



Case Report

When Hometown is an Alien Land

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ABSTRACT

With the help of a case vignette, the paper highlights the reasons for migration among transgender individuals. This viewpoint has been selected from a study conducted among 50 transgender individuals in Assam across various districts in the state. Due to various transphobic behaviors, many transgender individuals encounter discrimination and find it difficult to fit into so-called “mainstream society”. Therefore, many choose to migrate to a different district, city, or state to live a life of their choice.

Keywords: Transgender person, Transphobia, Discrimination, Migration

INTRODUCTION

Across the globe, more and more individuals are on the move than ever before. Few migrate for better living options for their families and themselves, and few others to seek new opportunities. Gender does impact the reasons for migration as to where, how, and with what available resources at destinations. The roles, suppositions, ongoing power dynamics, and relationships connected with being a biological man/woman or identifying as gay, lesbian, or transgender remarkably affect the many aspects of the process of migration and in turn, can also be affected by the migration.^[1]

Due to various forms of transphobia that are encountered by transgender individuals, they often land up in places where they can study and work as per their will. In turn, trans individuals migrating to a different place helps them live a life of their preferences.^[2] There are many significant pieces of evidence regarding the discriminatory treatments encountered by transgender individuals.^[3] Many are not readily accepted by their own families, relatives, and neighbors. This leads them to choose to migrate. One such case has been described below to show the cause and effect of migrating from one’s hometown to the state capital of Assam.

CASE REPORT

“Why is your hair so short? Grow your hair; it will make you look beautiful. Why don’t you wear what girls wear? Don’t you wear makeup like other girls of your age? What kind of clothes do you keep wearing? What is wrong with you? My adolescent days were all about these statements and questions. It was so tiring at times that I used to lock myself up in the room and cry for hours.” Mr SA, 23 years, partnered transman, hailing from Bongaigaon, Assam is pursuing hotel management from Guwahati, Assam. SA has been emotionally close with his mother and, since childhood knew that his paternal uncle and grandmother always desired a boy and not a girl. Yet his parents were quite content with him.

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Adolescence was already hard for SA because of innumerable queries and comments. To add on to it was his misery; the misery of knowing who he actually is. At the age of 16, he had his first romantic relationship with a girl of his class. "I found it strange to hug her. She sometimes used to find it weird, but I couldn't really tell her that it wasn't about her but rather about me. I discussed my situation with a friend who said that it happened. So, I was convinced, but a few days later, the same friend and I searched the internet and realized what being transgender means."

On completing his 12th class, SA migrated to Guwahati for a better life. "I was exhausted of being who I was not. In fact, I used to be in constant fear that if any of my relatives or neighbors would come to our place, they would keep on questioning and criticizing me for how I dressed, with whom I roam around and the never-ending list. I am no different from anyone else; I am a human being with emotions, feelings, aspirations, and dreams. Thus, I decided to migrate and pursue hotel management as I want to be a renowned chef."

On migrating, he joined an organization working with lesbians and gays, bisexual, transgender and queer individuals. He mentioned that he felt as liberated as he could be of being who he actually is. He met many other trans people from various parts of the country and started living a fearless life. He decided to make certain changes until his sex reassignment surgery. Thus, he started using a binder to hide his breasts, gave up wearing female clothes, and kept his hair short without any fear of critical comments from anyone around.

METHODOLOGY

The case study is an extract from a study conducted among 50 transgender individuals in Assam, India. For the present study, the researcher contacted the respondents via telephone and email and a non-probability sampling method was used. Data were collected as individuals identified themselves as transgender/transsexual, above the age of 18 years and hailing from Assam, India. Exclusion criteria were anyone identifying as cisgender and below the age of 18 years. An exploratory qualitative design was used for the study.

The subjective experience of the respondents was vital in this qualitative paper. After receiving the respondent's consent, the procedure was explained and assurance of confidentiality was provided. Face-to-face interviews were held to obtain first-hand experience and probing was done in order to ensure the free flow of information. The case study has been used as a technique to extrapolate the findings that have come up from the respondent's narrations. In social science research, a case study is considered a tool that helps to investigate the qualitative aspects of real-life circumstances or to have a finer understanding of the course of the problem.^[4] The interview

was later transcribed and a thematic analysis technique was used to identify the theme.

DISCUSSION

The findings from the above case study emphasize two major themes: (a) psychosocial stressors (transphobia, discrimination) and (b) migration (coping with their current situation). The participant's intense and regular critical comments and biases from family and friends. Persistent discrimination encountered by the respondents resulted in inadequate social support which in turn increased psychological trauma. Therefore, the participants were motivated to migrate for various reasons that included the liberty to express their gender identity safely and an expectation of greater acceptance of transgender people among the general public. This way the respondents got an opportunity to be away from critical comments made by family and friends and also an increased sense of being safety.

Transphobia is mostly experienced pervasively during adolescence and adulthood; due to transgender person's physical appearance and because of their preferred gender identity and expression many end up encountering it. They are called names, termed abnormal, and get physically harassed. Therefore, many of them end up avoiding families and friends, and sometimes lose their jobs too.^[5] The patterns in which transphobia occurs in several domains are significant to be considered. Discrimination and ostracization on the level of societal beliefs and of the existing laws and policies that extend and interact at individual, group, and community levels are forms of transphobia. Within many interpersonal relationships, many trans people experience rejection from their family members and extended social networks which in turn negatively impact the identity development of the individual and overall psychological functioning.^[6]

The participants described a lack of understanding and acceptance from their family regarding their gender identity and expression. This in turn, posed challenges to socio-emotional support. In the current case study, the reason for migrating to the state capital has a similar finding from a study titled "Trans Migrations: Exploring Life at the Intersection of Transgender Identity and Immigration." Freedom to express one's gender identity, transgender acceptance in the United States, lack of socioemotional support, and the impact of discrimination on mental health have been the major reasons for migration by the respondents of the study.^[7] Globally, transgender people are subjected to various forms of exploitation, violence, and transphobia. Thus, as a result of these atrocities, many transgender people are compelled to flee their states and countries in search of protection.^[8]

A study was done by Moody, Fuks, Pelaez, and Smith (2015) on suicidal attempts and ideation and their beliefs about the

protective factors that have prevented transgender persons from ending themselves. The study showed that receiving social support from people who hold meaning in the respondents lives, including families, partners, friends, and colleagues emerged as a main protective factor. The other protective factor was the ability of respondents to live their lives authentically while accepting their transgender identity and being accepted by people.^[9] There are many other studies that conclude that with adequate social support, transgender people can have a better quality of life. In the case study discussed above the participant would not have to opt to cope with his situation by migrating if he was understood, his gender identity was accepted, and if he had adequate primary and secondary social support.

CONCLUSION

Transgender individuals have to deal with various forms of discrimination and encounter transphobia both at micro and macro levels. Therefore, many choose to shift or migrate from their hometown or home state to a new place that makes them feel safer and has more acceptance for people with gender variant identities. This allows people with trans identities to fully express their gender and live life on their own terms. Migrating definitely does not ensure an end to their everyday struggle for their gender identity, but surely helps them to cope with their existing or immediate crisis.

Ethical approval

This research/study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at Assam Medical College and Hospital, number AMC/EC/2703, dated 22/12/2017.

Declaration of patient consent

The authors certify that they have obtained all appropriate patient consent.

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Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

Use of artificial intelligence (AI)-assisted technology for manuscript preparation

The authors confirm that there was no use of artificial intelligence (AI)-assisted technology for assisting in the writing or editing of the manuscript and no images were manipulated using AI.

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