

## Quality Of Life among Transgenders in Kerala

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**ABSTRACT:** Transgender are the people who are born with male or female anatomies but they feel different from their body structure (Mohammed Rafeek ). Transgenders are most among the vulnerable and marginalized population in all over the India. Based on the geographical area they have to know the different name in different place. Transgenders are faced great adversities from their childhood, experience a poor quality of life that continues to their adulthood. The study has focused on the quality of life among male to female transgenders in the state of Kerala in the age group of 18-40. The study used quantitative methods adopting a descriptive research design. Male to female transgender individuals from the three district (Kottayam, Ernakulam, Thrissur) in Kerala, India, who are the age group of 18- 40 years, constituted the study population. The sample size was 100. Questionnaire involving a socio-demographic data sheet prepared by the researcher, and WHO QOL-BREF (1996) were used for data collection. Data was collected through in-depth interviews. The results indicate a moderate to good level of quality of life of the transgender individuals both domain wise and in total, in the current life situation.

**Key words:** male to female transgender, quality of life, invisible, Kerala

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### I. INTRODUCTION

The term transgender signifies a person who is neither male nor female. Basically, Transgender (TG) plays opposite gender roles ascribed to the person wherein the male plays the female and the female plays the male. The identity of transgender could be either masculine body with feminine voice/behavior or feminine body with male voice/behavior. Such things generally characterize them as transgender. Transgender are the people who are born with male or female anatomies but they feel different from their body structure (Mohammed Rafeek ,2006 ).

The word transgender, derived from Latin, can be divided into two parts: trans and gender. Trans is a Latin prefix meaning “across or beyond” and Gender shares the same Latin word as genus. ‘Trans’ is sometimes used as a short form of transgenders. Transgender is a popular term commonly used all over the world. On the other hand though, in Kerala, majority of the normal population is not aware of such terms and repeatedly use negative words popularized by films and other media. Transgenders are the most marginalized and vulnerable or excluded population in India. In Kerala, transgenders are facing lots of problem directly or indirectly from the society (Kerala transgender policy 2014). The WHO defines transgender as an umbrella term for people whose gender identity and expression does not conform to the norms and expectations traditionally associated with the sex assigned to them at birth, it includes people who are transsexual, transgender or otherwise considered gender non-conforming (WHO 2015).The literature clearly proves that a majority of the transgenders is living out of their home because of their gender identity issues. Very recently, there is a noted change in the attitude of the people of Kerala by supporting them and reducing discrimination. Legislative election of 2016 is the best example of acceptance of transgenders in Kerala. The election official statistics (<http://www.ceo.kerala.gov.in>) shows that 65 transgenders used their right to vote (district-wise split up of transgender voters are Trivandrum-8, Ernakulam-18, Thrissur-13, Malapuram-9 Palakkad-9, Kollam-7, Kozhykode-4, Kannur-4, Kottayam-3 Alapuzha-3, Kasargode-1, Wayanad-1), which is a clear evidence of creating an identity for the transgenders politically. WHO defines Quality of Life as an individual's perception of their position in life in the context of the culture and value systems in which they live and in relation to their goals, expectations, standards, and concerns. It is a broad ranging concept affected in a complex way by the person's physical health, psychological state, personal beliefs, social relationships and their relationship to salient features of their environment.

Due to the societal and familial pressure, some transgenders enter into marital life and have children, but a majority of relations part ways within a month or a year. After the marriage also they follow extra marital same-sex relationships because of their unique gender identity different from the normal population. Some other

transgenders are driven to sex work due to many complex reasons, including economic necessity and non-acceptance from the family and the society. Compared to Tamil Nadu population, lesser no. of transgenders is engaged in sex work and alms-seeking for their livelihood in Kerala.

The Indian public considers all transgenders as sex workers even though not all of them are. As a result of this misconception, Hijras/transgenders have to face discrimination, and physical and sexual violence from the society (Venkatesan Chakrapani, Priya Babu, Timothy Ebenezer, 2004).

In India, the total population of transgender is around 4.88 Lakh as per 2011 census but the majority of them are invisible in mainstream society. In Kerala, the policy estimated that more the 25,000 transgenders are living but less than 4000 transgenders are ready to come out to the mainstream society with their own gender identity. The socio-economic and caste census reveals that rural India has over 70,000 transgenders with Uttar Pradesh topping the list with nearly 13,000. Kerala is the first state to publish a policy for transgenders. The policy clearly proves such people face discrimination in their every aspect of life such as education, employment, housing, health and other areas. General public ridicule “Hijras” and feminine MSM for being “different” and many sometimes behave in a hostile manner towards them. It was found that the transgender community is disproportionately affected by violence (Mizock, Lewis, 2011; Wilchins, Lombardi, Priesing, & Malouf, 2001).

