



EMPOWERMENT OF TRANSGENDER YOUTHS: BREAKING BARRIERS, EMBRACING DIVERSITY

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Abstract

This paper explores the critical topic of empowering transgender youths, highlighting the challenges they face and the initiatives aimed at fostering their self-acceptance, inclusion, and overall well-being. Transgender youths often experience higher rates of discrimination, stigma, and mental health struggles, making empowerment efforts crucial in supporting their journey towards self-realization and societal acceptance.

This paper delves into various aspects of empowerment, including education, healthcare, legal rights, and social support networks. It emphasizes the significance of creating safe and affirming spaces where transgender youths can freely express their identity and thrive without fear of judgment or prejudice.

It also aims to shed light on the experiences of transgender youth, exploring the complexities and struggles they encounter in various aspects of their lives. It will also highlight the significance of creating an inclusive and affirming environment that fosters their self-esteem, resilience, and social integration.

Furthermore, the paper discusses the role of allies, educational institutions, policymakers, and the broader community in advocating for transgender youth rights and promoting positive social change. By fostering a more inclusive and understanding environment, transgender youths are enabled to reach their full potential, contributing meaningfully to society and paving the way for a more tolerant and diverse future.

This paper will also explore the challenges and triumphs of transgender youth, the initiatives supporting their empowerment, and the importance of fostering a society that embraces and uplifts them for who they are. Through this lens, we hope to contribute to a broader conversation on how to create a more inclusive and equitable future for all transgender youth.

Keywords: transgender youths, empowerment, inclusion, acceptance, discrimination, mental health, social support, legal rights, societal change.

Introduction

Transgender youth represent a resilient and diverse group of individuals who navigate a unique journey of self-discovery and identity development. As young people who identify with a gender that differs from their assigned sex at birth, they face a multitude of challenges, including societal stigma, discrimination, and limited access to resources and support systems. Understanding and addressing the specific needs of transgender youth is essential to promote their well-being, mental health, and overall empowerment.

History of transgender individuals

The history of transgender individuals dates back thousands of years and spans across various cultures and societies. While the understanding and acceptance of transgender people have evolved over time, transgender individuals have always existed and played significant roles in shaping history. Here are some key milestones and historical points in the history of transgender individuals:

Ancient Cultures: According to some sources of literature the mention of transgenders dates back to 3000 B.C. with the story of Shikhandini, who was the first born of King Drupad. Shikhandini in exchange for her penance was granted a boon by Yaksha in order to extract her vengeance from Bhishma.

Many ancient civilizations, such as the Sumerians, Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans, had diverse gender expressions and recognized the existence of gender identities beyond the binary. Some historical texts and artworks depict individuals who may have been transgender or gender-nonconforming.

Medieval and Renaissance Periods: Some medieval and Renaissance societies had individuals who lived as a different gender than the one assigned at birth. For example, "female husbands" were documented in Europe, where assigned-female individuals lived as men and sometimes married women.

Colonial America: Native American cultures often recognized the existence of Two-Spirit individuals, who held a respected and sacred role in their communities, embodying both masculine and feminine qualities. However, European colonization brought with it Western gender norms, leading to increased marginalization of Two-Spirit people.

20th Century: The 20th century witnessed a mix of advancements and challenges for transgender individuals. The medical field began to explore gender-affirming treatments, but transgender individuals faced significant stigma and discrimination.

1950s-1960s: Transgender individuals like Christine Jorgensen and Lili Elbe gained public attention for undergoing gender-affirming surgeries, bringing transgender issues into the spotlight.

Stonewall Riots: The Stonewall Riots in 1969 marked a pivotal moment in the LGBTQ+ rights movement, including the rights of transgender individuals. The uprising at the Stonewall Inn in New York City against police raids fueled the modern LGBTQ+ rights movement.

1980s-1990s: The AIDS epidemic disproportionately affected the LGBTQ+ community, including transgender individuals. Activism during this period focused on healthcare access, fighting discrimination, and advocating for LGBTQ+ rights.

21st Century: The 21st century saw increased visibility and acceptance for transgender individuals, with progress in legal recognition, healthcare access, and societal understanding. Many countries began to enact laws protecting transgender rights.

Transgender Rights Movements: Transgender rights movements gained momentum worldwide, advocating for legal protections, gender-affirming healthcare, and societal acceptance.

Transgender Awareness: Increasing awareness through media, education, and advocacy has helped dispel myths and promote understanding about transgender identities.

Despite these advancements, transgender individuals continue to face discrimination, violence, and challenges in various parts of the world. The fight for transgender rights and acceptance remains ongoing, with many individuals and organizations working tirelessly to create a more inclusive and equitable society for All gender identities.

