

Empowering transgender individuals: A thematic analysis of workplace challenges and mental health outcomes

Syeda Mariam Arshad and Sonia Naeem*

Kinnaird College for Women

Transgender communities in our society are always considered as a taboo and people are often seen distancing themselves without making any attempt to understand their issues, especially when they try to become financially independent. This study aims to explore the workplace challenges and the impact of societal behavior on the psychological health of transgender community in Lahore, Pakistan. The study was based on Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), for which six transgender individuals were selected through the snowball sampling technique and analyzed using thematic analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect in-depth information regarding their experiences. Five major themes were identified after the interviews were transcribed including: societal indifferences, challenges faced during employment, impact on psychological health, self-satisfaction after employment and coping strategies. The results of the study indicated that all the participants encountered absurd societal behavior and faced inequity challenges during employment that resultantly had an adverse effect on their psychological health. Furthermore, the findings suggested various coping strategies that participants used in order to cope with undesirable circumstances and majority of them reported social support and use of optimistic self-talk as the most desirable coping mechanism. Furthermore, the participants pointed out discrimination and inequality they faced during employment. The present study can fill the research gaps with reference to our society and will help the mental health professionals to teach them ways to cope up with the challenges they face, additionally the findings will help to improve the experience of transgender individuals at organizational and societal level.

Keywords: transgender individual; societal behavior; workplace challenges; mental health; thematic analysis

Gender is a complex and pervasive social construct shaped by societal and cultural norms that influence individuals across all segments of society. Transgender individuals, in particular, challenge these socially prescribed norms through behaviors, characteristics, and appearances that diverge from traditional expectations of masculinity and femininity. Their existence disrupts the conventional binary system of gender and may manifest in diverse forms, including gender fluidity, intersex, genderqueer, and third-gender identities. In Pakistan, the term ‘Hijra’ is commonly used to refer to transgender individuals and encompasses a broad range of gender non-conforming identities (Burdge, 2007). Despite their longstanding presence in society, the transgender community in Pakistan continues to experience severe social exclusion, persistent discrimination, and inadequate legal and social protection. They are frequently denied fundamental rights, including voting rights, equitable access to institutions, and participation in decision-making processes. Such marginalization is reinforced by prevailing cultural norms, societal attitudes, and lifestyles that uphold rigid binary gender expectations (Ahmed, 2014).

Historically, transgender individuals have existed across diverse cultures, social classes, and racial groups; however, they have consistently faced marginalization and stigmatization within society. In many social contexts, transgender individuals are subjected to humiliation, exclusion, verbal abuse, and discrimination, while public attitudes toward them are often characterized by discomfort, fear, prejudice, and social avoidance. Such discriminatory practices are evident across multiple domains of life, including workplaces, family systems, and broader social interactions, where transgender individuals are frequently denied basic rights, equal opportunities, and human dignity (Lenning & Buist, 2013). In

*Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Aisha Sarfraz, University of Management, Lahore, Pakistan. Email: sonia.naeem@kinnaird.edu.pk

Pakistan, the transgender community experiences severe social exclusion, persistent discrimination, and inadequate legal and institutional protection. They are often deprived of fundamental rights, including voting rights, access to educational and social institutions, and participation in decision-making processes. This continued marginalization is reinforced by prevailing cultural norms, societal behaviors, and lifestyles that uphold rigid binary gender expectations. Although some individuals may demonstrate empathy and acceptance toward transgender community, the dominant societal response remains rooted in fear, ridicule, and hostility (Ahmed, 2014).

The challenges of transgender individuals are not limited to social settings; they also face overwhelming economic hardships. Their vulnerability to discrimination at workplace increases the financial strain for them. Due to widespread prejudice and discriminatory practices in professional settings, transgender individuals often experience significant financial strain and employment insecurity. Workplace discrimination commonly manifests in the form of restricted freedom of expression, sexual harassment, verbal abuse, physical violence, lack of awareness regarding sexual minorities, and persistent psychological stress. Research by Whittle et al. (2007), revealed that approximately 6% of transgender individuals reported experiencing physical violence in the workplace, while more than 10% faced verbal abuse. As a consequence of these hostile experiences, many transgender employees preferred to leave or change their jobs in search of safer and more accepting environments (Whittle et al., 2007).

