



DROPOUTS OF TRANSGENDER IN THE SCHOOLS OF DELHI: AN ANALYTICAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to raise the issue of school dropouts and the educational rights of transgender individuals in Delhi. The topic itself is a subject of debate within the gender community in this area. The article utilizes secondary data. The transgender society in Delhi has an organized association to address acts of injustice, and through questionnaires and direct interviews, the researchers gathered additional information about school dropouts. To gain a better understanding of this issue, the researchers reviewed numerous publications by scholars. The paper also provides recommendations for reducing the dropout rate among transgender students, making it a highly relevant contribution to this field of study.

KEYWORDS : Transgender, Education System, Inequalities, Provisions in Policies

INTRODUCTION

Inequalities in human society and their consequences for individuals and groups have been extensively studied by sociologists. The causes, nature, form, structural connections, and effects of inequality are key areas of investigation. The distribution of opportunities is greatly affected by inequalities, which in turn influence human development, career choices, and standard of living. The unequal distribution of opportunities creates discrimination, struggle, and the need for government intervention. Sociological research focuses on understanding the distribution and effects of opportunities. Education is a crucial opportunity that affects access to other opportunities and continues to be a subject of sociological interest. While equality of opportunity is an ideal concept, unequal access is a reality that requires sociological investigation. This is particularly relevant in developing countries like India, which face social stratification and are undergoing transitions towards modernization and an open market. Education is seen as a powerful tool for socio-economic development and is essential for the overall development of individuals and nations. It serves as an equalizer and helps individuals escape poverty. Education contributes to personal and social development, social mobility, and social change. Quality education is crucial for the development of a country and its population, especially marginalized communities.

The Indian government has implemented new social schemes to improve the marginalized communities, focusing on education and providing more opportunities for academic activities. There should be no discrimination in the education system, and it is the government's responsibility to offer free education to all individuals up to the age of 14. It is crucial to provide quality education without any barriers based on religion, caste, or gender, ensuring that everyone has access to knowledge from esteemed institutions. Additionally, it is important to provide education to the transgender community as they are vulnerable and often face difficult living situations. To uplift this community, better education should be provided, taking into consideration that many transgender individuals are ostracized from their homes and educational institutions due to societal stigma.

Every individual deserves the right to receive education in a safe and supportive environment. However, transgender individuals often encounter significant challenges in their schools or educational institutions, including discrimination and various forms of harassment from their peers and teachers. This mistreatment, both physical and psychological, often leaves them feeling extremely uncomfortable, causing

many to discontinue their education altogether. Although they do have legal protection, many transgender individuals are unaware of their rights.

According to the 2011 Census, there were 54,854 children between the ages of 0-6 who identified as "others" instead of adhering to traditional male or female genders. The recognition of gender identity that does not conform to societal norms at such a young age emphasizes the crucial role of schools in the lives of transgender children. However, research literature examining the experiences of transgender individuals in schools and their representation in textbooks reveals the existence of discrimination in both realms.

India's transgender community is now receiving significant attention from mainstream society. In a rare move, the Rajya Sabha passed a Bill in 2015 called the Rights of Transgender Persons Bill, which guarantees reservation for transgender individuals in education, employment, financial aid, and social inclusion. The Constitution of India emphasizes equality for all citizens, and Articles 15 and 16 specifically prohibit discrimination and promote equal opportunities in public employment. This extends to education, as stated in the National Policy on Education, which aims to equalize education opportunities for all populations. However, challenges such as caste-based stratification and the structure of formal education still hinder the achievement of equality in status and opportunity.

The education system, like the caste system, contributes to societal division by perpetuating and justifying it. Investigation is needed to understand the connection between these two systems. While access to education may not be denied, not everyone has the opportunity to choose the institution and courses they want. As a result, children from marginalized communities often end up in government schools or drop out, leading to a widening gap between perception and reality. It is crucial to study equal access to education as India cannot progress into the 21st century with a significant illiterate population and a large unskilled workforce. Denying the development of human resources is a violation of a basic human right.

