

Invisible Struggles: Workplace Discrimination and Violence Against Transgender Individuals and Impact on Their Mental Health in Kolkata

Dr. Anita Awasthi¹, Ms. Mousumi Baskey², Ms. Tejaswi Sharma³, Dr. Urvashi⁴, Dr. Abhishek Kumar Mishra⁵, Prof. Sandeep Kumar Singh^{6*}

¹Assistant Professor, Department of Social Work, Chhatrapati Shahu Ji Maharaj University, Kanpur, India,
email: anitaawasthi@gmail.com, Orchid ID: 0009-0007-2310-264X

² Research Scholar, Department of Lifelong Learning & Extension, Chhatrapati Shahu ji Maharaj University, Kanpur, India.
Email: mbaskei109@gmail.com, Orchid ID: 0009-0009-2123-9217

³ Research Scholar, Department of Social Work, Chhatrapati Shahu Ji Maharaj University, Kanpur, India.
Email: Sharmatejaswi19@gmail.com, Orchid ID: 0009-0003-3813-4514

⁴ Assistant Professor, Department of Social Work, Chhatrapati Shahu Ji Maharaj University, Kanpur, India.
Email: urvashi@csjmu.ac.in, Orchid ID:

⁵Assistant Professor, Department of lifelong learning and Extension, Chhatrapati Shahu Ji Maharaj University, Kanpur, India. Email: abhidu@hotmail.com, ORCID ID-0009-0004-5396-6789

^{6*}Professor, Faculty of Advanced Studies of Social Sciences, Chhatrapati Shahu Ji Maharaj University, Kanpur, India.
Email: drsandeepmsw@gmail.com, Orchid ID: 0009-0003-3813-4514

*Corresponding author details: Sandeep Kumar Singh

*Professor & Dean, Faculty of Advanced Studies of Social Science, Chhatrapati Shahu Ji Maharaj University, Kanpur, India. email: drsandeepmsw@gmail.com.

ABSTRACT

In Kolkata and throughout India, transgender people experience a great deal of harassment and discrimination at work. Their work prospects and general well-being are impacted by this discrimination, which has its roots in social stigma and a dearth of thorough legal protections. In Kolkata, transgender people experience many kinds of discriminatory practices at work, such as sexual harassment, harassment, and prejudice. The absence of supportive organisational cultures and trans-inclusive non-discrimination rules makes these difficulties worse. Discrimination in the workplace pushes them to choose informal employment sectors like sex work, badhai, begging etc. This research paper focuses on what kind of discrimination and violence they have faced in their workplace. What are the key factors in choosing an informal work sector? How does this harassment impact their mental well-being health? This study is based on primary and secondary data. The data was collected from different parts of Kolkata city, using snowball and purposive sampling methods. In conclusion, although transgender rights have been recognised by Indian law, there are still a lot of loopholes in how these rights are applied, especially in the workplace. To solve these problems, extensive policy reforms, improved application of current legislation, and the development of welcoming workplace cultures that value and assist transgender workers are all necessary.

Keywords: *Transgender, Mental health, Discrimination, Violence.*

How to Cite: Anita Awasthi, Ms. Mousumi Baskey, Ms. Tejaswi Sharma, Urvashi, Abhishek Kumar Mishra, Sandeep Kumar Singh., (2025) Invisible Struggles: Workplace Discrimination and Violence Against Transgender Individuals and Impact on Their Mental Health in Kolkata, *Journal of Carcinogenesis*, Vol.24, No.6s, 312-317.

