances to forget my blues.”	
Workplace experiences	Facilities	Restrooms	“I suffer from urine infections.”	108
	Non-disclosure	Gender	“I fear not being accepted.”	
	Discrimination	Salary, job profile	“I had compromised with my salary.”	

Source: Author

underrepresented, even in minority employees within different organizations. Stereotyping according to gender identity affects the quality of work and professional responsibilities. There is obvious discrimination in the hiring and selection processes of transgender candidates, which extends post-placement once employment has commenced. Evidence of social exclusion pervades the workplace on both physical and psychological levels.

Attitudes and Public Perceptions

The principal codes were the attitudes of family members, relatives, social circles, and friends. With regard to attitude, participants were vociferous in expressing body-shaming and abuse experienced from childhood within their family circle:

“My family felt ashamed of my sexuality and always found an opportunity to state that maybe they had incurred some curse.”

“My parents always kept me in isolation and rarely took me to social gatherings.”

“My mother used to cry that she hated the way people used to stare each time they saw me in ...”

Discussing friends, participants were more relaxed:

“After the initial jokes and teasing Some of them bonded well.”

“My friends were mostly from the same sexuality as mine.”

One participant explicitly described the sense of fear in facing interviews due to the high number of previous rejections:

“Very few calls come, and I drop them or have last moment panic -attacks and cancel going!” The participant expressed a sense of paranoia in handling whatever interview calls come because of past unpleasant experiences in interview handling. A persisting sense of avoidance exists in the mind, adversely affecting the new interviews.

Another participant expressed anguish over the compromises that had to be made:

“I had to settle on a lower salary and facilities as compared to others, but I had no choice.” The reluctance of the company to hire such candidates is evident in the salary and benefits negotiation processes. It is precisely why the participant in dire need of employment compromised on the compensation and allowances.

Mental Health Issues

The key codes were abuse from different circles, isolation, a sense of disconnection from others, depression, low morale, and sadness. One of the participants remarked:

“I prefer not to reveal my gender because I have to face the dark consequences if I do so... in my job... office people and the overall negative experiences.”

Another participant expressed:

“I suffer from a constant state of rejection ...in the interviews; there is always the way of staring at me... my clothes ... and even a silent resentment of having to interview a person like me. It is a cold way of killing me psychologically...”

Thus, a sense of trepidation and insecurity engulfs each employee’s mind regarding job security and career growth as a response to gender identity disclosure. Such fears are not unfounded; there have been several cases of compensation cuts, career growth restrictions, and blatant discriminatory activities against this section of the community (Badgett et al., 2009). Davis (2009) elaborated on the necessary duplicity of many transgender individuals who, on the one hand, lead lives within certain circles, the members of whom are familiar with and thus accustomed to the person’s chosen gender but, on the other hand, hide their chosen identity professionally or socially.

Workplace Experiences

The main themes discussed were the various facets of work-related experiences. The principal codes were facilities available within the workplace, restrooms, non-disclosure of gender, discrimination in salary, job profile, professional circle, and promotion opportunities. Participants readily described the acute psychological harassment they faced each day. Several participants expressed dismay at how they were ridiculed for their chosen sexual identity:

“Some colleagues make fun of me and use double-meaning jokes and insinuations....” one anonymous participant confided.

Another participant revealed the issues related to non-acceptance, especially with regard to the use of restrooms:

“I am a male transgender, but I identified myself as female and named myself so...however, no one considers me a female in the office where I work. I am forced to use the male restroom much against my will. Nowadays, I avoid the male restrooms and so drink less liquids; the result is I suffer frequent urine infections.”

Discussion

There is a paucity of relevant information and a lack of suitable training methods relating to gender diversity. HR departments are responsible for not taking a proactive stance in this context. As a result, transgender employees fail to obtain the support they need. This minority is not appropriately represented in the candidate pool or the various companies’ employee pool. Transgender employees are often excluded from the ordinary course of work

responsibilities. Transgender individuals are noticeably more positively received in the entertainment industry for shows and roadside performances in roles such as drag queens (Ozturk & Tatli, 2016). The difficulties transgender employees face begin at the initial recruitment phase and continue throughout the workplace tenure. Even though laws are designed to protect such minority groups, it seems there is a high level of complacency in enforcing these laws. From the interviews in this study, a high level of distrust of company policies related to transgender employees is evident. The current study found that the perception among transgender employees regarding career prospects, compensation, and available facilities is one of futility. Unsatisfactory compensation is a source of dissatisfaction stemming from some interviewed participants. It is an area that highlights the extent of the impact of sexuality on extrinsic rewards like salary. Though the interviews were conducted in leading cities of the country that are known for their inclusive approach, sadly, even in such contexts, the financial rewards are not equal to other employees in most cases.

