

Public opinions and gender issue

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Abstract. – OBJECTIVE: Gender is an aspect of the natural identity of a person that has been given ample attention in socio-cultural, psychological, and political studies worldwide. Transgender, which is a part of gender issues, is still lacking in information on definitions of transgender, its causes, society's perceptions toward it, and interpretations on transgender action. Transgender is an umbrella term that describes people whose gender identity or expression does not match the sex they have been assigned at birth. It is one of the most important signs of progress produced by scientific advancement in the field of medicine, which is a relatively new phenomenon. Due to the lack of research on transgender, researchers study this issue at the theoretical and public opinion levels and from different perspectives. The objectives are to provide insights into the landscape of gender issues, instill awareness among communities and make them understand the psychological pains and the emotional difficulties that the transgender go through. Transgender issues must be analyzed from the perspectives of humanity, ethics, and culture.

MATERIALS AND METHODS: Data were gathered through open-ended interviews among nine participants. And to complement the data, particularly about the public's opinions toward the transgender, a focus group discussion (FGD) was held among four participants.

RESULTS: The findings indicate that the transgender community often faces social discrimination due to the social stigma towards them. Thus, the treatment should be more on psychological therapies, family education, community awareness, and social activism that are needed to realign the transgender to the right track.

CONCLUSIONS: This study provides insights into the landscape of gender equality and ways to support those with gender identity issues. Hence, this research carries values to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) in enhancing the policy on gender equality.

Key Words:

Gender issue, Transgender, Psychology, Humanity, Ethics & culture, Family education, Psychological support.

Introduction

The term "sex change" dated back to the year 1681, when Krafft-Ebing published his book titled *Psychopathia Sexualize*, in which he spoke of a complex and variable classification of psychosexual diseases and dealt extensively with homosexuality, which had several forms. In the year 1191, Cauldwell quoted this phrase, and he also published a book titled *Psychopathia Transsexuals*. In his book, he discussed sex change and its differences from psychosis and other sexual deviations. He also provided clarifications as to the symptoms of sex change disease and described those who developed these symptoms as transsexual¹. Transsexual is a subset of transgender². Transgender is a term that includes many ways that gender identity can be different from the sex they were assigned with at birth. These people express their gender identity in many ways; some express their gender through their dresses, behaviors, and manners to live as the gender that feels right for them, whilst others take hormones and may have surgery to change their body, so it matches their gender identity.

Colton & Christine³ indicate that transgender is an umbrella term that incorporates differences in gender identity in which one's assigned biological sex does not match one's felt identity. This umbrella term includes persons who do not feel they fit into a dichotomous sex structure through which they are identified as male or female. Individuals in this category may feel as if they are in the wrong gender, but this perception may or may not correlate with a desire for surgical or hormonal reassignment. It can be a psychological disorder because it is impossible to biologically transform a person from one gender to the other. Indeed, it is a psychological condition and not a medical one. It can be difficult for people who are not transgender to imagine what being transgender feels like. Psychologists and doctors describe the distress, unhappiness, and anxiety that the

transgender feels about the mismatch between their bodies and their gender identity as gender dysphoria. A person may be formally diagnosed with gender dysphoria to receive medical treatment to help them change⁴.

Virginia Prince was an American transgender activist in the 1960s that first used the word transgender. However, the word was not widely used until the 1970s⁵; it was used to identify people who live a cross-gender lifestyle without having to undergo any sex change or reassignment surgery. The meaning of the term continued to expand in the 1980s and became known as a concept that reflected all those with a gender identity that did not match the sex at birth. In the 1990s, however, the term took on a political dimension as a combination covering all those who at one stage did not conform to the gender norms, and the term was used to question the validity of those norms. Besides, it was also used to promote equal rights and anti-discrimination legislation, which then led to the widespread use of the word in the media, academics, and law¹.

Until now, there is no conclusive scientific explanation of transgender existence but there are several factors that have been proposed as contributors to transgender identity development. There are biological factors like genetic influences and hormone influences, and psychological factors such as personal issues and life experience⁵. There is a psychological disorder in certain cases in which a person desires to switch to another gender after experiencing a rape incident and feeling hatred for that particular gender. Furthermore, the victim's psychological difficulty may also contribute to the development of a transgender identity when a discrepancy between sex and gender identity can lead to distressing and unpleasant feelings called gender dysphoria (formerly known as gender identity disorder) or gender incongruity. Individuals with gender dysphoria have a deep and enduring desire to live based on their gender identity rather than their biological sex, and they are typically transgender. Many transgender individuals feel that their gender identity is an innate part of them and is an integral part of who they were born to be⁵. Psychological issues such as childhood trauma as a result of sexual abuse may also cause the individuals not to live with their biological sex any longer. Life experiences have also been proposed as one of the factors that cause transgender identity development. For example, parents who have a strong desire for a boy but only give birth

to girls, so they raise their daughters like sons by giving them boys' names, cross-dressing them with boys' clothing and praise their appearances. This consequently leads to gender confusion among the children.