## **II. TRANSGENDERS IN INDIAN CONTEXTS**

The transgenders have existed all over the world and many of the countries have implemented separate policies and programs for transgenders and other sexual minorities. They have been known under different names in different places: ‘baklas’ in Philippines, ‘berdaches’ among American Indian tribes, ‘xaniths’ in Oman, ‘serrers’ in Africa, Kathoey in Thailand, and Waria in Indonesia and hijras’, ‘jogappas’, ‘jogtas’, and ‘shiv-shaktis’ in South Asia

The episode in Ramayana involving hijras/transgenders occurs when Rama is banished for 14 years. When he leaves for the forest, he turns around to see a large number of his people following him. Rama orders the people ‘all the men and women’ to return to the city, but the hijras belonging to neither category don’t feel bound by his injunction and want to stay with him. Impressed by their devotion, Rama sanctioned them the power to confer blessings on prosperous occasions like childbirth, marriage and inaugural functions hence the custom of ‘badhai’ whereby the hijras sing, dance, and grant blessings. Thus, the transgenders have great traditional significance in India.

Another legend is in Mahabharata (a sacred book in Hindu) involving Aravan, son of Arjuna and Nagakanya, who offered to face Bhishma in battle and be slaughtered since Bhishma had vowed revenge. Aravan had one condition for sacrificing his life. He wanted to spend the last night of his life in a state of matrimony. Since no one offered to marry him, Krishna assumed the female form of Mohini and married him. The hijras in Tamil Nadu are feminine homosexuals who take Aravana as their progenitor and call themselves ‘Aravanis (PUCL-K).

## **III. METHODOLOGY**

The main aim of the study is to find out the quality of life of male to female transgenders in Kerala. The study used a quantitative method and adopted descriptive research design. The study was conducted in the three district in Kerala among those belonging to the age group of 18 to 40 and living in this districts. The three districts are Ernakulam, Kottayam, and Thrissur. The KASACS projects reports 2016 show that more than 3000 transgenders are in the three district but the majority of them are more or less invisible in mainstream society. The respondents who have given their consent letter satisfying the inclusion criteria of male to female transgender individual, who lives full time dressed as a female in the three districts of Kerala, have been included in the present study. The sample size was 100 divided on the basis of transgender community population in the three districts.

## **IV. TOOL OF DATA COLLECTION**

Questionnaires involving a socio-demographic data sheet prepared by the researcher which included details of the transgender persons and their community and WHO QOL-BREF (1996) were used for data collection. The WHOQOL instruments were developed collaboratively in a number of centers worldwide, and have been widely field-tested. The WHOQOL-BREF instrument comprises 26 items, which measure the following broad domains such physical health, psychological health, social relationships, and environment. The WHOQOL-BREF is a shorter version of the original instrument that may be more convenient for use in large research studies or clinical trials. Domain scores are scaled in a positive direction (i.e. higher scores denote higher quality of life). The mean score of items within each domain is used to calculate the domain score.

V. RESULTS

**Socio demographic details of the respondents**

In total, 100 male to female transgenders from three districts in Kerala have participated in the study. Respondents belonged to the age group of 18-40. Majority (48%) of the respondents are coming from Hindu religion and 39% are from Christian religion. Religion plays an important role in the life of transgender people because they are described and accepted in the religious books and traditions but at the same time, they are getting discriminated and rejected in their physical and mental transformations in every area. Kottankulangara (An ancient temple of Goddess Durga situated in Chavara, Kollam district of Kerala) Chamayavilakku (a festival celebrating in the month of Meenam, according to Malayalam calendar in which men are dressed up like ladies and do special prayers to goddess) is the main religious festival in Kerala where transgender people are accepted ( Mathrubhumi editorial, 2015 ). At the present time, Christian missionaries also take an initiative to improve the quality of life of the transgenders. The best example of this change is a missionary-initiated school 'sahag' international (founded by mx Vijayaraja Mallika with the help of missionary) in Ernakulam with the help of National open school education. Majority (41%) of the respondents were between the age group of 30-35.42% of respondents have up to high school level education, 55% of participants were earning their livelihood through some soft skill job like makeup, dance etc.42% of participants earning 5000- 10000/ per month. However, 20% of the participants are engaged in sex work and alms-seeking for satisfying their daily needs. 82% of them are unmarried and 11% married. Most of the married transgenders hide their sexual identity in front of the family. The majority of the participants (48%) were living with their biological families and 44% of the participants lived with the transgender community, only two persons among them lived with their partner.