In Pakistan, the situation is particularly alarming, as transgender individuals continue to face pervasive mistreatment, harassment, and social exclusion across educational and occupational domains. Studies indicate that nearly 90% of transgender individuals experience workplace mistreatment, reflecting the deeply entrenched discrimination present in professional settings. Additionally, more than 40% of transgender workers encounter adverse employment outcomes because of their gender identity, which significantly affects their ability to secure and maintain stable employment. The transgender community in Pakistan also experiences high levels of physical victimization, with research suggesting that approximately 43% to 60% of transgender individuals have been subjected to physical abuse and violence. Such victimization is closely associated with broader structural inequalities, including increased school dropout rates resulting from hostile educational environments, social rejection, and lack of institutional support. Consequently, many transgender individuals become socially and economically vulnerable, which may increase their likelihood of engaging in high-risk or harmful activities that can negatively affect both their physical and psychological well-being (Whittle et al., 2007).

In recent years, the government has undertaken several initiatives aimed at improving the lives and social recognition of transgender individuals in Pakistan. One significant development has been the introduction of a third-gender category on National Identity Cards by the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA), which has contributed to greater legal recognition and acknowledgment of transgender identities. Despite these progressive measures, the transgender community in Pakistan continues to experience substantial social marginalization, discrimination, harassment, and violence. The continued prevalence of these challenges highlights the urgent need for greater societal understanding, acceptance, and institutional support for transgender individuals. Addressing these concerns requires sustained and collaborative efforts from both governmental and non-governmental organizations to create a more inclusive, equitable, and supportive social environment for the transgender community in Pakistan (Mizock & Mueser, 2014).

The persistent experiences of discrimination, social exclusion, rejection, and violence have serious implications for the mental health and psychological well-being of transgender individuals. Research consistently demonstrates that transgender individuals experience higher levels of depression, anxiety, psychological distress, low self-esteem, substance abuse, and

suicidal ideation compared to the general population. According to minority stress theory, chronic exposure to stigma, prejudice, and victimization significantly contributes to the deterioration of psychological well-being among marginalized groups. In addition, rejection from family members, bullying in educational settings, workplace discrimination, and inadequate social support further intensify feelings of isolation, hopelessness, and emotional distress. Limited access to mental health services, combined with fear of societal judgment and discrimination, often discourages transgender individuals from seeking professional psychological support, thereby exacerbating their mental health difficulties (Mizock & Mueser, 2014).

In the Pakistani context, these psychological challenges are further intensified by deeply rooted cultural stigmatization and rigid gender norms that restrict the social acceptance and inclusion of transgender individuals. Many transgender individuals are deprived of equal educational, occupational, and healthcare opportunities, contributing to chronic stress, emotional vulnerability, and reduced quality of life. Consequently, despite recent governmental efforts toward legal recognition and inclusion, transgender individuals in Pakistan continue to face significant barriers to psychological well-being and social integration. Therefore, there is a critical need to explore the factors affecting the mental health of transgender individuals and to understand how societal discrimination and exclusion shape their overall well-being. The present study seeks to contribute to the existing literature on transgender mental health within the Pakistani context by providing empirical insights that may assist in the development of supportive interventions, inclusive policies, and mental health programs tailored to the unique needs of transgender individuals.

Research Questions

- How is societal behavior perceived by employed transgender individuals in Pakistan?
- What are the workplace challenges faced by the employed transgender community?
- How does societal behavior impact the psychological health of transgender community?
- What are the coping strategies used by transgender community to deal with the challenges?