Communities often correlate transgender with the negatives, and the media also plays a role in this. For instance, strange stories like a pregnant man expecting a baby or a soldier who replaces his hat with a headscarf always have a place in the media. It is the presentation of the news that attracts readers or viewers who may sympathize with these people. This sympathy pushes viewers to respond to the demands of these people, and this might encourage the spread of such phenomena⁶. Simultaneously, some members of communities would look at them with feelings of discontent and mockery, which may lead to severe abuses and discriminations towards the transgender. Any pretext of these must be blocked because they destroy the values, morals, and religious principles that nations were built upon⁷. Therefore, transgender is an important topic that researchers need to further investigate from the perspectives of humanity, ethics, and culture.

Humanity Perspective on Transgender

Transgender has become more significant recently. It is common to watch how they are discriminated against or oppressed on the media nowadays. A mental health consultant has proven that the transgender are patients with whom we must sympathize, and they are not guilty of their condition⁸. The consultant Al-Awadhi⁹ has stated that the transgenders are ill, both organically and psychologically, and in both cases, we should sympathize with them and let them coexist with us without defaming their disease, as their illness is no fault of theirs. In the same way as we are, they are afflicted with an illness like any other disease. They share the same fate as some of us do; some are without family and have no children to help them when they grow older. Some do not have stable jobs or income, and some are homeless. We often see this tragedy occur among them, in which many of them commit suicide or die on the sidewalk alone. Therefore, transgender must be perceived from the human point of view. This group of people deserves help, support, and sympathy from communities. It is the job of a community to provide the proper counseling, guidance, and assistance for its members who are transgender. Similar to any other patients who suffer from diseases and deserve to receive the

proper treatment, the transgender should be treated as patients who suffer from Gender Identity Disorder (GID). This disorder is a formal diagnosis used by psychologists and physicians to depict people who experience significant discontent with the sex they were assigned at birth and/or the gender roles associated with that sex. Evidence suggests that people who identify with a gender different than the one they were assigned with at birth may due to psychological or behavioral causes, but also biological ones related to their genetics, the makeup of their brains, or prenatal exposure to hormones¹⁰.

Transgender is subjected to harassment, bullying, and violence in schools. A study conducted in the United States indicated that more than 80 percent of transgender adolescents reported a feeling of unsafety within the school environment, more than 40 percent reported physical abuse, and more than 65 percent reported harassment on the Internet or through social media¹¹. The psychological difficulties of gender must not prevent a person from enjoying basic rights, such as being recognized by the government, and having access to health care, education or work. However, this does not happen among transgender; they are often vulnerable to humiliation, violence, or even death. The Transgender Murder Monitoring Project, an initiative to collect and analyze reports of transgender murder worldwide, recorded 1,731 of this crime globally between 2007 and 2014. Most of the murders were brutal and shocking, some cases involving torture and mutilation. The transgender does not only suffer from the dangers around, but the state of transphobia also creates negative feelings amongst themselves. These negative feelings may cause them to hate themselves, and they become prone to destructive behaviors such as drugs or alcohol abuse that can easily lure them into feeling suicidal. However, recent developments in the transgender issue have witnessed many gradual changes, especially in the Western world, where policies have been put in place to eliminate discrimination and to promote equal opportunities. Fortunately, this is also spreading in developing countries. There are also numerous campaigns to support and introduce transgender to the world so that people around the world can accept them. To illustrate, the United Nations promotes the “stigma-stopping” campaign to instill awareness on transgender issues¹².

Transgender activists always emphasize that transgender face severe discrimination, systemic inequality, widespread stigma, and human rights

violations. The violence includes police abuse, abuse of sex workers’ clients, and intimate partner violence committed against the transgender is widespread¹³. Besides, the transgender may experience family rejection, violation of their rights to education, jobs, and social protection. This eventually leads to higher rates of unemployment, poverty, housing insecurity, and marginalization. The activists assert that the lack of legal recognition of transgender in many countries contributes to trans community exclusion. To minimize this, the Trans Murder Monitoring (TMM) project was developed by Transrespect versus Transphobia Worldwide¹⁴ press to monitor, collect and analyze the reports of homicide cases among the transgender. A study conducted under this project reveals that the highest number of murder cases among the transgender in the world was in Central and South America in 2016, where most of the incidents were triggered by hate crimes. Besides, the transgender also suffers mental illness at a significantly higher rate than the general population that is the cisgender. This heightened risk is primarily due to the additional stresses that the transgender face, which include stress due to discrimination and harassment, stress from being part of a minority group, and stress due to their gender identity that is not affirmed. In addition, there is a greater risk for suicide among the transgender in which they are twice as likely to think about and attempt suicide than other LGB people¹⁵. Bailey et al¹⁶ and Haas et al¹⁵ have identified several factors that put the transgender to be at risk of suicide. These factors are conflict between one’s physical gender and the gender which one identifies, fear of transitioning, discrimination, lack of support from parents and family members, institutional prejudice manifested through laws and policies, a mental illness that includes depression and anxiety, alcohol and/or drug abuse, stigma, isolation from conventional society, and homelessness (Figure 1).