Therefore, in terms of human resource development, studying equal access to education for a nation with a large pool of potential talent has a forward-thinking approach. However, despite legal and official recognition, the transgender community still faces significant exclusion. Reports from Delhi have highlighted that transgender students have been forced to drop out of school due to bullying. Research literature on the

school experiences of transgender individuals across different cultures supports these findings. Given that schools and textbooks have a profound influence on students, it is crucial to examine how they portray the transgender community and address the broader issue of heteronormativity. Schools play a vital role in socialization, and textbooks have a long-lasting impact. Challenging gender categories and norms at a fundamental level is necessary to reduce gender-based inequity and violence. The government should also take responsibility for raising public awareness about transgender individuals and treating them as human beings. This article aims to uncover the societal stigma surrounding the transgender community and understand why transgender individuals leave school at an early age. Furthermore, there is concern that the New Education Policy may continue to overlook the needs of transgender children.

Concept of Transgender

Typically, the majority of people identify with the gender that aligns with their biological sex. However, there are individuals who have a gender identity or expression that differs from the one traditionally associated with their assigned sex at birth. This is known as being transgender and can occur at any age. The term "transgender" is an umbrella term that encompasses various groups, including transsexuals, transvestites, intersex individuals, and anyone who does not conform to the traditional model of sex or gender. In India, there is a term called "hijra," which originates from the Arabic language and refers to individuals who reject the established binary gender norms and exhibit a blurring of culturally prevalent gender roles. This term includes pre-operative, post-operative, and non-operative transsexual individuals who strongly identify with a gender opposite to their biological sex.

Exclusion of Transgender from Schools

Transgender individuals face exclusion from various social institutions such as families and schools, and this discrimination often prevents transgender children from exercising their rights. In schools, transgender students are particularly vulnerable to negative attitudes from both teachers and students, leading to their marginalization. The school environment for transgender youth is typically heteronormative, forcing them to conceal their true selves and resulting in their exclusion. During adolescence, young people are exposed to societal norms and expectations surrounding gender, and these norms are tightly enforced by peers, friends, teachers, and family members. Transgender students encounter numerous challenges in secondary and higher education settings, including concerns about safety, access to appropriate bathrooms and healthcare, and the accurate identification of their gender in records.

Transgender children and young individuals encounter obstacles in their education when they are unable to attend school without fear of discrimination based on their preferred name and gender. This harassment, which can come from both students and staff, leads to higher rates of absenteeism, decreased aspirations for education, and lower academic performance. It is important to note that even individuals who are not transgender may face harassment for expressing non-binary gender identities, particularly boys who do not conform to traditional gender norms. Additionally, discrimination regarding the use of segregated restrooms further contributes to the exclusion of transgender students from school environments.

School Dropouts of Transgender

Transgender children, women, and young people face significant problems in the world, and unfortunately, schools are no different. However, it is possible for schools to change their approach by recognizing the inherent humanity in each individual and taking active steps to eliminate societal divisions. Transgender students are more likely to be

subjected to verbal and physical harassment, assault, teasing, and social exclusion. They also have a higher rate of having their belongings stolen or damaged compared to other student groups. Even if they manage to enroll in an educational institution, they continue to face daily harassment and bullying, often leading them to drop out. The constant harassment that trans youth experience has a detrimental impact on their academic performance and aspirations. Consequently, they are more likely to leave school due to feeling unsafe. Some may resort to drug use as a coping mechanism, while others may consider suicide. Bullying in school is a major problem specifically faced by transgender individuals. The long-term effects of bullying on these victims can be severe. Despite advancements in transgender rights, discrimination and bullying against transgender students remain prevalent issues within schools. Discrimination can take various forms, including rejection, verbal and physical bullying, and even sexual assault. Transgender students often experience isolation and mistreatment, preventing them from fully participating in school activities alongside their classmates. Effeminate boys often endure hardship and discrimination in both their families and schools, as they are often accused by teachers of breaking societal and educational norms.