Method

In order to gain deep insight about the subjectivity of the issue this study was based on qualitative methodology. This study aimed to explore the workplace challenges, and the impact of societal behavior on the psychological health of employed transgender community in Lahore, Pakistan.

Assumption

In research, epistemology describes how a researcher knows the truth and reality of something as the goal is to describe people's subjective lived experiences, realities and understandings. Moreover, from epistemological assumptions the knowledge is gained through an empathic understanding of participants lived social realities. Epistemology also influences the ways researchers frame their research in their attempts to discover knowledge as the researchers also construct knowledge socially that is a result of their personal experiences of real life within the natural settings investigated. Furthermore, there is some sort of engagement between the researchers and their subjects through interactive processes in which they dialogue, intermingle, question, write, read, listen and record research data (Creswell, 2013). In this study epistemological assumption was followed as the transgender's lived experiences and they were explored through the process of interviews by actively engaging with them to gain an insight of participants' social realities.

Interpretive Framework

From a social constructivism approach, learning occurs through social interaction which involves active engagement with a social group and knowledge is considered to be a

product of group interaction as the main focus of this approach is on the collaborative nature of learning. Moreover, this approach seeks for an understanding of the world in which individuals live and work (Creswell, 2013). Social constructivism approach was applied for the present research as the participating individuals were asked for subjective views based on their own individual experiences. The complexity of views was also taken into consideration during their interview. Individuals had prior knowledge about the purpose of the research which led to a broad open discussion in order to explore, the complexity of the views in depth.

Method of Inquiry

The study was based on IPA which pertains to the lived experiences of participants. A phenomenological approach was followed as the main focus of the study was based on the lived experiences of the participants. Moreover, phenomenology is considered to be a powerful approach of inquiry in order to obtain subjective experiences of the individuals, as well as to describe their lived phenomenon. However, throughout the research process, the shared experiences of participants were studied and all the issues faced by transgender participants were heard. Hermeneutic phenomenology by Heidegger has been used in this research in order to understand lived experiences of individuals. According to this methodology all the individuals and their life stories are distinctive from one another (Frechette et al., 2020).

Sample and Sampling Strategy

The study included six transgender individuals working in different professions and who were financially independent. Participants were selected based on their willingness to take part in in-depth interviews and share their lived experiences. According to Dukes (1984), phenomenological studies typically involve 3 to 10 participants (Creswell, 2013). A snowball sampling technique was employed, which is particularly useful for accessing hard-to-reach populations (Crossman, 2019). Participants were initially approached through social media platforms, which facilitated recruitment and contact.

Exclusion Criteria

- Transgender individuals with gender dysphoria were excluded from the study.
- Transgender individuals engaged in dancing and begging were excluded from the study.
- Individuals who were not transgender by birth were excluded from the study.
- Transgender individual who are mentally disturbed were excluded from the study.

Table 1

Sample Characteristics of the Participants

Participants	Age	Education	Occupation	Monthly income
1	28	Matric and makeup course	Makeup artist	40,000
2	34	Matric	Organizational worker	25,000
3	42	Stitching course	Tailor	36,000
4	38	Matric and makeup course	Makeup artist	40,000
5	32	Stitching course	Tailor	45,000
6	30	Stitching course	Tailor	45,000

Data Collection Method

An interview guide was used as the primary research instrument for data collection. Telephonic interviews were conducted because participants were more comfortable with this mode of inquiry. The interviews were semi-structured in nature and consisted of opening questions, key questions, closing questions, and probe questions. The mode of interview was Urdu language to facilitate in-depth discussion. Open-ended questions were prepared to obtain

participants' subjective views and personal experiences related to the phenomenon under study. Although a set of ten predetermined questions was developed, the order of the questions was not strictly followed, and additional relevant questions were asked, to gain further clarification and detail. This flexible approach encouraged participants to elaborate on and clarify their narratives, thereby generating rich and comprehensive data. Semi-structured interviews are widely recognized as an effective qualitative research method because they combine a predetermined set of open-ended questions with the flexibility to explore participants' thoughts, experiences, and beliefs in greater depth. This method allows researchers to build rapport, ask follow-up questions, and collect reliable yet detailed data while maintaining focus on the research objectives (Adams, 2015). Furthermore, all interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' consent while ensuring their anonymity and confidentiality throughout the research process.