1. INTRODUCTION

Transgenders in India, also known as hijras, kinnars, or aravanis, have a centuries-long history and cultural presence. They are recognized as a third gender in Indian society and have been part of many cultural and religious practices. In 2014, the Supreme Court of India legally established transgenders as a third gender, thereby giving them fundamental rights and legal protection. This landmark judgment paved the way for further legislation to put an end to discrimination and provide equality. In India, transgender people have lived steeped in co-existing marginal identities and social inequality; they face recurring workplace discrimination and violence. Research shows that transgender persons face extensive stigma, harassment, and abuse in numerous domains, and employment is one such area (Ganju & Saggurti, 2017). This discrimination occurs in a variety of ways, including: barriers to acquiring and being promoted in jobs, lack of social support, policing of gender, and threats to personal safety, as well as the absence of inclusive policies (Göksel, 2024). This discrimination can take shape in the form of being unable to obtain or retain a job, lack of social support, gender policing, threat to personal safety, and lack of inclusive policies (Mizock et al., 2018). Ironically, in a country long touted as friendly to diverse sexualities and gender expressions, a 2016 study commissioned by the International Labour Organization found that LGBT workers in Thailand also felt heavy stigma and discrimination (Suriyasarn, 2016). This also indicates that discrimination against transgender individuals in the workplace is not peculiar to India. In short, instances of workplace discrimination and violence against transgender individuals are rooted in a larger framework of systemic oppression in India. These experiences lead to a higher vulnerability to HIV, mental health issues, and social isolation (Ganju & Saggurti, 2017; Gomes De Jesus et al., 2020). Kolkata, once known as Calcutta, is the capital of West Bengal. It is located on the east bank of the Hooghly River, a cosmopolitan city and an intriguing blend of colonial elegance, cultural diversity, intellectual concentration, and everyday confusion. According to the 2011 census, the transgender population of India is 4.8 million, and West Bengal stands in 5th position in terms of population and literacy rate of trans 58.83 %. As Kolkata is the capital of West Bengal, most of the transgender come to Kolkata for their bread and butter. This research paper is targeted to those who identify themselves as transgender, and their involvement in different working sectors.

The second main aspect of this paper is mental health. As we all know, mental health is very important for every individual, but when we talk about the most vulnerable community and their mental illness, everyone wants to keep silent. They have no clue regarding whom they will share their problem. Few community development organisations provide counselling programs in Kolkata, but a very small number of trans people know about this, and a few can not afford the charges of the counselling session. Hence, it resulted in quitting the job and engaging in an informal working culture like Hijra, kharja, challa etc. These are all local terms of working culture. In this study, more than half of the sample size are engaged in hijra profession, that is 53 per cent. 14 per cent of my sample were involved in challa or bagging, 13 per cent were into the kharja or prostitution. Very less, 0.67 per cent of my sample, reported they were in the teaching and medical profession. Moreover, 45 per cent and 10 per cent of my sample agreed they were faced with bullying and sexually abused. Interestingly, the impact of harassment on transgender very awful. 80 per cent of the respondents in my sample said they feel depressed. 90 per cent have body shaming and lower self-esteem, and many more. Thus this study strongly claims that this marginalized community need more focus and support so that they can address their problems fearlessly

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

Experiences of violence and discrimination significantly impact the mental health and well-being of transgender and gender-nonconforming individuals. Studies reveal a high prevalence of discrimination across various settings, including employment (DeSouza et al., 2017), healthcare (Shires & Jaffee, 2015), and social services (Seelman, 2015). This discrimination, often stemming from gender nonconformity (Miller & Grollman, 2015), leads to substantial psychological distress, contributing to health-harming behaviors and mental health issues (Veldhuis et al., 2018). These issues are further compounded by factors such as race, socioeconomic status, and citizenship status, which exacerbate experiences of unequal treatment and violence (Seelman, 2015; Veldhuis et al., 2018). Research emphasizes the urgent need for policy changes, professional training, and robust support systems to mitigate the adverse effects of violence and discrimination on transgender individuals, ultimately improving their mental health outcomes (Thompson et al., 2019).

Objectives:

This study aims to comprehend the obstacles transgender individuals confront in the workplaces of Kolkata through investigating three core facets.

Firstly, examining the essence and extent of violence and bias against this group will provide valuable insight. Secondly, portraying their participation across multiple industries will demonstrate existing opportunities and barriers. Finally, correlating encounters of persecution and unfair treatment to psychological health will underscore the necessary support.

By analysing these interrelated elements, this research seeks a deeper understanding of the issues transgender people face professionally in Kolkata to ultimately work towards more equitable inclusion.

Hypothesis:

1. Transgender individuals in Kolkata experience higher levels of workplace violence and discrimination.
2. Workplace harassment and discrimination have a significant negative impact on the mental health of transgender individuals in Kolkata.