Legal Rights of Transgender Students

In 2006, a significant order was passed by the Department of Social Welfare, Tamilnadu India, granting hijras the right to attend school and college. This order ensures that transgender and gender non-conforming students are treated fairly and respectfully. It permits students to use their preferred names and pronouns, dress according to their gender identity following appropriate dress rules, and not be compelled to provide personal and medical information without their consent. School officials are not allowed to share personal information about a transgender student without their permission, including their assigned sex at birth, medical history, gender identity, or gender transition. Additionally, students have the right to be protected from harassment and bullying, and educational institutions have a duty to prevent and address any instances of unlawful sexual harassment based on gender identity. Schools are required to have procedures in place for students to report incidents of transgender harassment, which should be thoroughly investigated and resolved.

Students are entitled to equal educational opportunities, which includes the right to use locker rooms and restrooms that align with their gender identity. They also have the right to participate fully in athletic and extracurricular activities, without having to provide medical documentation for their gender transition. It is important for schools to support and accommodate students in their transition, allowing them to express their gender identity. However, research and literature have found discrimination against transgender individuals in schools, both in their experiences and representation in textbooks. Exclusion and shame are common issues faced by transgender students. Even initiatives aimed at inclusivity may be ineffective without proper training.

Smith's (2013) research focused on the American School Counselor Association's National Model, which emphasizes the importance of creating a welcoming environment for LGBTQ parents and students. According to Smith, the model can be used by counselors with critical consciousness to challenge heteronormativity. However, counselors without critical consciousness can use the model to maintain heteronormativity. Smith argues that the model's use of simplified language, lack of specificity about systemic barriers, and conditional language regarding LGBTQ students may lead counselors to be passive in their actions.

He argues that using a reductionist egalitarian language in

democratic societies can undermine efforts to interrupt oppressive forces. Instead, he suggests using a pluralistic language that acknowledges the unequal playing field for marginalized groups. He also proposes naming and defining specific barriers and providing strategies to disrupt oppressive forces, such as hetero-normativity in schools.

In a study on LGBT themed children's books, Lester (2014) found that they often reinforce hetero-normativity by celebrating non-threatening LGBT characters who conform to expected gender roles. Jennings and Macgillivray (2011) examined multicultural education textbooks and found that sexual orientation and gender identity were often conflated or incorrectly defined. They also found only one text that explicitly linked gender identity with transgender identities and explained what it means to be transgender.

Payne and Smith's (2014) study on teachers revealed that they commonly respond with fear and anxiety to the presence of a transgender child and the disruption of the gender binary. None of the participants in the study had received any training on transgender students in their professional programs, limiting the potential for schools to affirm transgender identity.

Case and Meier (2014) found in their study that current curriculum models for preparing school adult educators and counselors in Texas fail to address the needs of gender non-conforming youth and appropriate ally behavior. They concluded that the lack of training on transgender youth leaves educators unprepared to support this marginalized community.

A comprehensive review of 39 studies conducted in various countries between 1995 and 2023 has found strong evidence linking peer victimization based on sexual orientation and gender identity to feelings of not belonging in school and higher levels of depression. This type of victimization is also associated with negative effects on educational progress, traumatic stress, and the use of alcohol and substances. Wallace and Russell (2013) argue that peer victimization can lead to shame becoming a dominant aspect of a gender-nonconforming child's mental health, potentially leading to a greater vulnerability to shame, a shame-based identity, and depression later in life. However, Jones (2013) cautions that portraying GLBTIQ students as at-risk victims, which are a prevalent view in Western research, may have negative consequences on the actual experiences of these students. This caution also applies to textbooks, as Jennings and Macgillivray's (2011) analysis reveals that they often reinforce hetero-normativity and perpetuate a victim narrative.

The school plays a vital role in the lives of transgender children because it is where they first become aware of their gender identity. According to Brill and Pepper (2008), the school environment can either support or harm a child's sense of self. It is important for schools to be inclusive and create a safe space where bullying and teasing are not tolerated, and where children are taught to respect and appreciate differences. This is especially important for gender variant and transgender children who often face discrimination. Transgender individuals often share experiences of social exclusion during their school years, and this can lead to ongoing marginalization in adulthood. For example, the 2011 Census data shows that a large percentage of transgender individuals in the workforce are unemployed or working in low-wage jobs. However, research also suggests that an inclusive curriculum and supportive teachers can make a difference in challenging hetero-normativity and helping transgender children navigate the challenges they face in and outside of school (DePalma, 2013; Nelson, 1999; Takács, 2006).