Procedure

For this current research, the topic was firstly approved by the Institutional Review Board. An interview guide was also reviewed by the supervisor followed by pilot study. A pilot study is a preliminary study conducted before the main research study. The purpose is to test the reliability of the interview guide and fix potential issues in the research design and method. Two participants were selected for the pilot study and on the basis of their feedback, changes were made to improve the interview guide. Following a thorough review by the supervisor and two qualitative experts, the final interview guide was implemented. Participants were selected for the main study through snow ball sampling technique, based on the inclusion criteria. Each participant was briefed about the aim of the research. Their consent was taken to participate in the study. A demographic information sheet form was used to extract the basic information such as age, occupation, education etc. to build rapport. Interviews were conducted on phone call, considering the feasible for the participants. They were told about their right of withdrawal at any time they intended. At the end, the participants were thanked for taking out their precious time as well for choosing to be part of the study. Their consent for audio recording the interview was taken beforehand that helped to transcribe the data.

Main Study

In this research study, six participants voluntarily participated and gave consent to audio record the interviews as well. The participants were approached through snowball sampling technique. For the data collection interview guide was used. However, all the research ethics were ensured before and during the data collection method i.e. prior consent, voluntary participation, giving prior information regarding the study and maintenance of confidentiality. All the participants were interviewed according to their availability as a total nine participants were contacted for the interview purpose, however only six were available and interviewed after deciding the appropriate time with each participant's consensus. The interviews were telephonic in nature and audio recording was done as it greatly helped in transcribing the data later on. The interviews were semi structured in nature with open ended questions in them. However, probing was also used in order to get a clearer picture of what the participants were describing. Moreover, some note taking was done and some of the main points were written during the interview that later helped for making the themes. However, the duration of each interview was approximately 40-50 minutes, to the point of saturation. The interviews were conducted in Urdu and subsequently translated into the English language. The translated transcripts were carefully reviewed and thoroughly checked by two language experts to ensure accuracy, clarity, and consistency of meaning. The collected audio data was transcribed. Major themes and verbatim were drawn out from the collected data. Lastly, in order to identify the major findings of the study, interpretation and explanations of the themes were done.

Data Verification Method

Peer Review

Peer review is the critical evaluation of an academic work by others in a similar field of study. The evaluation is conducted by one or more individuals who possess similar competencies as the producer of the work. The main purpose of peer review is to provide constructive feedback to the researcher for the improvement of the study. Peer review was done as a data verification method before conducting the actual research on a large sample (Creswell, 2013). However, in the present study, interview guide was reviewed by the two experts who have been conducting qualitative research for the past two years.

Data Analysis

For the analysis of the data, Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis method was followed. The data was read and re-read to gain familiarity with the content, after which meaningful segments were systematically coded. Similar codes were then grouped to identify potential themes, which were subsequently reviewed and refined to ensure they accurately represented the data. The final themes were clearly defined and named, and the findings were organized and interpreted to provide a coherent and meaningful account of the participants' experiences.

Results

The aim of the present study is to explore the workplace challenges, and the impact of societal behavior on the psychological health of employed trans-genders community in Lahore, Pakistan. Five major themes were identified including: societal indifferences, challenges faced during employment, impact on psychological health, self- satisfaction after employment and coping strategies

Table 2

Majors Themes and Sub Themes of the Study

Master Themes	Sub-Themes
Societal indifferences	Unsympathetic attitude Lack of acceptance Insensitive comments Lack of empathy in all socio-economic classes
Challenges faced during employment	Inadequate opportunities Unresponsive attitude of employers Bullying Discrimination Lower incomes Poverty
Impact on psychological health	Excessive stress Isolation Anxiety provoking thoughts Depression
Self- satisfaction after employment	Providing support to the family Respect and recognition Source of pride and dignity Self- sufficiency

Coping strategies	Building support network
	Self-care
	Seeking mentorship
	Focusing on strengths
	Workplace strategies

Discussion

The major themes of the study depict the issues faced by the trans-gender community in Pakistan which suggests that they face a lot of insensitive attitude of people and are immensely marginalized communities even deprived of basic human rights.