Therefore, Bauer et al¹⁷ suggested that interventions that are aimed at increasing social inclusion, minimizing transphobic discrimination and violence, and promoting access to medical transition should be viewed as parts of a comprehensive approach to prevent suicide among the transgender. These interventions do not need to replace patients or clinical methods (e.g., psychotherapy), but they must have the potential to reduce suicide intentions and attempts among the transgender. Targeting stigma and social exclusion as the fundamental causes of inequalities can

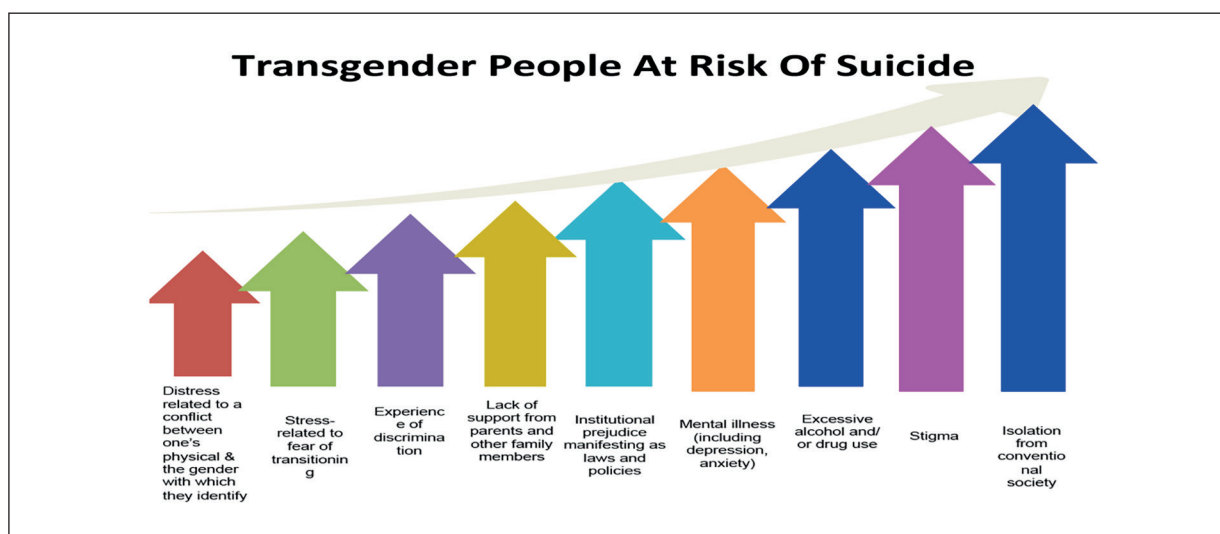


Figure 1. Transgender people at risk of suicide.

do this as well. Although the transgender can be said to be the victims of circumstances, they have the right to live their life safely and are protected by the laws similar to the rest of the community members. In addition, even though transgender may be a taboo in certain societies and not much data can be gathered due to this, research needs to be done continuously on this group of people so that measures or actions can be taken in reassuring their physical well-being and psychological conditions are taken care of similar to other people's well-being and conditions. Al-Kharafi¹⁸ has stressed the necessity of dealing with the transgender in the way that we perceive them as being sick, and they need the proper treatment. Therefore, awareness among members of societies needs to be instilled to change their view on this group of people. All in all, we need to revisit the transgender issues from the angles of a human being. We have to embrace the fact that this category of people is handicapped, and they suffer from a disease. They do not need to be punished for their ailment that is organic, and they have psychological defects. It is not their choice, nor it is anyone's fault to have such a condition.

Ethics Perspective on Transgender

Gender is something that a person does not choose. Rather, it is considered wisdom from God, blessed and exalted, and He is the one who creates mankind in two genders without a third; if a third exist, it is then considered to be abnormal.

The Almighty says: "... He gives females to whomever He wishes and gives males to whomever He wishes." (Al-Shūrā: 49).

And He said: "...and made of him the two genders, the male and the female. ..." (Al-Qiyāmah: 39).