**Quality of life (WHO QLF BREF) of the transgenders in Kerala**

To study the quality of life among respondents, data were collected with the help of WHO QOL BREF scale. There are four main domains assessed for measuring physical quality of life such as physical health, psychological, social relationship and environment. 13% positively rated that they have good quality of life. The overall perception of their quality of life shows that 16% rated very good quality of life, 30% rated as neither poor nor good, 35% are negatively rated that they have very poor quality of life and remaining 6% have poor quality of life. It is understood that majority of the respondents believes that they possess poor quality of life. The next question measured their health satisfaction. 18% of respondents agreed that they are very satisfied with their health condition, 12% of them are satisfied, 38% of them are dissatisfied with their own health, 7% are very dissatisfied with their health and remaining 25% are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with their health. It clearly shows that they have dissatisfied with their health condition.

The WHOQLF BEF has been divided in four domain and Overall quality of Life and General Health facet. The four domains are Physical health domain, psychological health domain, environmental domain and social relationship domain. The physical domain(domain-1) consists of seven different components which are physical pain prevents, medication for daily life, energy for ever day life, sleep, the ability for performing daily living activities, capacity/activity. In QOL domain -1, physical health mean value is 19.84 and the standard deviation is 5.833, indicating a moderate to good level of quality of life of the respondents.

The Psychological health domain(domain-2) consist of six different components which are the concentration in daily work, enjoying life, finding life meaningful, body image, satisfaction with self and negative feelings such as blue mood, anxiety, depression. The mean value of psychological health domain is 18.00 and the standard deviation is 4.35 indicating the moderate to good level of quality of life of the respondents.

Social relationship domain analyzes the average rating of all 3 components in the social health domain that are satisfaction with a personal relationship, sexual life, and friends. The mean value of the social relationship is 8.35 and the standard deviation is 3.03, indicating a moderate to good level of quality of life of the participants. Environmental health domain (domin-4) consists of eight components which are security, physical environment, financial support, accessibility of information, leisure activity, physical environment, health care support and transport. The environmental health mean value is 22.66 and the standard deviation is 7.80 indicating poor quality of life of the participants compared to the other domains. Thus, looking at the QOL total, the mean value is 68.85 and the standard deviation is 21.01 indicating a moderate to good level quality of life of transgenders current life situation in Kerala. The table 2 shows the quality of life domain score and table - 3 shows the overall quality of life of the respondents in Kerala.

**Table 1:** socio demographic details of the respondent

Variable	Frequency (N100)	Percent
<b>District</b>		
Ernakulam	40	40%

Thrissur	30	30%
Kottayam	30	30%
<b>Age</b>		
18-25	11	11%
25-30	11	11%
30-35	41	41%
35-40	37	37%
<b>Education</b>		
1-7	14	14%
High school	42	42%
Higher secondary	18	18%
Degree and above	26	26%
<b>Marital status</b>		
Married	11	11%
Unmarried	82	82%
Separated	7	7%
<b>Monthly Income</b>		
Below 3000	10	10%
3000-5000	33	33%
5000-10000	42	42%
Above 10000	15	15%
<b>Religion</b>		
Hindu	48	48%
Christian	39	39%
Muslim	12	12%
Others	1	1%
<b>Living Arrangement</b>		
Friends	44	44%
Family	48	48%
Relatives	1	1%
Others	7	7%

**Table -2** Domain score of QOL

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Physical health	100	19.8400	5.83393
Psychological	100	18.0000	4.35774
Social health	100	8.3500	3.03307
Environmental health	100	22.6600	7.80859
Valid N (listwise)	100		

**Table- 3** overall quality of life of the respondents

<b>QOL Total</b>	
Valid	100
Missing	0
Mean	68.85
Std. deviation	21.01
Minimum	33
Maximum	154

**Table 4 :** Correlation between monthly income and total QLF of the respondents.

		Monthly income of the respondent	Total QLF
Monthly income of the respondent	Pearson Correlation	1	.122
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.227
	N	100	100
Total QLF	Pearson Correlation	.122	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.227	

	N	100	100
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Table 4 portrays the correlation result between monthly income of the respondents and total quality of life. The total quality of life can divide into four domains and monthly income has been divided into four subgroups such as below 3000, 300-5000, 5000-10000 and 10000 and above. The variable monthly income of the respondents is found that it have no significant and low correlation with their quality of life.