Societal Indifferences

The society did not share the feelings of transgender individuals as almost all the participants reported people's negative and hostile behavior towards them. According to Participant 5, *"The behavior of people, they don't even consider us as humans"*. All the participants complained about the non-acceptance of people towards them, as society refused to accept them due to which they had to face extreme forms of social exclusion. As reported by participant 1: *"No one values or accepts us."* Similarly, participant 3 reported: *"People never tend to see us with a good eye"*. The insensitive behavior is not only limited to a specific class of the society but all societal classes (upper, middle, lower) were involved in such detrimental behavior as participant 1 narrated: *"Both literate and illiterate class judge us and treat us differently"*. Similarly, participant 2 said that *"It includes both classes, upper and lower."* Nguyen et al. (2025) examined the mental health challenges faced by transgender individuals in Vietnam and found that discrimination, violence, and limited access to healthcare significantly affect their well-being. They also reported high levels of gender dysphoria, depression, and social exclusion among transgender men and women, along with limited access to psychosocial support.

Overall, this theme highlights that societal indifference towards transgender individuals contributes significantly to their continued marginalization, reinforcing exclusion, stigma, and unequal access to opportunities and services.

Challenges faced during Employment

Transgender individuals are often excluded from employment quotas, which further limits their access to formal job opportunities. Due to prevailing negative attitudes and stigma toward transgender people, they frequently face discrimination during hiring processes and workplace interactions. As a result, many transgender individuals are deprived of equal employment opportunities and economic stability. This systemic exclusion not only restricts their career development, but also reinforces cycles of social and economic marginalization. In line with this, Chellammal et al. (2021) highlight that transgender individuals are discriminated against and socially cornered on an almost daily basis. They are among the most vulnerable and highly marginalized groups, often lagging behind in various aspects of life, particularly education. Moreover, a large segment of the population is reluctant to interact with them and avoids employing them, further limiting their opportunities for inclusion and advancement, as participant 4 reported: *"We are mostly excluded from proper job opportunities. Even when there are jobs, people hesitate to hire us because of stigma and how society views us"*. Transgender individuals are often sidelined and treated as untouchables in society. They face numerous challenges and discrimination at workplace and their problems are not taken seriously by others as participant 1 said that: *"I have given interviews in multiple places along with my CV, but I haven't received any response"*. Similarly, participant 6 reported: *"Where ever I go people don't behave nicely, and our problems are labelled as less important"*. Khan

(2020) conducted a qualitative study in Islamabad, Pakistan to explore the psychological, social, and emotional challenges faced by transgender individuals. Through in-depth interviews, the study revealed that transgender people often experience a deep disconnect between their internal gender identity and physical sex, leading to identity conflicts and emotional distress. Participants reported widespread discrimination, stigma, and being labeled as socially deviant or mentally ill, which contributed to high rates of mental health issues. The study highlighted the negative attitudes of families and society, frequent experiences of violence, and significant social, financial, and interpersonal challenges, including workplace discrimination and poverty. Transgender individuals are always considered as taboo and people are often seen humiliating them. As narrated by the participant 3: *"People mostly enter into the shop just for the sake of teasing"*. Similarly, participant 4 reported: *"The most pain I feel is when people make fun of us"*. People often used bad words to call them and due to this attitude these individuals feel hurt. However, participant 5 highlighted severe harassment on part of males as she said: *"Mostly men misbehave with us, they give smiles as they pass by"*. All the participants faced challenges based on their professions. As reported by the participant 1: *"We have to struggle a lot but still people don't value us"*. Similarly, participant 2 reported: *"First of all people reject us by saying that why should we employ a transgender individual"*. A significant wage gap is faced by transgender community and due to which they suffer from economic challenges and financial strains. These individuals are not being paid according to their struggle and abilities as participants 6 reported: *"Income is not much, only enough to fulfill basic needs"*. Similarly, participant 1 narrated: *"Can't really say salary is enough, it is quite less"*.