Transgender youths encounter a range of unique experiences and challenges as they navigate their gender identity. These experiences can significantly impact their well-being and overall development. Here are **some of the key experiences faced by transgender youths:**

- **Gender Dysphoria:** Many transgender youths experience gender dysphoria; a distressing disconnects between their gender identity and their assigned sex at birth. This can lead to emotional struggles, anxiety, and depression.
- **Stigma and Discrimination:** Transgender youths often face discrimination, bullying, and harassment from peers, adults, and institutions. This can occur in schools, public spaces, and even within their families, leading to feelings of isolation and rejection.
- **Mental Health Struggles:** Due to the social and emotional challenges they encounter, transgender youths are at a higher risk of mental health issues, such as anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation.
- **Lack of Acceptance:** Many transgender youths experience rejection from family members, which can lead to homelessness and a lack of support networks. In extension all these factors can push any individual towards criminal activities.
- **Educational Barriers:** Transgender youths may encounter difficulties in educational settings due to bullying or lack of understanding from educators and classmates. This can affect their academic performance and motivation to continue their education.
- **Access to Healthcare:** Access to transgender-affirming healthcare can be limited, making it challenging for transgender youths to access gender-affirming treatments and support for their physical and mental health needs.
- **Legal Protections:** Legal recognition and protection of transgender rights can vary depending on the region, leading to unequal access to essential services and opportunities.

- **Self-Discovery and Identity Development:** Transgender youths often go through a process of self-discovery and identity development. This journey can be complex, as they navigate societal expectations and norms while embracing their authentic selves.
- **Coming Out:** The process of coming out as transgender can be emotionally taxing and challenging, as youths fear potential negative reactions and rejection from loved ones.

Despite the many challenges they face, transgender youths also demonstrate remarkable resilience and strength. When provided with supportive environments, acceptance, and access to affirming resources, they can thrive and contribute positively to their communities and society as a whole. Understanding their experiences and advocating for their rights is crucial in creating a more inclusive and equitable world for transgender youths.

Creating safe and affirming spaces for transgender individuals is crucial for several reasons:

- **Mental Health and Well-being:** Transgender people often face high levels of discrimination, stigma, and violence, which can lead to significant mental health challenges, including anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation. Safe spaces provide a sanctuary where they can express their identity without fear, which is essential for their mental and emotional well-being.
- **Personal Growth and Empowerment:** In a supportive environment, transgender individuals are more likely to explore and affirm their identity, leading to greater self-acceptance and confidence. This empowerment can translate into better opportunities for personal and professional growth.
- **Community and Support Networks:** Safe spaces foster a sense of community and belonging, which is particularly important for those who might be isolated or estranged from their families or previous social circles. These networks can offer practical support, friendship, and a shared understanding of challenges and triumphs.
- **Educational and Advocacy Opportunities:** Affirming spaces can serve as hubs for education about transgender issues, promoting awareness and understanding among allies and the broader community. They also provide a platform for advocacy, helping to advance rights and protections for transgender individuals.
- **Reduction of Violence and Discrimination:** When transgender individuals have safe places to express themselves, it reduces their exposure to hostile environments where they might face violence or harassment. This, in turn, can decrease the overall rates of violence and discrimination they experience.
- **Visibility and Representation:** Safe spaces contribute to the visibility of transgender people, helping to normalize transgender identities in society. This increased visibility can lead to greater acceptance and integration of transgender people into all aspects of life.

In essence, creating and maintaining safe and affirming spaces for transgender individuals is fundamental to fostering an inclusive society where everyone can thrive without fear of judgment or harm.

Role of allies, educational institutions, policy makers in advocating transgenders rights and promoting positive social change:

Allies, educational institutions, and policymakers play pivotal roles in advocating for transgender rights and promoting positive social change. Here's how each group can contribute:

Allies

- **Education and Awareness:** Allies can educate themselves about transgender issues and experiences, helping to dismantle stereotypes and misinformation.
- **Advocacy:** By speaking out against discrimination and supporting trans-inclusive policies, allies amplify transgender voices and issues.
- **Support Networks:** Allies can provide emotional and practical support to transgender individuals, helping them navigate challenges in various settings, from personal relationships to professional environments.
- **Visibility and Representation:** Allies can use their platforms to increase visibility for transgender issues, promoting acceptance and understanding within their communities.

Educational Institutions

- **Inclusive Policies:** Implementing policies that protect transgender students, such as anti-bullying measures and inclusive bathroom policies, helps create a safer environment.
- **Curriculum Changes:** Integrating transgender issues into the curriculum fosters understanding and acceptance among all students.
- **Support Services:** Offering counselling and support groups specifically for transgender students provides crucial resources for their mental health and well-being.
- **Training and Development:** Providing training for staff and faculty on transgender issues ensures a supportive and knowledgeable environment for all students.

Policymakers

- **Legal Protections:** Enacting and enforcing anti-discrimination laws that protect transgender individuals in employment, housing, healthcare, and public accommodations is critical.
- **Healthcare Access:** Ensuring access to gender-affirming healthcare, including hormone therapy and surgeries, as well as mental health services.
- **Data Collection and Research:** Supporting research on transgender issues to inform policy decisions and track the effectiveness of implemented measures.
- **Public Awareness Campaigns:** Funding and promoting campaigns that raise awareness about transgender rights and issues to foster a more inclusive society.