**Table 5 :** correlation between education and total QLF

		Education of the Respondent	Total QLF
Education of the respondent	Pearson Correlation	1	.255*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.010
	N	100	100
Total QLF	Pearson Correlation	.255*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.010	
	N	100	100

The table shows that the correlation between education of the respondents and total quality of life. Education has divided to four subgroups, 1-7, High school, higher secondary, Degree and above. The variable education of the respondents found to have a significant correlation with their quality of life. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). So the study clearly proves that there is a significant relation between quality of life and education. Education plays an important role in every person's life, especially in transgenders.

**Table6 :** Correlation between age and total QLF of the respondents

		Age of the respondent	Total QLF
Age of the respondent	Pearson Correlation	1	.034
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.733
	N	100	100
Total QLF	Pearson Correlation	.034	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.733	
	N	100	100

## VI. DISCUSSION

The study clearly indicates that there is moderate to good quality of life for the transgenders in Kerala, domain-wise and overall. According to the Kerala transgender policy study reports (2014), the genesis of the problems of TGs in India lies in the stigma and discrimination they face in society, resulting in their exclusion from the socio-economic and political spectrum. They are an outlier group of the society. TGs have unique needs, which are overlooked and ignored by society. In view of the systemic injustices that prevent this minority community from realizing equal rights, they are forced to live as second-class citizens in their own countries. Alphonsa George and Janardhana N., Muralidhar's (2015) study on quality of life of transgender older adults in Chennai and Bangalore give an idea about the transgender older, they are invisible groups in south Indian population, the final result of the study that their quality of life is moderate to good, that can be positively connected with the current study on transgenders in Kerala.

Joz Motmans, Petra Meier, Koen Ponnet and Guy T'Sjoen, (2012), the study did not find any significant difference in the quality of life (QOL) of transgenders from the general Dutch female population, which can be positively connected with the present study findings. The study found that transgender women had a lower quality of life than transgender men in Dutch.

The quality of life of the respondents in Kerala has a significant correlation to their monthly income. Most of the respondents are doing soft skill works for earning money. About 42% of the respondent's monthly income is **Rs.500 to Rs.10000**. The Kerala transgender policy study reports (2014) prove that 54% of the transgenders in Kerala have less than Rs.5000 as their monthly income and only 11.6% has regular jobs. Another study by Venkatesan Chakrapani, Priya Babu, and Timothy Ebenezer, (2004) stated that many Aravanis have a low socio-economic status and if they fall ill they attend public hospitals since free medical care is available there. However, it cannot be ignored that 42% of the respondents in the present study have a monthly income of 5000-10000 rupees, which might have contributed to their better quality of life. Another variable- education has a significant correlation with their quality of life. The Kerala transgender policy study reports (2014) fifty-eight percentage of transgender students are drop out of school before 10<sup>th</sup> STD because of harassment, gender-related negative expression and unavailability of educational special reserved quota/reservation etc. however in the present study 42% of the transgenders are drop outs before highly school level. The educational qualification also helps them to create a good quality of life in future. Times of India reports (2017) that Kerala is the first state in India to start a residential school for school drop-out transgenders.

The initiative was taken by Vijayaraja Mallika with the help of Christian missionaries and National open school education.

The variable age and quality of life have no significant correlation for the respondents. Wilchins, Lombardi, Priesing, & Malouf, (1997) study shows that half of their sample faced discrimination and violence from their life. The violence and discrimination can reduce their quality of life in every aspect. In the present study as well, majority of the respondents are facing discrimination from society.

## VII. CONCLUSION

Transgender is a discriminated and vulnerable population in Kerala. In every area of their life they face discrimination and violence from mainstream society. The state of Kerala introduced a new policy for transgenders- a pioneering shift in perspective that happened in the state. The current study tries to focus on the quality of life among transgender people in Kerala and employs WHOQLF BREF for assessing the same. In Kerala there is no study hitherto in this regard for ascertaining the quality of life among transgenders which is another reason why this is a useful study for the community. This study helps to look into the current health quality condition of transgenders and help them to adopt a healthy way of mechanism for improving their quality of life. It also exhorts the younger transgender generation to adopt positive and healthy coping mechanisms at an early stage for living.

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