On the personal front, the interviews reflected a perturbing fact that has haunted the majority of the participants: the mental and physical abuse inflicted by the surrounding circle of these individuals. The psychological wound is deep-rooted, so it is narrated in the interviews even after many years. The deep shame of the family members about their transgender child has been a disturbing thought from their childhood and has generated a sense of being unwanted. The participants carry this feeling of being neglected and ostracized in their careers and workplaces.

The career aspirations of the participants have been stifled by the negative experiences related to their sexuality. It is not that they have grown as negative and sad souls from the beginning. Interviews highlight the initial bottlenecks they face in revealing their gender: the peculiar looks, the passive treatment, and even the lack of job interview calls. In most cases, career aspirations are nipped in the bud for these segments. Afterward, they primarily focus on obtaining a job that pays less, gives lower satisfaction, and does not establish a proper career path. In this way, they have been compromising their respective careers in whatever capacity possible.

Work and life satisfaction is the extended condition that emerges from the career aspirations and as the transgender individual starts the job. Again from the interview transcripts, responses reveal the lack of empathy by the other employees. The perception of the transgender participants about the workplace layout, the treatment of the other work members, and the facilities are concerning. The distinction between the transgender employees and the other employees will affect the projects, assignments, advancement opportunities, and general interpersonal communications. Here, the role of the management and HR is of profound importance

in educating the other employees and stakeholders to reduce discrimination.

This study demonstrates essential aspects of the employment of transgender individuals. The primary finding was that gender-related issues impart psychological trauma to the mental health and well-being of transgender employees. Transgender employees have been subjected to the stigma of mental and physical abuse. A body of Western qualitative and cross-sectional literature corroborated this (Bockting et al., 2013; Goldblum et al., 2012; Toomey et al., 2010). The present study also highlights discrimination at deeper levels due to inculcated belief systems among the socio-professional groups surrounding the transgender workforce. The ostensible purpose of professional organizations is generally to demonstrate positive employment figures for a minority group by hiring a certain number of transgender workers rather than concentrating on inclusiveness. Research also found that there are failings in providing career support and assistance required by this minority group, both by the management and the HR staff. According to Kirk and Belovics (2011), transgender employees should be supported by customized self-assessment, career-related search, and strategy making. The participants of this study revealed other common forms of discrimination such as termination of employment, refusal of employment offers based on gender choice, and various kinds of mental harassment. This has resulted in a serious under-representation of transgender employees in the private and public sectors.

Organizations need to be aware of the rewards in practical returns of gender inclusivity in the workforce. India is losing GDP by excluding the transgender population. There is an urgent need to align the diversity policies of Indian companies with current global standards. Deloitte (2014) has rightly pointed out that those organizations that are genuinely tolerant, receptive, and inclusive in workforce practices are rewarded with a productive workforce.

Company Initiatives

While Indian corporate initiatives regarding introducing viable policies and practices have not been entirely commendable to date, several corporations such as Godrej India Culture Lab and Tata Steel have implemented measures in recent years. However, very few transgender individuals approach such organizations because they lack the professional qualifications to curtail opportunities through discriminatory activities. Indian companies, on the whole, still hesitate to hire transgender employees for several reasons. One is the challenge of providing a safe working environment and the second is the reluctance to bear the costs of transitioning for such a group of employees. Organizations

need to introduce policies that are sensitive to the physical and psychological needs of transgender individuals.

