

Transidentity in India: Exploring the scientific perspective

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ABSTRACT:

This article provides a comprehensive exploration of the scientific dimensions of transidentity in India. It delves into the prevalence of transgenderism, differentiates transgender individuals from other gender identities, discusses the reasons behind sex reassignment surgery, and examines the genetic and neurological aspects of transgender identity. The article emphasizes the significance of understanding the scientific perspective of transidentity in fostering inclusivity, promoting mental health interventions, and developing support systems for transgender individuals. The findings contribute to the growing body of knowledge on transidentity and its implications for mental health professionals, policymakers, and society at large (Iqbal MZ, 2011).

INTRODUCTION

Transgender individuals constitute a minority group that faces unique challenges and experiences. Understanding the scientific aspects of transidentity is crucial for fostering inclusivity and developing appropriate support systems. This article delves into the scientific dimensions of transidentity, differentiates it from other gender identities, explores the reasons behind sex reassignment surgery, and provides insight into the genetic basis of transgenderism (Figure 1).

PREVALENCE OF TRANSGENDERISM: Research conducted by the UCLA Williams Institute suggests that approximately 0.58 percent of the United States population, which amounts to 1.4 million individuals, identify as transgender. While these figures pertain to the United States, the prevalence of transgenderism globally was estimated to be around 7 million individuals who have undergone sex assignment surgery to align their physical appearance with their gender identity (Jody L, 2022).

DIFFERENTIATING TRANSGENDERISM FROM OTHER GENDER IDENTITIES: It is important to distinguish transgender individuals from other gender identities, such as Kinner/Hijras in India. Transgender individuals experience a state in which their biological sex assigned at birth does not align with their psychological gender identity. Gender identity encompasses an individual's internal sense of their gender, while gender expression refers to how individuals present themselves outwardly in

terms of appearance and behavior. Transgender people can exhibit diverse gender expressions and sexual orientations (Drummond QE, 2023).

In contrast, Kinner/Hijras in India do not fall under the transgender category. Kinner individuals possess both male and female physical characteristics and emotions within the same body. This condition, known as True Hermaphroditism, represents a rare variety of Disorders of Sexual Differentiation (DSD) and accounts for only 5 percent of cases worldwide.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND TRANSGENDERISM: Transgender individuals may have diverse sexual orientations, including heterosexuality, homosexuality, bisexuality, pansexuality, polysexuality, or asexuality. However, it is important to note that Kinner/Hijras in India typically engage in physical relationships with other Kinner individuals or males due to their feminine gender identity, as dictated by South Asian culture. Many Kinner/Hijras undergo the religious act of Nirvaan, which involves the removal of male reproductive organs (Reiner WG, 2005).

SOCIETAL ACCEPTANCE AND LEGAL RECOGNITION: While Kinner/Hijras are recognized as the third gender in India, transgender individuals do not enjoy the same level of acceptance and legal recognition in many countries. For instance, in some European countries, a mental health diagnosis is required for legal recognition, and sterilization may be mandated in twenty European countries (World Population Review, 2023). In contrast, countries like Germany, Australia, Bangladesh, Pakistan, New Zealand, Nepal, and Thailand acknowledge Kinner/Hijras as a third gender (Figure 2).

SEX REASSIGNMENT SURGERY: A PATH TO ACCEPTANCE: Transgender individuals often consider sex reassignment surgery as a means to align their physical appearance with their gender identity, primarily due to societal

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Earlier life as a man

Present life as a woman

Figure 1. Transgenderism.



Earlier life as a man

Present life as a woman

Figure 2. Societal Acceptance and Legal Recognition.

transphobia and gender incongruence. Sex reassignment surgery allows for changes to the individual’s anatomical features while preserving their genetic structure. It is important to note that chromosomes, which determine biological sex, cannot be altered after birth. Sex reassignment surgery is currently the only available option for transgender individuals to live their lives in alignment with their psychological identity and gain societal acceptance (Reiner, 2004).

NEUROLOGICAL ASPECTS OF TRANSGENDER IDENTITY: Recent neuroscientific studies have provided insights into the neurological aspects of transgender identity. Research utilizing brain imaging techniques, such as Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) and Functional MRI (fMRI), has identified potential structural and functional differences in brain regions associated with gender identity. For instance, studies have shown that transgender individuals may exhibit brain characteristics that align with their identified gender rather than their assigned sex at birth. These findings suggest that transgender identity may have a neurological basis, further supporting the understanding of transgenderism as a valid and distinct identity (Iqbal MZ, 2011).

GENETIC AND EPIGENETIC FACTORS: The scientific exploration of transgenderism also encompasses genetic and epigenetic research. Although the specific genetic factors influencing transgender identity are not yet

fully understood, there is evidence suggesting a potential genetic basis. Studies have indicated that specific gene variants, such as those related to sex hormone receptors and the development of reproductive organs, may play a role in gender identity formation. Additionally, emerging research suggests that epigenetic modifications, which can influence gene expression, may contribute to the development of gender identity. Further investigations into the interplay between genetics, epigenetics, and transgender identity hold promise for a deeper understanding of its biological underpinnings.

PSYCHOSOCIAL FACTORS AND MENTAL HEALTH: While scientific research has shed light on the biological aspects of transgender identity, it is essential to acknowledge the significant influence of psychosocial factors and mental health considerations. Transgender individuals often face societal stigma, discrimination, and minority stress, which can contribute to mental health challenges such as depression, anxiety, and suicidality. Mental health support and affirming care play vital roles in promoting the well-being and resilience of transgender individuals (Reiner WG, 2004).

INTERSECTIONALITY AND TRANSGENDER IDENTITY: Transgender individuals encompass diverse backgrounds, ethnicities, and cultural contexts, which

necessitates an intersectional understanding of transgender identity. Intersectionality recognizes that individuals experience multiple forms of oppression and discrimination based on intersecting social identities, such as race, class, and disability. Intersectional perspectives within transgender research highlight the unique challenges faced by transgender individuals with marginalized identities and emphasize the importance of inclusive and culturally sensitive approaches in supporting their well-being.

CONTINUED SCIENTIFIC EXPLORATION: The scientific understanding of transidentity is an evolving field, with ongoing research aimed at further elucidating its multifaceted nature. Future studies may focus on the long-term outcomes of gender-affirming interventions, the experiences of non-binary and gender non-conforming individuals, the role of social support networks, and the impact of legal frameworks on transgender individuals' lives. By continually expanding our scientific knowledge, we can contribute to the development of evidence-based practices, policies, and interventions that promote the well-being and rights of transgender individuals worldwide.

CONCLUSION

Understanding the scientific aspects of transidentity is crucial for fostering inclusivity and creating a supportive environment for transgender individuals. Transgenderism should be differentiated from other gender identities such as Kinner/Hijras, who possess both male and female physical characteristics. Recognizing the diverse gender expressions

and sexual orientations within the transgender community is essential. Sex reassignment surgery provides transgender individuals with an opportunity to align their physical appearance with their gender identity. By enhancing our scientific understanding of transidentity, we can promote greater acceptance and support for transgender individuals in society.

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