Education plays a crucial role in building a developed society. It is important for all individuals, including transgender individuals, to have access to education in a safe and supportive environment. However, transgender students often face various challenges such as discrimination and harassment from their peers and teachers, which can lead to physical and psychological harm. As a result, many transgender students feel uncomfortable in their educational settings and may even choose to discontinue their education. It is important to note that transgender individuals have legal protection against such discrimination, although they may be unaware of this fact. This paper aims to analyze the issues faced by transgender students in their educational institutes and critically examine the high dropout rates among transgender students, identifying its underlying causes.

Education is the key to transforming the world, promoting civilization and modernization. It has the power to inspire creativity and improve quality of life. The school acts as a crucial agent of socialization, equipping individuals with knowledge and self-sufficiency. The knowledge gained in school greatly impacts daily life. Therefore, schooling is important for everyone. According to the different survey, 43.3% of the transgender attended regular schooling after disclosing their identity, while 56.7% did not. The majority of those who did not attend regular schooling cited harassment from peers and staff, including assault, teasing, and verbal and physical abuse. The fear of revealing their identity made them feel shy and led them to drop out of school. They also had higher dropout rates compared to other students due to concerns about their safety.

Approximately 54.9 percent of participants chose not to pursue further education after coming out as transgender, feeling too self-conscious about their newly identified identity. Some even faced mental distress that made them fearful of attending school. On the other hand, 45.1 percent of transgender decided to continue their education once they embraced their transgender identity. These individuals were fortunate to have accepting parents who encouraged their pursuit of higher education. Interestingly, there were transgender who identified as transgender but preferred to keep their identity hidden during their schooling years. However, thanks to a Delhi-based NGO that supports transgender individuals, those who were rejected by their families found refuge and assistance in continuing their education. Some transgender shared that their parents and teachers played a crucial role in helping them complete high school. Furthermore, certain participants managed to pursue education outside of traditional school settings as they obtained permission from school authorities for alternative methods of learning.

55.5% of the transgender reported being allowed to continue their education by school authorities or educational institutions. However, some transgender expressed hesitation and fear about attending school due to their identity. In Delhi, there are no restrictions for transgender in schools, and most educational institutions accept them. If transgender encounter any issues at school, NGOs working for transgender individuals step in to address and rectify the problem. On the other hand, studies shows that 44.5% of the transgender are not permitted to continue their education by school authorities or educational institutions. In certain schools, educators and administrators are taking the lead in fostering inclusivity. However, some educational institutions have noticed a decrease in academic admissions due to transgender students, which has made some parents concerned about their children's well-being and behavior, resulting in transgender being denied the opportunity to continue their studies.

One another study shows that 45.8 percent were denied access to educational institutions solely because they

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

identified as transgender. These individuals experienced mistreatment such as teasing from both students and staff at school. As a result, they faced various types of harassment, including physical and verbal abuse, which led them to drop out of school. Furthermore, they were excluded from educational institutions due to their transgender identity. Additionally, a portion of these transgender turned to drug use, which further resulted in their rejection from educational institutions. Studies also shows that about 54.2 percent of the transgender disclosed that their educational opportunities were denied solely based on their transgender identity. Some educational institutions refuse to accept transgender individuals, citing potential disturbance to other students and a decrease in admissions as their reasons.

According to one another study, 34 percent of participants admitted that they had experienced ridicule from school children and college students. Transgender individuals, who deviate from societal expectations of male and female appearance and behavior, are often the target of such mockery due to their non-conforming identities. In India, transgender people are officially recognized as the third gender by the Constitution. Additionally, some transgender individuals also cross-dress, further subjecting them to public teasing. In this particular case, it was school children and college students who were observed ridiculing the survey transgender.

30.4% of transgender reported that school children and college students were staring at them in a disrespectful way. Some individuals who identify as transgender are cross dressers. This can lead to mistreatment from school children and college students. 23.7% of transgender stated that school children and college students looked at them with fear.