Furthermore, it has been observed that large reputed organizations have fairly standardized policies on inclusiveness that consist of transgender policies and programs in recent years. Indian startups are also taking proactive measures to support transgender employees in distinctive ways. An examination reflects that transgender-inclusive policies are seen in either large brands or startups in the country's metro cities. Sodexo, in 2018, with the help of social organizations, assisted in the placement of a transgender person. Similarly, Nukkad Café in an Indian city recruits only transgender and disabled individuals. The café represents social acceptance, and interesting activities are conducted to demonstrate the power of expression amidst mental challenges and discrimination. It has been, over time, a forum to exchange thoughts and views between different communities (Deb, 2018). Swiggy (India) has also started with the intake of transgender employees, and the first individual has been a program manager. She had come from an upper social class family and had the privilege to study and work abroad, too (Sasha, 2019). Interestingly, small ventures were more open about employing transgender hiring than big corporations. Recent trends show that the Indian corporate sector has slowly transitioned from practicing diversity to managing inclusion. Organizations like SAP, Intel and IBM have transparent, equal opportunity employment policies and programs. However, large companies have bureaucratic issues that the founder, Neelam Jain, of PeriFerry has aptly explained: "With multinational corporations and bigger concerns, there are layers and layers of approvals to get. The startups we worked with are willing to move fast and look into all the requirements of the person." (Chitra, 2018).

Managerial Implications

The Diversity and Inclusiveness perspective

The Diversity & Inclusive (D & I) experts have suggested the following trans-inclusive measures: Sensitization, Restroom arrangements, Health Insurance and Medical benefits, and Support groups (Varshney, 2020).

The formulation of a trans hiring policy cannot become effective without a conducive work environment. The D & I initiatives should make the other employees and stakeholders understand the gender-inclusive approach of the firm and the personality attributes of this employee segment. There can be D & I workshops and seminars. The restroom facilities should be another area where the company needs to turn its attention, and a general infrastructure should be developed for gender-neutral restrooms that prevent discrimination. Health Insurance and Medical benefits for transgender

employees are differentiated to some extent. It is suggested that companies use the Insurance Regulations and Development Authority (IRDAI) Regulations, 2016. This use of the regulation strengthens the particular case of the transgender employee in gender affirmation surgery and hormone therapy procedures with the existing insurer. Additionally, there should be support groups for transgender employees. Such support group members may not be transgender but can be other individuals concerned for the transgender workforce.

A number of additional initiatives can be introduced to enhance the work environment for transgender individuals: conducting awareness programs for members of the Human Resources departments regarding acceptance and inclusivity and the use of correct gender pronouns. Supervisors should also be counseled on being fair and unbiased in giving assignments to transgender people and minimizing rating biases. Additionally, many positions should be reserved for transgender candidates during the recruitment and selection processes. While India remains unaccepting of the transgender community, there can be no inclusiveness. These individuals are still deprived of exclusive legal rights and official recognition.

Empathy for the struggles faced daily by transgender employees is still lacking among psychologists and counselors (Silva, 2018). The present study points to the managerial implications in the successful employment and retention of transgender individuals: transgender workers desire to accept their unique attributes, not to stifle their potential. Before HR departments map out inclusive policies, they should receive training in the provisions necessary to retain transgender employees successfully. Only then will malpractice, inequality, and the exclusion of minority groups be eradicated. Employment laws need to be revised and non-discriminatory regulations enforced to protect transgender workers and all minorities.

Conclusion and Future Research Implications

This study was necessarily limited due to respondents being fewer in number than anticipated, a direct result of the sensitive nature of the interviews performed. Many individuals refused to participate, citing personal reasons. Future research should focus on quantitative studies on the variables related to workplace climate, empowerment, and incivility linked with the transgender workforce and their organizational commitment, turnover intention, and other related issues. Cross-cultural research on company policies, transgender morale, and global attitudes can provide a detailed perspective on current knowledge gaps and suggested policy revisions. More research on inclusion and equality diversity needs to be undertaken, focusing on the background environment as a contextual factor strategically shaping the potential workplace and the individual's psyche.

The present study was based on transgender employees' perceptions of the work environment and treatment. However, additional research should be performed on the perceptions and attitudes of other workers toward transgender employees working within the same organizations. The challenge in researching members of the transgender community lies in the fact that this minority is often sidelined in the workforce. Such marginalization is not conducive to effective research (Hines, 2010). Specially customized research can elicit suppressed information, encouraging respondents to explore untapped issues (Tatli & O'zibilgin, 2012). To date, there is a sense of apathy in HR departments about employee diversity practices. What is required is a paradigm shift in the mindset of the professional community at large, resulting in inequality and inclusion of all minority groups. Dietert (2009) has identified the kind of research which needs to be conducted in the future which will elicit the experiences of the transgender workforce enabling cross-cultural or industry-led comparisons.

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