Overall, this theme highlights that transgender individuals experience persistent structural and social barriers in employment, including exclusion from quotas, discriminatory hiring practices, and workplace stigma. These challenges collectively restrict their access to equal opportunities, hinder career progression, and contribute to ongoing socioeconomic marginalization.

Impact on Psychological Health

All the challenges adversely affected the mental health of all the participants and they suffered from constant depressive thoughts as narrated by participant 2, *"I stay mentally depressed usually and its quite disappointing"*. Similarly, participant 3 reported *"I am mentally disturbed mostly"*. Transgender individuals often experience excessive stress due to various factors, including minority stress, identity concealment, and lack of support. The cumulative effect of stigma, prejudice, and discrimination can lead to increased stress levels, while hiding one's true identity can be stressful and affect mental health. Inadequate support from family, friends, or community can further exacerbate stress.

Isolation is another common experience for many transgender individuals, resulting from social exclusion, lack of acceptance, and internalized shame. Participant 3 reported *"Rejection by loved ones is the most difficult phase of my life"*. Societal stigma and discrimination can make it challenging to form and maintain social connections. Negative self-perceptions and internalized shame can also contribute to feelings of isolation. Anxiety-provoking thoughts can arise from fear of rejection, fear of violence, and uncertainty about the future. According to participant 4 *"What is my future, who will be with me at my old age."* The risk of physical violence and harassment can lead to anxiety and hypervigilance, while uncertainty about access to healthcare and employment can contribute to anxiety. Depression is a significant concern for many transgender individuals, often resulting from cumulative stress, lack of support, and internalized shame. The cumulative effect of minority stress, isolation, and anxiety-provoking thoughts can contribute to depression, while inadequate support from family, friends, or community can exacerbate depressive symptoms. Negative

self-perceptions and internalized shame can also contribute to depressive symptoms. Lenning and Buist, (2013) gain insight through personal narratives of the transgenders. According to them, transgenders face considerable levels of discrimination, stigmatization harassment. Due to rejection in society, isolation and violence higher rates of substance use and mood disorders, anxiety and suicidal thoughts are experienced by the transgender community. This study that was conducted in the USA revealed the reported feelings of social stigma coupled with economic hardship and mental suffering. Furthermore, their gender identity affected their performance as well. Social challenges took a toll on their psychological health as their identity caused them to struggle with how to behave because they did not fit society's expectation and definition of female or male.

Self- Satisfaction after Employment

Almost all the participants reported feelings of contentment and had an improved sense of self-esteem after having an employment as stated by participant 1: *"I feel I am at peace now."* Participant 2 narrated: *"I am quite satisfied and my heart is at peace now."* Employed transgender individuals can experience a sense of pride and fulfillment from being able to provide financial support to their families. This can be particularly significant for those who have faced rejection or marginalization. By being employed, transgender individuals can demonstrate their ability to contribute to their families' well-being, which can help strengthen family bonds, improve self-esteem, and reduce financial stress. Providing financial support can also alleviate financial stress and provide a sense of security. Having a respectable profession can be a source of pride and dignity for employed transgender individuals. According to participant 1, *"I feel over the moon when I give my money to my family."* A professional career can earn respect and recognition from others, helping to counteract negative stereotypes and stigma. A profession can also provide a sense of purpose and direction, which can be beneficial for mental health and well-being. Being part of a professional community can foster a sense of belonging and connection with others. Self-sufficiency is another important aspect of employment for transgender individuals. By being financially independent, individuals can reduce their dependence on others, increase their autonomy, and improve their mental health. Participant 5 reported: *"Now I'm deeply satisfied that I'm not asking money from anyone instead supporting my family."* Financial stability and independence can be liberating and empowering, allowing individuals to make their own choices and decisions.