3. METHODOLOGY:

This exploratory research was based on primary and secondary data. A total of 150 data were collected from different parts of Kolkata city. The secondary data was gathered from different articles, research papers, and periodicals etc.

Research Design: The research design for this study was a survey design.

Research participants: The participants of this study were who consider themselves as transwoman based in Kolkata. Who was involved in the various informal and formal working sectors.

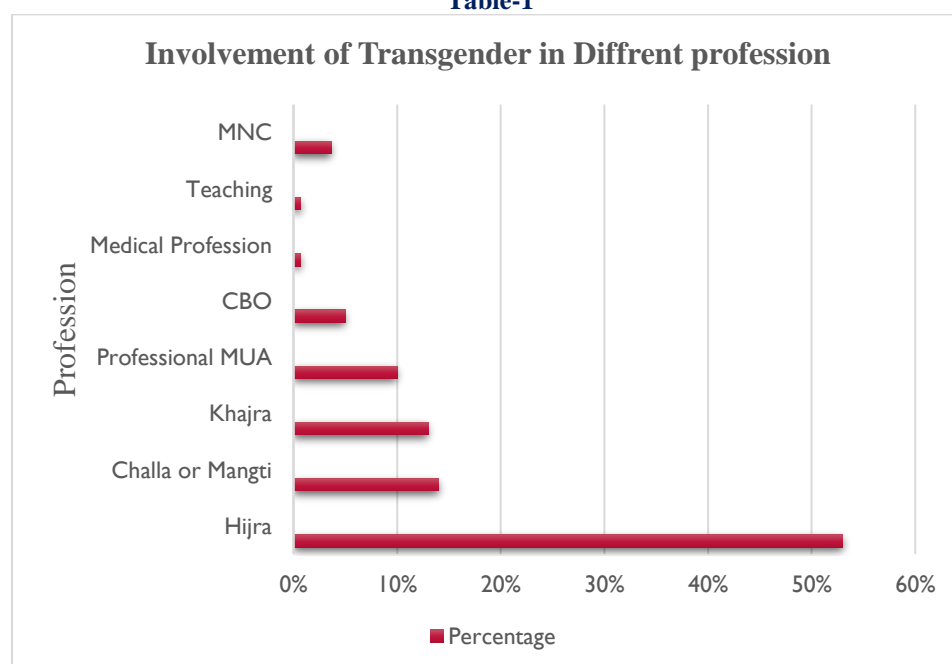
Sampling: Though no relevant data were recorded in any government sector, the snowball sampling method was used primarily. A convincing method was used for those who were ready to give an interview. Purposive sampling was used as this study was conducted purposefully.

Tool: An Open and closed-ended interview schedule was used for this research.

Analysis: The analysis was done by calculating the percentage and represented by using bar graph.

4. RESULT:

Table-1



This table represents the distribution of professions among a sample size of 150 individuals, likely from the transgender community, based on the terminology used (e.g., "Hijra," "Challa or Mangti," "Khajra"). The percentage values indicate the proportion of individuals in each profession.

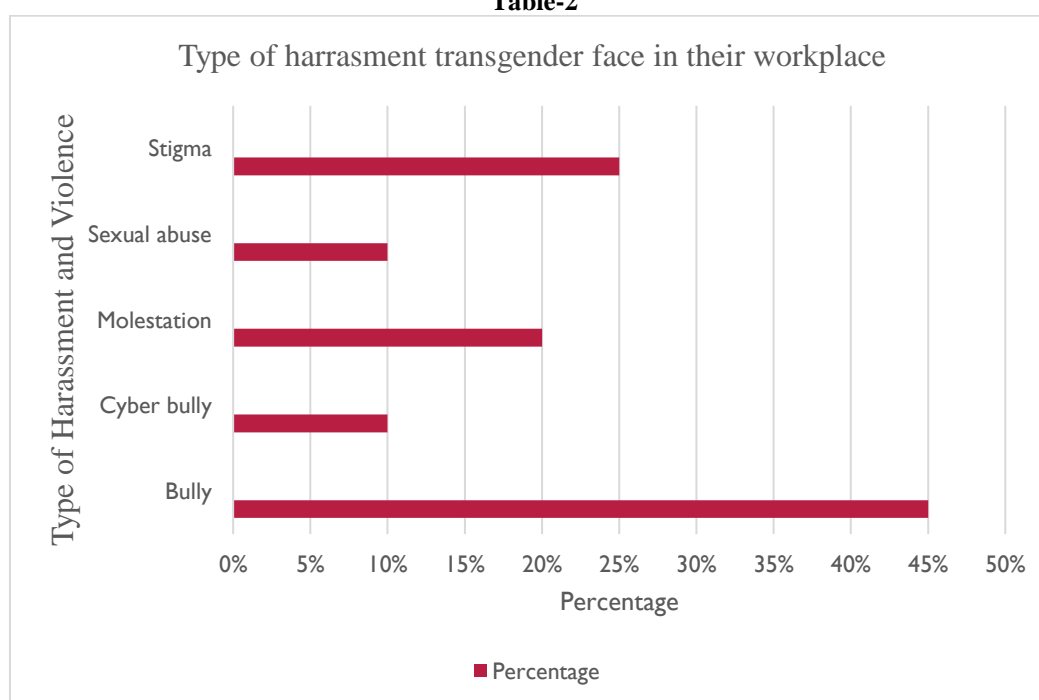
Breakdown of the Table:

Hijra (53%) – The majority (53%) of the individuals in the sample identify with the Hijra community, which traditionally engages in cultural and religious roles, including blessings at ceremonies. **Challa or Mangti (14%)** – About 14% are engaged in Challa or Mangti, which refers to traditional forms of begging, often practiced by marginalized transgender individuals. **Khajra (13%)** – A notable 13% belong to this category, which might refer to a subgroup within the community involved in particular cultural or social activities. **Professional Makeup Artists (MUA) (10%)** – A significant number

(10%) are working as professional makeup artists, showing some representation in the beauty industry. CBO (5%) – 5% of individuals work in Community-Based Organizations (CBOs), likely engaging in social work, activism, and support services for marginalized groups. Medical Profession (0.67%) – Only a very small percentage (0.67%) of transgender individuals in the sample are working in the medical field, indicating potential barriers to education and employment in healthcare. Teaching (0.67%) – Similarly, teaching is a rare profession among the sample, with only 0.67% representation, suggesting limited access to or acceptance in educational institutions as teachers. MNC (3.66%) – Some (3.66%) individuals are employed in Multinational Corporations (MNCs), reflecting a growing but still limited inclusion of transgender individuals in corporate settings.

Key Observations: The majority (53%) of individuals belong to the traditional Hijra community. 14% are engaged in traditional means of livelihood, such as Challa or Mangti (begging). Employment in formal sectors (medical, teaching, corporate jobs) is extremely low, with only 0.67% in the medical and teaching fields. Makeup artistry (10%) and MNC employment (3.66%) show some professional inclusion but remain relatively small. This table highlights the occupational challenges and limited economic opportunities faced by transgender individuals, emphasizing the need for greater inclusion in mainstream professions.