According to Makrlov¹, mankind is either masculine or feminine. However, there are cases of sexual ambiguity in which it is difficult to know the gender of an individual based on the criterion of the external reproductive systems. Hence, it can be said that this alone is insufficient to define gender satisfactorily. It then requires a more scientific way to search for criteria in determining gender, and one of these criteria lies in the psychological traits of individuals. A person's psyche may have an impact in determining his affiliation with a specific gender. However, in the case of the transgender, it is more complex. The assigned gender at birth may not be what or who they are. This leads to another issue that is changing sex among the transgender. The issue of changing sex is an extremely difficult issue in which it raises moral, ethical, and social complications.

Islam has the answers to all problems and has the cures to all diseases except death and growing old. Islam has taught parents to raise children properly and make them the ones who direct their behavior from a young age. This was stated by Prophet Muhammad (pbuH), "Every child born with instinct, so his parents are the one who makes him a Jew, Magus or Christian." The eth-

ics discussed in this section is related to parents and guardians. These people are supposed to assume roles that guide and assist children to follow the teachings of Islam. No matter how hard the condition or the situation that we are in, Islam has solutions that are not against our nature as human beings. Should the transgender need to change their sex, the parents or guardians or any other persons should provide them with the pieces of advice and guidance and be empathic toward them without compromising on the principles of Islam. The transgender should be encouraged and guided to bring them back to the natural state of the sex that was assigned to them at birth. In worse case scenarios, parents should treat their transgender child by assuming preventive roles before the child gets worse. They could work closely with psychiatrists or counselors in helping their child to cope with the dilemma of being a transgender. Usually, treatments in treating these cases are more successful with the involvement of both parents and medical or psychological professionals.

Within the perspective of Islam, it is not ethical to change the sex for the reason of being “I love to change”. Islamic laws prohibit changing the gender that is based on the fulfillment of personal desire rather than any valid reason like the medical reason that may threaten one’s health conditions. There is no doubt that such personal desire is a form of insulting to the will of God Almighty, and He has the absolute power in determining the gender of His creation; He knows best, and we should submit to Him. Al-Bukhari and others narrated on the authority of Ibn Abbas, may God be pleased with them, said: “*The Messenger of God, may God’s prayers and peace be upon him, cursed men who likened women to men, and women who likened women to men*”¹⁹. Thus, the type of sex change that is performed just to fill in a personal desire and should the reason be to resemble the other gender, is not ethical for men and women.

Any medical work that lacks the intention to heal the body is considered to be unethical. In the process of changing sex, the natural functions of the organs, especially the genitalia, are affected. Any distortion that happens to this organ will cause complications such as unable to conceive, get married, or even enjoy certain activities as other people do. According to Hausser²⁰, the therapeutic goal of transgender operations is difficult to determine because there are people who consider sex change seekers have abnormalities;

they have no goals in life, except for conducting this operation due to the mental disorder that they suffer from. The principle of non-prejudice to the situation of any person means no one can act and change the compatibility, gender, age, or descent of a person because it is considered unethical and outside the circle of dealing and business²¹. At the same time, it is an ethical and moral obligation to relieve suffering, especially among pediatric patients with gender dysphoria, who have difficulty managing the disease²². However, evidence shows that medicine is not the only way to relieve suffering for the transgender. Psychology professionals also should help a community to accept the transgender.

Cultural Perspective on Transgender

Transgender is a sensitive subject, and in certain cultures, it is taboo. Due to this, there are many ambiguities, and researchers have not been able to find out the exact causes of transgender. Scholars and researchers investigate transgender from different cultural viewpoints. Their findings suggested that some accept transgenders’ actions as an individual’s rights, others insult transgenders’ actions, and others perceive them as victims or sick people. Previous research works found that the transgender often experiences prejudice and discrimination based on their gender identity²³. According to Makrlov¹, social research conducted confirmed the presence of a transgender individual at a workplace posed many problems, especially in terms of relationships with co-workers who quickly knew the psychological problem that this colleague was having. They noted this transgender’s appearance and behaviors, demanding this colleague to be removed from their working environment. This transgender colleague freaked them out, terrified them and some had even questioned the need to employ such a person at the company. The culture that these investigated people were from had affected the way they thought about their transgender colleagues.

