

# Re-Intensifying Life Experiences Of Transgender Individuals Amidst Covid-19 Pandemic

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## Abstract:

Globally, the people are fighting together to survive the intensity of the different waves of Covid-19 pandemic. Transgender persons are alienated from the main stream of society. The social exclusion denies various rights and opportunities as well as perpetuates discrimination, poverty, inequality and invisibility. The main objective of this study is to analyze the life experiences, economic crisis and mental health issues of transgender individuals in the pandemic period. The study is conducted through snowball sampling method in Kollam district, Kerala. Primary data collected through interview schedule. Secondary data were collected from books, journals and internet. Research design of the study is descriptive in nature. This study shows that adverse living conditions, financial crisis and emotional distress are important barriers for transgender people to lead a happy and fulfilling life. The transgender which has a different gender identity should become an integral part of our society. It is the imperative of the times to come up with innovative reforms at the government level by formulating specific strategies and policies for their upliftment.

**Keywords:** Living experiences, Transgender, economic crisis, mental health, Covid-19

## Introduction

The people of the world are fighting together to survive the intensity of the different waves of Covid-19 pandemic. Transgender persons are there among the marginalized and vulnerable communities with abysmal conditions. They are rejected from the mainstream of society are frustrated with the loss of livelihoods and security. The social exclusion denies various rights and opportunities as well as perpetuates discrimination, poverty, inequality and invisibility. Compared to other members of the society, this pandemic period was a very difficult time for transgender people, who had to fight the battle for survival. Public health measures to limit the spread of corona virus disease have different effects on the mental health of individuals

depending on social and economic conditions (Fisher et al., 2020). Covid-19 quickly illuminated the deep inequalities faced by transgender and non-binary communities in society. But access to social support, which plays a crucial role in protecting transgender from the results of stigma and discrimination, has been diminished. Notably, these troubles are happening alongside several legal and interpersonal challenges and assaults on transgender rights (Julie Woulfe & Melina Wald 2020).

## METHODOLOGY

Re-Intensifying Life Experiences of Transgender Individuals Amidst Covid-19 Pandemic is the major concern of the research study. The main objective of the study is to analyze the miserable

life experiences, economic crisis and mental health issues of transgender individuals in the pandemic period. The study was conducted among 100 transgender individuals in Kollam district, Kerala through snowball sampling method. Primary data collected through interview schedule and secondary data were collected from books, journals and internet. Research design of the study is descriptive in nature. This study shows that adverse living conditions, financial crisis and emotional distress are important barriers for transgender people to lead a happy and fulfilling life. This marginalized community alienated from the mainstream of society and excluded from social domains.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The following literature reviews help to understand the problems experienced by transgender individuals during the Covid-19 pandemic. Banerjee & Rao (2020) in their article "The Graying Minority": Lived Experiences and Psychosocial Challenges of Older Transgender Adults During the COVID-19 Pandemic in India, A Qualitative Exploration- explains elderly transgender people face difficulties due to marginalization, stigma, and disease, as well as multiple survival threats, especially at the physical, emotional, and financial levels. Their emotional and social risk is high during this pandemic. No one takes the needs of older transgender people seriously. Policies required for their welfare should be formulated and implemented. Their health and wellbeing can only be ensured by raising the level of social awareness.

According to Pillay & Barnes (2020) says that Covid-19 poses new challenges to the nations of the world that are suffering from adverse conditions. It places more burdens on the government. Lockdown restrictions to reduce the spread of the disease create problems such as unemployment, poverty and mental health problems. In such countries, marginalized transgender groups are most affected. For them, this period has created fear; frustration and panic. Losses of employment and financial crisis have disrupted their lives (Potteat, Reisner et al 2020). Analyses Covid-19 pandemic totally changed the

life of transgender women, especially those who living with HIV. Difficulties in employment, income, food, and shelter indicate a high risk of violence against these gender minorities. HIV-infected transgender women with Covid-19 Symptoms rarely see the possibility of receiving care in city hospitals. Such hospitals are already overcrowded with Covid-19 patients. Such conditions increase the risk of disease transmission.