Table-2

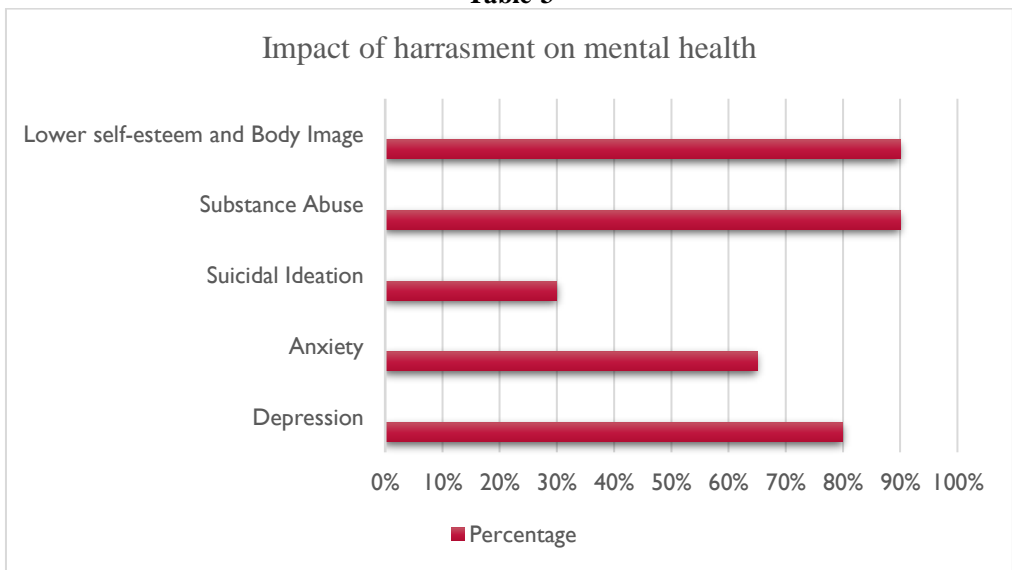


The table lists several forms of harassment and discrimination that transgender people frequently encounter at their jobs. With 45% of respondents claiming they have been verbally abused, teased, excluded, or targeted because of their gender identification, bullying is the most often occurring. About twenty percent have gone through molesting—that is, unwelcome physical contact or inappropriate behaviour. Ten percent of transgender workers experience cyberbullying, which includes things like offensive messages, online shaming, or being outed without permission via emails or office conversations. Another 10% claimed experiencing sexual abuse, which entails significant transgressions including coercion or non-consensual acts.

Apart from these overt forms of abuse, 25% of transgender individuals—about 38 out of the 150 respondents—said they experience stigma at the workplace. This means that simply by who they are, they sometimes experience judgment, exclusion, or mistreatment. Though it may not always be clear or overt, this kind of stigma can be just as damaging, like being passed over for promotions, constantly misgendered, or made to feel as though they belong nowhere.

The statistics taken together show how transgender people still experience several layers of mistreatment in professional environments. It emphasises how urgently more inclusive, polite, and encouraging workplaces where everyone feels safe and valued are needed.

Table-3



The table draws attention to the significant mental health issues that transgender people encounter, many of which are closely related to instances of social stigma, harassment, and discrimination. The data, which comes from a sample of 150 respondents, shows that a sizable portion—roughly 80%- struggles with depression, which impacts about 120 people. This frequently results from ongoing rejection, loneliness, and emotional anguish brought on by unfair treatment in day-to-day interactions. Approximately 98 people, or 65% of the respondents, reported having anxiety, which can be brought on by stressful situations at work, fear of being judged, or unsafe surroundings.

Thirty percent of respondents, or roughly forty-five people, reported having suicidal thoughts, which is a startling indication of the emotional weight that many people bear. The fact that 90% (135 people) reported abusing substances, which can be a coping strategy to dull trauma or emotional pain, is even more alarming. 90% of participants also reported having a negative body image and low self-esteem, which is frequently brought on by body dysphoria, social pressure, and ongoing identity validation.

These findings highlight the critical need for accessible, affirming mental health services as well as broader societal change to create inclusive, respectful environments where transgender people can live with safety, acceptance, and dignity. Overall, the table presents a troubling picture of how profoundly harassment and social stigma affect transgender people's mental health.

5. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY:

This research had a number of limitations that need to be taken into account when interpreting the findings. The sample size of 150 participants was comparatively small, which might have impacted the generalizability of the findings to a wider transgender population. Also, the specificity to Kolkata City restricts the generalizability of the findings to other areas, as experiences can differ in different geographical and cultural settings. The use of snowball and purposive sampling techniques might have introduced bias in participant selection, which could have impacted the representativeness of the sample. The absence of comparison with non-transgender individuals in comparable work settings makes it difficult to ascertain the degree to which observed experiences are specific to transgender individuals. Moreover, there is a likelihood of underreporting experiences due to stigma or fear of consequences, which might have impacted the validity of the data gathered.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS:

Based on the findings of the study, the following can be recommended to minimize the challenges of transgender people in the workplace. The use of inclusive anti-discrimination policies in the workplace is vital to the protection of transgender workers from unfair treatment. Employers' and co-workers' sensitivity training can encourage the development of more inclusive workplaces and empathy. Better access to mental health care services specifically designed for transgender persons is vital to minimize the psychological effects of discrimination in the workplace. The establishment of programs to advance transgender persons in formal employment fields can encourage greater representation and access in these

fields. Legal protection, strengthening and enforcement of transgender rights in the workplace is vital to ensure their protection and equal treatment. Awareness campaigns can encourage the minimization of societal stigma and greater acceptance of transgender persons. Encouragement of further research on transgender experiences in various work environments in India will encourage a better understanding of the challenges of this group.