Studies have indicated that individuals often negatively judge those who express nonconforming gender behaviors that do not fit within this binary conception²⁴. This might be due to the representation of transgender people on TV that has been overwhelmingly negative, as Mocarski, Butler, Emmons, and Smallwood²⁵ stated, “*When transgender people do become mediated they are done so in marginalizing way...*” (p. 250). The media has a big impact on how a culture views the transgender. Transgender activists always

voice that discrimination is used as a weapon to make the transgender acceptable among the public by portraying how communities and governments are discriminating them? The transgender community is often said to face social discrimination and systemic inequality due to the social stigma towards them. This, in turn, shapes societies' perception towards them, empathizes with their situation, and ultimately makes it seem as though it is permissible and a personal right of an individual to be a transgender. Generally, transgenderism is incongruent with the cultural traditions of Muslim societies. It is not accepted and contrary to the cultures of the Muslims. The transgender in Malaysia, for instance, is seen as a provocative group that is flouting the core cultural values. Therefore, this group usually keeps the practices private. Chang et al⁵ showed that the majority of Malaysians did not accept transgender. Many Malaysians perceive the transgender as going against the law, contradicting the tenets of religions and causing gender imbalance. Some other Malaysians felt that the transgender had lost their minds, and they were from the low-class citizens, especially those who were sex workers. A similar study was conducted in Algeria and Egypt, and the result was also similar. The communities there rejected the transgender to be part of them, and they disliked working with them¹. Therefore, there had been many camps, seminars, and retreats conducted by different Muslim organizations to bring back the transgender to the "right path", guide and advise them, denounce their actions, and warn them of the consequences of their actions.

Research Methodology

The study is purely qualitative in which it captures the community's views on transgender in Malaysia. Data was gathered through

open-ended interviews among nine participants. The researcher created an interview template using specific questions to be asked. The five questions were on how they view the transgender, how do they interact with them, how their culture influences the way they interact with them, their ethical views, humanity views, and cultural views on the transgender. To complement the data, particularly about the public's opinions toward the transgender, a focus group discussion (FGD) was held among four participants. The discussion was on the perceived influence of humanity, ethics, religion, and culture toward the transgender. Altogether 13 subjects participated in this study.

Findings and Results

This section presents the discussion on the key findings with a focus on identified patterns and themes related to the participants' views on humanity, ethics, and culture or/and religious influences regarding the transgender.

Findings from Individual Interviews

Nine participants were involved in this study; their ages were between 18 and 51 years old, their working experiences were between 0 and 15 years with different qualifications. A brief description of the participants is depicted in Table I.

Religious practice is linked with culture and/or social practice because religions guide people, the way they think, and their daily practices. Social practices could become a culture when they are the norms practiced for years, and they could be in the form of religious practices or accepted as religious practices. There exists a consensus among the participants that the Malay and Islamic values are intertwined, and such combined cultures, to a certain extent, have molded their view toward transgender.

Table I. Profile of participants.

| No. | Age | Work Experience | Qualification |
|-----|-----|-----------------|---------------|
| 1 | 51 | 12 | Education |
| 2 | 44 | 10 | Sociology |
| 3 | 30 | 2 | HR |
| 4 | 48 | 15 | Psychology |
| 5 | 25 | 2 | Architecture |
| 6 | 25 | 1 | Business |
| 7 | 22 | 1 | IT |
| 8 | 18 | 0 | Student |
| 9 | 18 | 0 | Student |

Almost all participants agreed that their cultural belief was a strong influence on how they viewed the transgender. Muslim participants believed that there was a hadith that solely focused on transgender issues. This hadith explains that the act of resembling the opposite gender (*tasyabbuh*) is prohibited, and it is among the major sins in Islam. In *fiqh*, it means a man resembling a woman or vice versa in the aspects of clothing, adornments, conversation, voice, walking, conduct, and changing one's physical characteristics. This hadith that has been narrated from Abu Hurairah r.a, Prophet Muhammad (pbuH) said, "The Apostle of Allah (PBUH) cursed the man who dressed like a woman and the woman who dressed like a man". In another narration from Ibn 'Abbas r.a, Prophet Muhammad (pbuH) said "The Prophet cursed effeminate men and women who imitated men."

One respondent stated: "Why you are wasting your time in studying these people; they are useless and not worth studying them."

Another respondent stated: "Definitely Malaysian people do not accept transgender people because it is against the religion, causing gender imbalance, and we believe that these transgender people lost their minds."

Another said: "My worry if God punish us because of the transgender; they are changing God's creation and every time I see them, I remember the people of the Prophet Luth."

Only one respondent said: "I can accept the transgender because they are human beings which have their right to do what they want and choose who they want to be as long as they do not give any harm to the society."

Based on the statements made, it can be summed up that the community does not accept transgender, the community does not sympathize with them and the community believes that this group of people is useless and studies on them

should not be conducted as they are a waste of time. Even though the findings indicate negative discourse about the transgender, people, in general, should sympathize with them. The transgender is just like us, and this group suffers from a psychological disease. They are not guilty; we can live with them without any prejudice because they are human beings too.

Findings from Focus Group Discussion

The participants were divided into two groups of two people in each group. They came from different backgrounds such as psychology, legal, sociology, and human resource, as shown in Table II.