Covid-19 has adversely affected the economy and human life of India, the world's second most populous country. As the number of corona virus cases skyrocketed, the government of India imposed the Quarantine Law under the Epidemic Disease Act of 1897 to make social isolation and lockdown effective. Lockdown has wreaked havoc on small, medium and large scale enterprises in the country and led to unemployment and recession. (Aritha Ghosh et al., 2020) Realizing that the rapid spread of Covid-19 in India would wipe out a large section of the population in the country, the government became confused as to whether it should save the lives or livelihoods of the people immediately. It should be noted that the Government of India has taken care to save lives before saving livelihoods. But protecting livelihoods is essential to prevent the loss of life. The government has announced the nationwide lockdown on its primary to save the lives of the people; this led to unemployment, slowed down agricultural and industrial production processes, and plunged the country into recession (Gagan Deep Sharma & Mandeep Mahendru 2000).

In the early stages of the spread of the corona virus, the absence of medication or vaccine necessitated maintaining physical and social distance to prevent the spread of the disease. Lockdowns, prolonged isolation, and changes in living conditions have caused mental distress especially among marginal communities. The increase in cases of mental illness associated with pandemic in India underscores its dire impact. (Surbhi Sharma et al., 2020). During the COVID-19 Pandemic in India the elderly transgender people face difficulties due to marginalization, stigma, and disease, as well as multiple survival threats, especially at the physical, emotional, and

financial levels. Their emotional and social risks are extremely higher in this particular situation (Banerjee & Rao 2020).

## RESULTS

### SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROFILE OF THE RESPONDENTS

**Table: 1 Personal details of the respondents (n=100)**

Socio - Economic Status	Category	Frequency
Gender	Trans man	2
	Trans woman	47
	She male	23
	Cross dresser	28
Age	Below 20	4
	20 to 30	40
	31to 40	36
	Above 40	20
Religion	Hindu	52
	Christian	32
	Muslim	16
Education	Primary	10
	High School	24
	SSLC	42
	Higher Secondary	21
	Degree / Diploma	3
Occupation	Unemployed	9
	Business	4
	Working in NGO	11
	Sex Work	76
Monthly Income	Up to 5000	4
	5001 to 6000	34
	6001 to 7000	46
	Above 7000	16
Living Arrangement	Living Alone	15
	Living with TG Friends	48
	Living with Family	5

	Living with Partner	32
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### Re-Intensifying life experiences of transgender during the Covid-19 Pandemic

The situation of transgender people in India is deplorable. The Social Stereotypes are an important factor in the growing discrimination against transgender in the country. They are experiencing constant difficulties in their daily lives. In 2014, the Supreme Court recognized

them as the third gender, putting an end to decades of socio-economic neglect. However, discrimination against this minority continues unabated. Covid - 19 Pandemic has made the lives of transgender people incredibly miserable. The study seeks to identify changes in their living conditions, employment, financial status and mental health. The following table shows the life experiences of transgender in pandemic condition.

**Table: 2 Life Experiences in the pandemic period**

Life Experiences	Frequency
Lack of livelihood	93
Low living conditions	76
Survival threats	98
Increased family disputes	45
Rejections	62
Lack of rental accommodation	24
Rent arrears	72
Lack of quarantine facilities and proper shelters	48
Obstacles to proper communication and sharing	93
Feeling of unsafe	92
Severe loneliness	88
Social isolation	88
Social alienation	88
Social insecurity	94
Lack of satisfaction	96
Migration problems	94
Covid stigma and social concerns	100
Delay in the process of obtaining gender identity documents	46
Lack of community meetings	100
Lack of community support	92
Lack of community functions	100
Invisibility of community	98
Absence of 'Kerala Queer Pride	100
Difficulties in using and accessing technology	42
Excessive use of social media	90
Gender related stigma	88
Increased risk of sex work	92
Unsafe conditions	94
Police harassment	65
Absence of rituals and festivities within the community	100

Lack of gender affirming treatments	77
Obstacles related with medical treatment	89
SRS canceled/ postponed	5
Lack of welfare activities of community based organizations	92
Positive experiences	25
Absence of government policies...no pension	100

The above table shows the covid - 19 pandemic experiences of transgender people in Kerala; especially from one's own family, community and society. For them, it was a time of double burden. Difficulties related with covid-19 issues and gender-related marginalization. These multiple threads are spread across all areas such as physiology, psychology, economics and social. This was a multifaceted challenge. These multiple threads are spread across all areas such as physiology, psychology, economics and social. Along with social insecurity, unemployment, lack of welfare activities and financial worries, they were further marginalized from the society. There has been no change in the discriminatory and inverse social reactions against transgender people.