Grant et al., (2011) discussed that stable employment significantly contributes to transgender individuals' economic security, psychological well-being, and their sense of dignity, while reducing vulnerability to social exclusion and marginalization.

Coping Strategies

Lastly, the respondents revealed their coping strategies and social network was one of the most significant coping mechanisms. Building a support network of other transgender individuals, allies, or support groups can provide a sense of community and help mitigate feelings of isolation or marginalization. As reported by participant 1: *"I have friends, if a problem comes up I usually discuss it with them"*. Similarly, participant 2 reported: *"I mostly tend to discuss with my fellows, we guide each other since our circle is includes all transgenders"*. Chinazzo et al. (2024) examined the quality of life of Brazilian transgender youth and how their coping strategies relate to both general and gender-related stress. Among 185 participants, including transgender boys, girls, and non-binary individuals, findings showed that a better quality of life was associated with receiving social support, while the use of avoidance coping strategies in response to general stress was linked to lower quality of life.

Another study applies the psychological mediation framework to understand how family rejection, a distal minority stressor, affects mental health in Transgender and Gender

Diverse (TGD) young adults by influencing proximal stressors like internalized transphobia and general psychological factors such as social support. Using data from 227 TGD individuals (average age 21.7), the research found that family rejection did not directly predict depression or anxiety, but was indirectly linked to increased anxiety through reduced social support. Internalized transphobia was associated with higher depression, while social support helped reduce anxiety. Additionally, resilience played a protective role by lessening the negative impact of family rejection on anxiety. These results suggest that proximal stressors have a stronger direct effect on mental health than distal stressors they highlight the crucial buffering roles of social support and resilience in improving mental health outcomes for TGD young adults (Costa et al., 2025). One of the coping strategies opted by two of the participants was positive self-talk and taking an optimistic approach as stated by participant 3: *"I say this to myself usually that I have my work at least and I don't have to beg for my needs"*. In the workplace, employed transgender individuals set clear boundaries and expectations with colleagues and supervisors that also help maintain a safe and respectful work environment. Additionally, seeking support from management can address workplace issues and create a more inclusive environment. Participant 4 said *"I always prefer to tell my problems to my incharge as he always finds way to solve them."* Self-care is also essential for employed transgender individuals. Prioritizing mental health through activities like exercise, yoga or mindfulness practices can help manage stress and maintain mental well-being. *"I feel happy to find time for myself outside of work as it provides a sense of purpose and fulfillment,"* participant 6 reported. Emphasizing their strengths and accomplishments help transgender individuals build confidence and resilience. Participant 2 said *"I always focus on my strengths that God has given me."* As reported by participant 5: *"Finding a mentor who can offer guidance and support can be beneficial for us, I'm so lucky to find one."*

Overall, the coping strategies adopted by transgender individuals reflect a combination of personal efforts to manage workplace and social challenges. The sub-themes of self-care, seeking mentorship, focusing on strengths, and workplace strategies illustrate how individuals actively work to maintain their emotional well-being and financial stability. These approaches not only help in reducing the impact of discrimination and stress, but also enhance their sense of self-worth and confidence.