Transgender individuals may dress and behave in a way that is typically associated with women, but their appearance and voice may still be masculine. 11.9% of transgender said that school children and college students had no reaction when looking at them. Some students are aware of transgender individuals, while others show indifference. Findings indicate at what age transgender identified them as transgender and whether they continued their education after coming out. 28.7% of transgender identified as transgender between the ages of 11-15 and decided to continue their education. This age group is crucial for personal development, as most children are eager to learn new things. Similarly, transgender individuals become aware of their identity at this age and desire to pursue education. Some transgender value education, while others choose to hide their identity due to fear and shyness. Some parents are accepting and supportive of their child's education. 16.4% of transgender discovered their transgender identity between the ages of 16-20 and decided to continue their education.

Certain schools and educational institutions are accepting of transgender individuals, which encourage them to continue their education. Conversely, 30.8% of transgender who identified as transgender between the ages of 16-20 did not continue their education. They may feel shy or face harassment, causing them to drop out of school. Transgender individuals do not voluntarily choose to leave school, but are forced to due to discrimination and abuse. Consequently, these transgender decided to cease their education.

Suggestions

The transgender community faces significant marginalization and vulnerability, particularly in education and employment. By raising awareness and implementing appropriate laws, we can eliminate stigma and discrimination and ensure transgender individuals have equal access to education, from early stages all the way to higher levels.

✓ Equal access to educational opportunities must be

ensured without discrimination, and affirmative actions should be taken to reduce stigma associated with the community.

- ✓ Schools and colleges should play a supportive role in these situations, and society, including parents, teachers, and students, need to be educated and sensitized.
- ✓ The dropout of transgender individuals from schools should not be seen as a choice but as a result of discrimination and abuse.
- ✓ There may be a need to review and reform structural constraints, legal procedures, and policies that hinder access to mainstream education.
- ✓ Transgender children must be kept safe in educational institutions, as they often face physical, mental, and emotional violence that forces them to leave.
- ✓ Fulfilling the obligations of the Right to Education Act is crucial for improving the educational conditions for the transgender community.
- ✓ There is a dire need for awareness of gender diversity and the protection of transgender youth in hostile school environments.
- ✓ Some schools in Delhi are taking steps to educate their students and staff by inviting transgender speakers and counselors.
- ✓ Governments should create a conducive environment for transgender children in educational institutions.
- ✓ Schools must understand and adhere to their responsibilities under the Equality Act (2010), including providing sufficient training on all protected characteristics, including those relating to transgender and gender variant children. The government should consider including training on these topics in the review of initial teacher training.

Notable Points

- 1- The upper House of the Parliament has passed a private members' Bill, which is a rare occurrence in the past five decades. The Bill still needs to be passed in the Lok Sabha to become an Act, but the government has stated that they will introduce a new Bill without the impractical clauses.
- 2- Although the judgment has been analyzed critically, there are concerns about the inconsistent and varied interpretations and implementation of the judgment (Dutta, 2014).
- 3- The Q in LGBTQ can also stand for Queer, while some authors include the I to represent Intersexed individuals in the acronym LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender). These acronyms are retained as such in this section.
- 4- Smith uses the term to refer to individuals who identify as homo- or bi-sexual, but it can also be used more broadly to describe anything that challenges or engages with hetero/gender normativity (DePalma, 2013).

CONCLUSION

No one has a clear understanding of what it means to be transgender, and sensitization alone is not enough to bring about acceptance. Education is necessary for people to accept and embrace change. In India, it is important to acknowledge and respect the equal rights and privileges of every individual and adopt a "live and let live" policy. Transgender individuals deserve the right to equality as outlined in Article 14, and discrimination based on religion, caste, sex, or place of birth, as prohibited in Article 15, should not be tolerated. Transgender individuals often face discrimination and harassment in educational settings, which leads to school dropouts. Harassment can take various forms, including verbal, physical, and sexual abuse. Schools should address the specific needs of transgender individuals and work towards protecting them based on their actual or perceived sexual orientation. Research shows that many transgender students face hostile environments in schools, which ultimately leads to their exclusion and denies them the opportunity to receive an education. When transgender

students feel unsafe and unwelcome, they are less likely to attend school and more likely to drop out.

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