Both groups reported similar opinions about the role of culture in their view of the transgender. From the discussion held, the findings revealed that transgenderism was incongruent with the cultural traditions of eastern societies. It was not accepted and contrary to the culture of ethnic groups in Malaysia, i.e., the Malays, Chinese, Indians, etc. Transgender was perceived as being provocative to the core cultural values of Malaysians. Therefore, the transgender community usually kept themselves and their practices private.

However, R1.2 highlighted that laws and legislation could be effective means to hinder transgenderism in Malaysia. The government must take legal interventions to prevent transgender issues from becoming worse. These interventions should not be misinterpreted as discriminations but more of creating public awareness on the predicament faced by the transgender, improving the transgender's well beings and conditions, and as well as functioning as preventive measures.

In addition, R2.2 indicated that transgender experienced a violation of their rights to education, jobs, and social protection. As a result, higher rates of unemployment, poverty, housing insecurity, and marginalization had occurred among them.

Table II. FGD participants' profile.

| Code names | | Qualification |
|----------------|------|---------------------------|
| Group 1 | | |
| Participant 1 | R1.1 | Psychology background |
| Participant 2 | R1.2 | Legal background |
| Group 2 | | |
| Participant 1 | R2.1 | Sociology background |
| Participant 2 | R2.2 | Human resource background |

Note: R = Respondent.

Psychologist, R1.1 indicated: *“Our society or/ and the culture influences our view toward the transgender. It also influences our acceptance or rejection of them. The common stereotypes gained from the culture, in turn, influences the same culture to close the doors for these group of people.”*

According to the sociologist, R1.2; *“Society has not enough information about transgender people, and that is why they do not accept them. They are, from the society’s point of view, abnormal people and away from the social values”.*

Discussion and Requirements

Transgender always face severe discrimination, family rejection, insecurity, systemic inequality, and widespread stigma. These are due to the lack of awareness and misunderstanding of who the transgenders are, why they behave in certain ways, and how to perceive them correctly. Transgender issues should be handled with wisdom through integrated actions that not only lie on the government but also on family, counselors, educational institutions, and the public. Furthermore, psychosocial supports are very crucial not only for transgender individuals but also for their families or others that are dealing with transgender issues. According to Baqutayan²⁶, hermaphrodite individuals are considered as a minority group based on gender identity disorder.

A general belief is that the issue to establish the gender identity of this group of individuals is not the problem of a nation only, it has been an issue of intense debate all over the world. Transgender people cannot easily be established in society with their natural characteristics. Undoubtedly, problems would arise if an individual’s perception of his or her own identity does not match the one shared by his or her parents, siblings, and friends. Therefore, urgent actions are needed in managing their feeling, identity, and behavior needs. The treatment of this group of people should be more of a therapy than surgery, and emotional adjustment needs to be taken into account. In reality, counselors alone cannot solve the transgender issues, and social and family members play crucial roles in managing the feelings of the transgender. Several studies indicated that sources of strength like family acceptance, supportive social networks, and participation in social activism help to moderate the negative impact of social discrimination on the mental health of intersexes/transgender individuals²⁷.

Counseling the Transgender

A feeling of belonging to a specific gender has a role in the formation of sexual identity for the transgender. Psychological factors explain to us that the establishment of a corresponding identity is based on the theories of psychoanalysis, which the close union reconciles with pain that prevents normal psychological reincarnation, with the result that the original feminine identity of the male develops instantly. A male, for instance, accords with his mother and shows a female tendency, and it is a different case for the development of females. A girl’s dream of being a male with the feeling that she is rejected because of her reproductive systems makes her unhappy, and as she corresponds to her mother, she develops a male tendency. Other psychological analyses showed that changing sex was a response to neurological problems. All these analyses concluded that parents’ relationship with their children could play a role in the development of sexual identity. The role of the family environment in building the identity of individuals and the extent of its impact on the development of sex change have been studied²⁸.

Hence, it can be concluded that one of the main issues that are faced by the transgender is rejection and this rejection comes from the transgender themselves, family members, community members, and institutions. The issues faced by the transgender are depicted in Figure 2.

To face these issues successfully, the transgender need support from those who are involved with them. These people are family members, especially parents who have to play effective parenting roles, the transgender themselves, who have to manage their dilemmas and emotions well, psychology professionals and social activists, who can be their advocates in fighting for their rights and well-being, and the authorities overseeing policies and legislation concerning the transgender.