Implications

The findings of the present study are primarily applicable to transgender individuals engaged in formal or structured employment settings. As the study did not include transgender persons whose primary livelihoods involve dancing, begging, or other informal occupations, the experiences and challenges of these groups remain underrepresented. Nevertheless, by providing context-specific empirical evidence from Pakistan, where research on the lived experiences of transgender individuals is limited, the study contributes to the field of gender studies and helps address an important gap in the literature. The findings further highlight the need for culturally relevant mental health interventions, workplace support systems, and inclusive policies to promote the well-being of transgender individuals.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study on employed transgender individuals has several limitations which should be considered when interpreting the findings. One key limitation is related to sample representativeness, as the participants may not fully reflect the broader population of employed transgender individuals. This was largely due to the difficulty in recruiting participants who met the inclusion criteria, which may have introduced sampling bias. Consequently, the generalizability of the findings is limited, and caution is needed when extending the results to other contexts or populations. Future research should include participants from diverse

occupational backgrounds belonging to from various industries, and socioeconomic backgrounds, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of experiences and support needs of the broader transgender community.

Furthermore, the sample was limited to Lahore city only, restricting generalizability; future studies should collect data from all provinces of Pakistan for better representation of the sample. Future studies could also focus on developing and evaluating interventions to support mental health of transgender individuals.

References

- Adams, W. (2015). Conducting semi-structured interviews. *Handbook of Practical Program Evaluation*, 492–505. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119171386.ch19>
- Ahmed, U. (2014). Factors affecting the social exclusion of eunuchs (Hijras) in Pakistan. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 5(23).
<https://www.mcser.org/journal/index.php/mjss/article/view/4782>
- Burdge, B. J. (2007). Bending gender, ending gender: Theoretical foundations for social work practice with the transgender community. *Social Work*, 52(3), 243–250.
- Chellammal, S., & Lekshmi, K. (2021). Challenges and problems of transgender. *Test Engineering and Management*, 83, 7818–7824.
- Chinazzo, Í. R., Fontanari, A. M. V., Riva, A., de Brito Silva, B., Rodrigues, L. P., Trajano, A. C., Feijó, M., Costa, A. B., & Lobato, M. I. R. (2024). Coping strategies employed by transgender youth with higher and lower quality of life. *British Journal of Developmental Psychology*. Advance online publication.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/bjdp.12524>
- Costa, R., Barrita, A., Vazquez, T., & Abreu, R. L. (2025). Effects from family rejection, social support, internalized transphobia, resilience, and collective action on mental health outcomes among transgender and gender diverse young adults: A moderated mediation model. *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity*. Advance online publication.
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Crossman, A. (2019). *What is a snowball sample in sociology?* ThoughtCo.
<https://www.thoughtco.com/snowball-sampling-3026730>
- Frechette, J., Bitzas, V., Aubry, M., Kilpatrick, K., & Lavoie-Tremblay, M. (2020). Capturing lived experience: Methodological considerations for interpretive phenomenological inquiry. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 19, 1–12.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406920907254>
- Grant, J. M., Mottet, L. A., Tanis, J., Harrison, J., Herman, J. L., & Keisling, M. (2011). *Injustice at every turn: A report of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey*. National Center for Transgender Equality and National Gay and Lesbian Task Force.
- Khan, J. (2020). *Discrimination faced by transgender*.
<https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.26486.83522>
- Lenning, E., & Buist, C. L. (2013). Social, psychological and economic challenges faced by transgender individuals and their significant others: Gaining insight through personal narratives. *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, 15(1), 44–57.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13691058.2012.738431>

- Mizock, L., & Mueser, K. T. (2014). Employment, mental health, internalized stigma, and coping with transphobia among transgender individuals. *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity*, 1(2), 146–158. <https://doi.org/10.1037/sgd0000029>
- Nguyen, L. T. T., Cu, L. N. T., Nguyen, A. L. H., Nguyen, G. Q., & Cu, L. C. (2025). An exploration of transgender people's lived experiences in addressing mental health challenges in Vietnam. *Clinical Social Work Journal*, 53, 3–15. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10615-024-00941-2>
- Whittle, S., Turner, L., & Al-Alami, M. (2007). *Engendered penalties: Transgender and transsexual people's experiences of inequality and discrimination*. Crown Copyright.