Due to the threat of the disease, they were legally barred from organizing the celebrations and community programs of the transgender community. The lack of opportunities to reunite was a very difficult situation. Because of the inability to make direct contact and share, their psychological difficulties increased. They used the internet and other social media to overcome their loneliness. Transgender individuals used the internet and other social media to overcome their loneliness. An exact routine, dream, or purpose in life began to disappear. This adversely affected their sleep at night and waking up during the day. They spend a lot of time on entertainment sites to pass the time. Its overuse has been shown to be detrimental to their mental health. They were worried about the SARS corona virus infection and the social situation where no one came to help them.

For transgender people living away from home and living alone, spending time with community friends who understand them was a great comfort. It was a bad situation and experience that no one was with them to survive the hardships. Kerala's traditional and strong cultural framework has increased the suffering of

transgender people who have to stay at home. Despite the displeasure of their family members, they remain at home only because they have no other place to accept them. Those who had to live in their own homes felt very bored and frustrated. In addition, resentment and intolerance from family members increased the level of stress. The inability to see or talk to their community members has doubled their anxiety and frustration.

Transgender sex workers confront a lot of issues in their daily lives. They earn their livelihood mainly through the sex work. Covid 19 has created obstacles for this too. Kenneth Rosario (2021) during the lockdown times most of the transgender people do not even have the reserve savings to pay rent. Their livelihood depends on social interactions. Social distancing and isolation make their needs unattainable. The closure of livelihoods has negatively affected food security. The number of transgender people using their sex for money is increasing rapidly. This study reveals that during the covid-19 pandemic, when life was hampered by the inability to move forward, many transgender people indiscriminately turned to sex work. Abhina Aher (2020) a transgender activist, revealed that the lockdown had adversely affected transgender sex workers. The lack of customers and the financial constraints across the country made their lives even more tragic. Indian Express (June 6, 2020) explains that during the covid-19 pandemic, sex workers in Kerala were going through a virtual sex route. Although not tech-savvy, they have been attracting their clients online with Trans Dating Sites and Apps e.g. Butterfly, Trans4date, OkCupid etc. With the end of the lockdown they do sex work both directly and in virtual mode.

The country is struggling to maintain public health during the global pandemic. Health care and good treatment have become possible only if money is spent. Weakened immunity, increased

risk of infection and lack of insurance increase the suffering of transgender individuals. Lacking money for medical treatment, they have to rely entirely on the government's free medical care system. . It is common for transgender people to undergo hormone therapy, laser treatment and sex reassignment surgery as part of their gender transition. But these are very expensive treatments. Economic hardship and social distance due to lockdowns were eliminated. Many were unable to complete the required treatment steps prior to sex reassignment surgery. The untimely completion of feminizing hormone therapy, vaginoplasty, facial hair

removal, facial feminization surgery and breast augmentation were major obstacles for those who wanted to have male to female sex reassignment surgery. Voice therapy, Tracheal Shave and Buttock augmentation were hampered by a lack of money and hospital facilities. Proper access to services, lack of accommodation, lack of health insurance, inadequacy of health facilities, and delays in the process of obtaining transgender identity cards, ration cards and other documents were some of the major problems they faced during this period.

### **Pandemic and Financial Crisis**

**Table: 2 Economic Crisis in the pandemic period**

<b>Economic issues</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Unemployment	16
Poverty	56
Lack of income	18
low and irregular incomes	87
Financial strain	98
Lack of savings	100
Debt	33
Economic crisis	90

The financial status of transgender people in India is deplorable. They do not get high salary jobs due to lack of higher education. Therefore, their economic condition and standard of living remain very low. It is very hard to raise their living standards with meager income. The literacy rate of transgender people in Kerala is very high compared to other states. However, they have to migrate from villages to cities in search of employment opportunities. During the Covid-19 period, the economic status of transgender people remained very low. The transgender community has suffered from the social isolation, lockdowns and stigma. They are facing a crisis situation in the financial sector. Many transgender people do not have a home. In addition, there are transgender people who find it difficult to rent a living space or even meet basic needs. Many of them feared that they would lose their rented houses due to rent arrears. Due to the sharp decline in income, they searched

for low-rent housing but could not find one. People were reluctant to rent houses because of the spread of corona disease through contact.