Collective Impact

- **Intersectional Approach:** Recognizing and addressing the varied experiences of transgender individuals, especially those who belong to other marginalized groups, such as people of colour or those with disabilities.
- **Collaboration and Partnership:** Working together across sectors—government, private, and non-profit—to create comprehensive strategies for inclusion and support.
- **Accountability and Evaluation:** Continuously assessing the effectiveness of policies and initiatives to ensure they meet the needs of transgender individuals and make necessary adjustments.

By actively engaging in these roles, allies, educational institutions, and policymakers can drive meaningful progress toward equality and social acceptance for transgender individuals, fostering a more inclusive and just society.

Padmini Prakash -India's First Transgender News Anchor: A case study

Padmini Prakash is a pioneering transgender individual from India who made history as the country's first transgender television news anchor. Her journey to breaking barriers and achieving success in the media industry showcases the challenges faced by transgender individuals in India and highlights the importance of inclusion and representation.

Born in 1971 in Tamil Nadu, India, Padmini Prakash realized her gender identity at a young age and faced societal prejudice and discrimination. Like many transgender individuals in India, she endured social stigma, family rejection, and struggled to access education and employment opportunities.

Padmini's journey was far from easy. In a society with limited understanding of transgender issues, she faced discrimination and rejection while pursuing her dreams. However, she remained resilient, determined to overcome societal norms and fulfill her ambitions.

Padmini's journey towards self-acceptance was a process that involved coming to terms with her identity and finding the courage to embrace it openly. Despite the challenges, she decided to undergo gender-affirming surgery, marking a significant milestone in her journey towards living as her authentic self.

In 2014, Padmini was offered a position as a television news anchor at the Tamil news channel "Lotus TV." This opportunity was groundbreaking as it marked the first time a transgender individual was hired as a news anchor in India. Her appointment garnered significant media attention and brought transgender issues to the forefront of public discourse.

As India's first transgender news anchor, Padmini used her platform to advocate for transgender rights, inclusion, and acceptance. She raised awareness about the challenges faced by the transgender community in India and encouraged societal dialogue on the need for greater understanding and empathy.

Padmini's achievements inspired many in the LGBTQ+ community and beyond, providing hope for those struggling with identity and acceptance. Her success challenged existing prejudices and contributed to a more inclusive narrative for transgender individuals in India.

Padmini Prakash's story exemplifies the resilience and strength of transgender individuals in India, who often navigate a challenging path towards acceptance and empowerment. Her groundbreaking role as India's first transgender news anchor has contributed significantly to increasing visibility and understanding of transgender issues. Padmini's journey serves as an inspiration for continued advocacy and efforts to create a more inclusive and accepting society for all individuals, regardless of their gender identity.

There are enormous examples other than Padmini Prakash who have inspired significant change in how the society functions. Joyita Mondal, India's first transgender Judge happens to be on such individual. From being starved and begging on the streets to completing her law degree through correspondence, her life is nothing less than an inspiration for thousands like her. Gauri Shindi who shot to limelight by way of a web series showcasing her role in the third gender legal recognition, is another such individual.

The list can go long but the point in of all such inspiring stories is that the Right to Live and Thrive in any society should not be confined to the gender of an individual. The merit of the individual should decide where they land up in the society.

By acknowledging the lived experiences of transgender youth, we can identify areas where interventions and policy changes are needed to ensure they have equal opportunities to lead fulfilling lives. Furthermore, by promoting dialogue and understanding, we can contribute to a more accepting and compassionate society that respects and celebrates the diversity of gender identities.

Conclusion

Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment has formulated a scheme "SMILE - Support for Marginalized Individuals for Livelihood and Enterprise", which includes sub scheme: 'Comprehensive Rehabilitation for Welfare of Transgender Persons'. Standing Finance Committee has approved the scheme on 30.11.2021. The focus of the sub-scheme is on rehabilitation, provision of medical facilities and intervention, counselling, education, skill development, economic linkages to the transgender persons. Skill development training to the Transgender beneficiaries is also being conducted through PM-DAKSH - A skill development scheme of the Ministry. On 21st Aug, 2020, National Council for Transgender Persons was constituted to advise Government on policies, programmes, legislation and projects with respect to transgender persons. In all fairness in order to be more forthcoming and welcoming towards trans people, we first need to educate people in all strata of the society that being trans is not a disease. It is a part of biology that no individual has control over. For any of the above-mentioned schemes to create even the smallest of difference it is important for the people of the society to welcome these changes with open arms instead of cynical scepticism and insecurity. Transpeople for centuries have lived a life of social isolation and in order of us to progress as a nation, every individual in this society irrespective of their genders needs to feel welcomed and included in this journey.

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