Effective Parenting Roles

The primary responsibility of parents is to help children to form an appropriate sexual identity. This is done through a process known as sexual normalization. In this process, a child learns sexual norms or psychological characteristics, which are appropriate for one of the sexes and not for the other. The child acquires the sexual identity, that is the feeling of being a boy or a girl, and also acquires the criteria for the sexual role during early childhood in this process. The preference

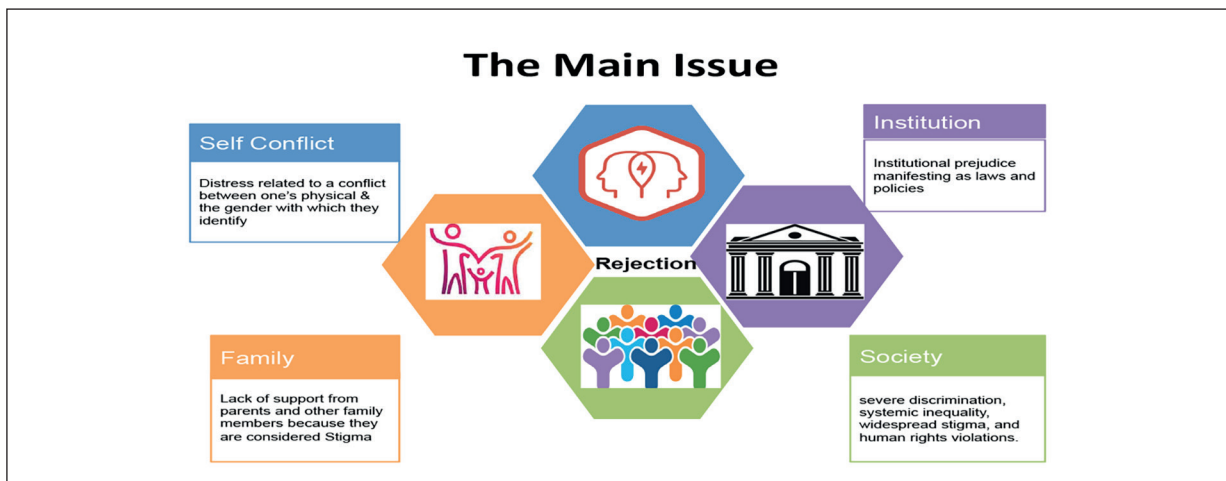


Figure 2. Issues concerning the transgender.

for a sexual role over the other occurs early in life around the age of three, so it is difficult to make important changes in the sexual role or sexual identity after the age of three²⁹. In this process, parents should play their role effectively in educating their children. Along the process, they should constantly provide religious education, sexual education and supervise their children's surroundings and socialization. This is important because parents are responsible for shaping children's personalities. There is a greater chance for parents who provide their children with early education to prevent them from being influenced by negative elements and subsequently can avoid them from getting involved with huge social problems. Parents need to spend more time with their children and raise them with good manners and values. Besides, parents have to be sensitive to their children's behaviors. The actions of some parents in cross-dressing their children may lead them to gender confusion and make them desire to be the opposite gender. Therefore, parents should provide the best in terms of their children's upbringing because the way children think and act is shaped by the way they are raised.

A study conducted among 119 children and adolescents by private clinics revealed that about 98 percent of the subjects had mental problems, so were their family members by 98 percent, and these family members had other physical health problems too. These subjects or young people had difficulty in relationships with their parents, especially among the male in which 99 percent were victims of abuse and maltreatment. Among the reasons that influence and motivate

a person to change his/her sex are parents' ways of raising their children, children's attachment to parents of the opposite sex, and the absence of one of the parents¹. Therefore, parents could help their children to overcome these difficulties by raising them correctly, fixing their attitudes, and directing their behaviors. In this sense, Islam has provided the guides for parents to bring up children the way Allah wants them to be; his good servants who can benefit not only themselves but others too. Early education is crucial in Islam because a child's nature is designed in such a way that he or she can absorb anything similar to a sponge absorbing water. Hence, parents must play effective roles in educating, guiding, and monitoring their children from an early age so that they can grow healthily in terms of physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual. In carrying out their duties and responsibilities in raising their children, parents can seek assistance from psychology professionals so that any problem can be managed or addressed effectively, and better outcomes can be achieved.

The Psychological Supports

Transgenders are people who have undergone experiences that may have been psychologically difficult for them or they have grown up in a family that has made them suffer from psychological abuses. Psychological supports are crucial in dealing with transgender issues. The treatments for transgender individuals should be more of psychological therapies than hormone and surgery treatments. In assisting the transgender to cope with the issues that

they are involved with, family members must provide the support that they need. The support that the transgender gets from family members and the professional support that they get from psychology professionals and activists would enable them to cope better with the psychosocial issues they suffer from, such as gender dysphoria and childhood trauma due to sexual abuse. In addition, for the families, psychosocial support is necessary to assist them in managing their feelings and behaviors to cope with having a transgender family member. Families of the transgender are often confronted with feelings of loss, shame, grief, betrayal, guilt, fear, and anger. Simultaneously, they are also prone to meet with rejection and social stigmatization from their social surroundings³⁰.