7. CONCLUSION:

In conclusion, the research revealed serious cases of discrimination and violence at work among transgender individuals in Kolkata, which have significant effects on their mental health and job prospects. Many of the participants were relegated to informal or customary employment, with minimal coverage of the formal labour market. Excessive levels of harassment, ranging from verbal abuse, molestation, and online bullying, lead to extreme cases of mental illness, including depression, anxiety, and drug abuse. These revelations highlight the compelling need for policy reform, enhanced legal safeguards, and social reforms aimed at building inclusive workplaces and support structures for transgender individuals. These challenges need to be tackled to ensure equality, dignity, and overall well-being for transgender individuals in the workplace and the broader society.

REFERENCE:

- [1] Ganju, D., & Saggurti, N. (2017). Stigma, violence and HIV vulnerability among transgender persons in sex work in Maharashtra, India. *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, 19(8), 903–917. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691058.2016.1271141>
- [2] Göksel, P. (2024). Discrimination and Violence against Transgender People. *Psikiyatride Güncel Yaklaşımlar*, 16(4), 731–739. <https://doi.org/10.18863/pgy.1417609>
- [3] Gomes De Jesus, J., Belden, C. M., Huynh, H. V., Malta, M., Legrand, S., Kaza, V. G. K., & Whetten, K. (2020). Mental health and challenges of transgender women: A qualitative study in Brazil and India. *International Journal of Transgender Health*, 21(4), 418–430. <https://doi.org/10.1080/26895269.2020.1761923>
- [4] Mizock, L., Sotilleo, E. A., Yuen, N., Ormerod, A. J., Riley, J., & Woodrum, T. D. (2018). Transphobia in the workplace: A qualitative study of employment stigma. *Stigma and Health*, 3(3), 275–282. <https://doi.org/10.1037/sah0000098>
- [5] Suriyasarn, B. (2016). *Discrimination and Marginalization of LGBT Workers in Thailand* (pp. 197–215). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-29623-4_12
- [6] Miller, L. R., & Grollman, E. A. (2015). The Social Costs of Gender Nonconformity for Transgender Adults: Implications for Discrimination and Health. *Sociological Forum*, 30(3), 809–831. <https://doi.org/10.1111/socf.12193>
- [7] Thompson, L. H., Isac, S., Bhattacharjee, P., Prakash, R., Leung, S., Dutta, S., Bhowmik, A., & Lorway, R. R. (2019). Violence and Mental Health Among Gender-Diverse Individuals Enrolled in a Human Immunodeficiency Virus Program in Karnataka, South India. *Transgender Health*, 4(1), 316–325. <https://doi.org/10.1089/trgh.2018.0051>
- [8] Desouza, E. R., Ispas, D., & Wesselmann, E. D. (2017). Workplace Discrimination against Sexual Minorities: Subtle and not-so-subtle. *Canadian Journal of Administrative Sciences / Revue Canadienne Des Sciences de l'Administration*, 34(2), 121–132. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cjas.1438>
- [9] Seelman, K. L. (2015). Unequal Treatment of Transgender Individuals in Domestic Violence and Rape Crisis Programs. *Journal of Social Service Research*, 41(3), 307–325. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01488376.2014.987943>
- [10] Veldhuis, C. B., Riggle, E. D. B., Drabble, L., Wootton, A. R., & Hughes, T. L. (2018). “I Fear for My Safety, but Want to Show Bravery for Others”: Violence and Discrimination Concerns Among Transgender and Gender-Nonconforming Individuals After the 2016 Presidential Election. *Violence and Gender*, 5(1), 26–36. <https://doi.org/10.1089/vio.2017.0032>
- [11] Shires, D. A., & Jaffee, K. (2015). Factors Associated with Health Care Discrimination Experiences among a National Sample of Female-to-Male Transgender Individuals. *Health & Social Work*, 40(2), 134–141. <https://doi.org/10.1093/hsw/hlv025>