When everyone took precaution for their own safety through social distance by excluding others from their contact list, it was the marginalized community severely affected. Many transgender people are migrating to other states and districts to overcome their economic crisis. Lockdowns and other travel restrictions also made immigration impossible. This led to increased economic concerns. Transgender people have a habit of spending more than saving. During the Covid-19 epidemic, transgender people spent all their possessions without any personal collection. Unemployment, poverty, disease, social stigma and financial vulnerability have also negatively affected the mental well-being of transgender people. Few transgender people do not receive

the assistance provided by the government due to lack of documents proving their transgender identity. The Covid-19 pandemic poses a formidable challenge to the lives of transgender people.

### **Covid-19 and Mental Health Issues**

Mental health includes the emotional, psychological, and social well-being of the individual. It greatly influences our thoughts, feelings and actions. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make healthy choices. Mental health helps us to manage our emotions properly, to maintain healthy relationships with others, and to make appropriate decisions. The uncertain and crisis-ridden social and economic environment of the pandemic era has adversely affected the mental health of transgender people. Negative attitudes towards life, inability to concentrate on things, excessive anxiety, mental restlessness, isolation from friends, inability to cope with daily problems, insomnia and suicidal tendencies are the main symptoms of mental illness. Along with the struggle to survive the epidemic, transgender people are also exposed to extreme psychological pressures.

### **PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

The global population is fully aware of the spread of Corona virus disease and its physical symptoms. Everyone has the utmost care to take the necessary precautions against corona virus

infection. In addition, everyone has a clear understanding of the disease and the health care that needs to be continued. However, awareness of the psychological consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic is scarce in society. Research shows that this global problem is negatively affecting human thinking, emotions, and behavior. Post-traumatic strain, temper, and confusion are reported in an analysis of the psychological effects of quarantine on covid-19. It has been reported that increasing the duration of the quarantine leads to greater stress and decreased availability of food and water creates constant stress during the quarantine (Brooks et al., 2020).

Covid-19 Pandemic has adversely affected the lives of individuals. The situation of the transgender, a marginalized section of society, is now very deplorable and reprehensible. This is a special period in the history of the world where human beings are forced to live apart from their fellow human beings. The particular situation has adversely affected the mental wellbeing of individuals. Transgender people face this situation along with the misery of isolation, loneliness and their other rejected experiences in normal life. Therefore, it has psychologically far-reaching consequences for them. This circumstance is a threat to the mental well-being of transgender people. The following table describes the psychological distress experienced by transgender people through social isolation, infrequent contact, and other related problems. These are the psychological effects of the Covid-19 pandemic.

**Table: 3 Psychological Effects of Covid-19 Pandemic**

	<b>Psychological Effects</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
1	Anxiety	98
2	Anger	94
3	Boredom	99
4	Depression	88
5	Fear	90
6	Fatigue	95
7	Jealousy	30
8	Hate	56
9	Hopelessness	97
10	Irritation	93
11	Insomnia	46
12	Loneliness	99

13	Laziness	78
14	Low self esteem	80
15	Suicidal tendency	44
16	Stress and Strain	85
17	Sadness	68
18	Shame	18
19	Tension	93
20	Unhappiness	95

It is clear from these psychological effects that a pandemic is not just a medical phenomenon and that such conditions abruptly affect individuals' mental state, thoughts, feelings, emotions, and actions. The findings of this study show that individuals should give the same importance to maintaining mental health as they do to physical health, which requires conscious effort on the part of individuals. This Pandemic Period also provides us with the psychological training that we need to be aware of the changes in the mental state of the individual due to the social environment and circumstances. There is a close relationship between the mental wellbeing of transgender individuals and their personal issues. They are neglected and ridiculed in all walks of life.