As stated by Akbar³¹, Walt Heyer was a transgender woman who had undergone gender reassignment surgery in 1983. After the transition, Heyer realized that hormones and sex change genital surgery did not solve the underlying issues driving his gender dysphoria. Due to this, he then underwent de-transition after eight years. From his experience, it is learned that hormones and surgery may alter appearances, but nothing changes the immutable fact of the sex. He said, *"Nobody's ever born a transgender; they're manufactured as a result of something, a developmental childhood issue that has yet to be determined for many people. However, he believes many pre-operative patients need greater help with mental health issues before they decide to go ahead"*. He added: *"There's a huge element of trust that all of the pre-surgical transgender people place in the hands of the clinicians. They make them go through counseling, but it's more of what I would frankly refer to as a rubber stamp because transgender victims are looking to approve them. All of them have some level of depression, and we're not treating them we're just cutting off body parts and giving them a new name and a new gender"*.

The Social Activism

The issues faced by the transgender need to be addressed together not only by the professionals and families, but the communities should be involved as well. Supportive social networks also play important roles in dealing with transgender issues. Social activities such as outreach programs, motivational camps, and social welfare assistance need to be intensified. This is to ensure that the transgender can be reached out

and assisted. They need support from the community members so that they can go back to the birth gender and be accepted by the members of the community³². In the Malaysian context, programs such as camps, seminars, or retreat that have been organized by the Department of Islam Development or JAKIM must be continued even though there are parties who are against them. Transgender individuals should be reached out using sensible approaches. Social activists should set good examples not only to the transgender but to the members of society as well. Social activists should provide the channels for transgender to share their thoughts and interact with other people effectively. Hopefully, this will help them resolve issues that have led them to choose to be a transgender. For example, through outreach programs, transgender individuals can interact with *Syariah* psychotherapists or preachers without being judged, and they can discuss matters that they do not understand more productively. Eventually, this would draw their attention to Islamic teachings and moderate the negative impacts of social discrimination they face.

Education

Other than family members and psychology professionals, institutions such as the government and education bodies must also be involved in addressing the issues faced by the transgender. The education bodies that constitute schools, colleges, and universities, may they be conventional or religious, must impose good values among students, and students must be educated on the conditions of the transgender. It can be said that without education that substantiates awareness and knowledge on transgender, students who are also members of communities might end up having negative perspectives about this group of people.

Education is a powerful tool to stop the spread of negative perceptions or notions about transgender. We have to understand in the view of the global village that we are in now, many people, especially teenagers, are easily exposed to foreign cultures and lifestyles through mass media, and they are susceptible to blindly follow these without having the right knowledge and wisdom. Therefore, it is the responsibility of our education system to educate people, especially the young ones with the wisdom and understanding on issues involved in transgender and how to overcome them³³. Undeniably, religious education is crucial in developing a society that is made of

firm believers and holds a high standard of values, and not easily influenced by foreign cultures and lifestyles that contradict religious teachings. Formal education through the introduction of Comprehensive Sex Education may also help in addressing transgender issues. Sex Education is defined as an age-appropriate, culturally relevant approach to teaching students about sex, genderism, and relationships by providing scientifically accurate, realistic, non-judgmental information³⁴. Comprehensive Sex Education is a curriculum-based process of teaching and learning about the cognitive, emotional, physical, and social aspects of sexuality. It can provide children with knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that will empower them to realize their health, well-being, and dignity and developing respectful social relationships.

Conclusions

Transgender issues have been frequently discussed due to the emergence of LGBT movements across the globe. There are still no conclusive scientific explanations on the occurrence of transgender, but there are several factors that have been proposed as contributors to the development of transgender identity. These factors are genetic influence, hormone influence, psychological issues, and life experience. The transgender community often faces social discrimination due to the social stigma toward them. Transgender issues can be viewed from various aspects that are humanities, ethics, and cultures. Each aspect provides us with better understandings and insights into transgenderism. The current discussions on transgender are largely focused on Muslim socio-cultural views. The Muslim societies strongly reject transgenderism, and this rejection is reigned by religion and cultural values. The transgender issues should be taken into consideration; the community should understand the difficulties and the psychological problems that this group is facing. Therefore, these issues should be handled with wisdom through integrated actions that do not only lie with the government but also the family institutions, education systems, and the public. Educating children and raising them decorously is important in managing or preventing transgender issues. Informal education that takes place at home with parents and formal education that includes religious education and comprehensive sex education can support children's personality

development and help them to build a society that holds a high standard of values and is not easily influenced by foreign cultures. Besides, psychosocial supports and community awareness are vital not only for the transgender but also for families in dealing with transgender issues. Treatment of transgender individuals should be more of psychological therapies than of hormone and surgery treatments. Moreover, family education and social activism need to be intensified further with supportive social networks to reinstate the transgender to the right path.

Conflict of Interest

The Authors declare that they have no conflict of interests.

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