Transgender people experience personal and internal conflicts and social discrimination. For them, the travel ban, contact ban, celebration ban, isolation caused by social distance and quarantine created by the Covid-19 Pandemic, low level of economic status, insecurity and unemployment are always negatively related. These psychological effects are the result of the interaction of all these factors. The anxieties and difficulties experienced during the pandemic period later come out as negative emotions. These are the common emotions and their expression that occur when even the primary needs are not satisfied. Transgender people face many critical issues due to extreme degree of discrimination. Covid-19 Pandemic deepened it. Fear, anger, irritation and tension are expressed as uncertainty about the future. Lack of financial security creates tension and increases anxiety and loss of happiness. In addition, ambiguities about the future destroy expectations. Loss of vitality and hope leads to severe depression. Feelings of failure and negative thoughts lower their self-

esteem. Loneliness, sadness and guilt lead to suicidal tendencies. Covid-19 Pandemic throws the lives of transgender people into the darkness of despair.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Socially and economically disadvantaged groups can only be uplifted by providing special care and protection. This requires a revolutionary and radical change in society. Transgender population is a Marginalized and vulnerable group. So it is essential to understand the real problems and find solutions while working for their elevation. Covid-19 epidemic has further degraded the transgender socially, economically and emotionally. In this situation, the nation, the government, the society and every citizen of the country have a responsibility to protect these vulnerable groups. Favorable legislation should be enacted at the government level and the necessary policies should be formulated and implemented. Society must be prepared to treat all human beings equally, to protect human rights and to recognize all human beings without discrimination. The following are some suggestions on how to bring the transgender community into the mainstream of society.

- ❖ Educate the public to participate in activities for the upliftment of transgender people.
- ❖ Ensure that the basic needs of transgender people are satisfied.
- ❖ Give transgender people all the rights and benefits required by the Constitution.
- ❖ Appoint a planning committee consisting of experts in the fields of sociology and economics to find out what is needed for



- the all-round growth of transgender people.
- ❖ Give special consideration to transgender people in the Five Year Plan.
  - ❖ Provide government appointments for transgender people according to their educational qualifications.
  - ❖ Implement reservation in government jobs for transgender people.
  - ❖ The money required for sex reassignment surgery (SRS) should be deposited by the government in the hospital account in a timely manner.
  - ❖ Give financial assistance to all homeless transgender people to build their own home.
  - ❖ Provide special protection for transgender people in emergencies such as floods and epidemics.
  - ❖ Train transgender people to acquire what they need to live with hope, to achieve higher status through self-effort, and to develop skills.
  - ❖ Disseminate programs on social media in a way that helps to cultivate a positive attitude about transgender people in the public.
  - ❖ Provide necessary medical care to transgender people.
  - ❖ Ensure awareness and quarantine facilities on precautionary measure especially for transgender people who are at risk population during the epidemic.
  - ❖ Take steps to prevent transphobia.
  - ❖ To prevent discrimination, abuse and gender attacks equip help lines and make transgender people aware of it.
  - ❖ It is mandatory to include information about different gender identity in school textbooks.
  - ❖ Provide financial assistance to those who deserve it.
  - ❖ Make unemployment wage and employment availability for transgender people through employment exchange.
  - ❖ Include transgender people in health insurance policies.

- ❖ Provide counseling and helpline facilities to ensure mental health.
- ❖ Build transgender Old Age Homes run by the government.
- ❖ Appoint a commission to study the problems faced by transgender people in Kerala.

## CONCLUSION

India has surpassed the third wave of covid-19 Pandemic accelerated by the Omicron variant. The experience of being a Global Village is also getting closer to the nations of the world who are fighting for survival in these historically significant days. The plight of transgender people, one of the most marginalized sections of society, is a matter of special concern as the world is on the cusp of spreading the disease caused by the Naval Corona virus. Transgender people are the ones who struggle the most to overcome the challenges posed by the miserable living conditions of marginalized minorities. They are mainly affected by the isolation and loneliness created by social distance and lockdowns. Their lives, mixed with despair, helplessness and neglect, are a question mark in the eyes of the world's conscience. We must be able to protect the human rights and constitutional denials that are being destroyed in the lives of transgender people who are melting in the furnace of life experiences. Only then will we enter the freedom of liberation from the framework of sectarianism. It is the responsibility of society to bring the lives of transgender people, who have sunk into the misery of the epidemic, into the light of survival.

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