

Intersectional Stigma's Consequences on Transgender Students' Mental Health, Motivation, and Academic Performance

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Abstract

This study examines a complex connection among intersectional stigma and the academic performance of transgender pupils in Pakistan. The research highlights the additional difficulties that transgender students encounter at the university level due to numerous types of stigma, including gender-based, religious-based, and class-based prejudice. The presence of intersectional stigma, which refers to the combined effects of many social classifications, has a considerable negative influence on the mental health, motivation, and involvement of these students in their educational endeavors. The study employs Kimberlé Crenshaw's intersectionality theory to demonstrate how several types of oppression, rooted in social identities such as race, socioeconomic class, and disability, overlap with gender identity. The study utilizes a qualitative approach with a grounded theory design, conducting semi-structured interviews with transgender students enrolled at both public and private universities in Islamabad. This method offers a comprehensive comprehension of the impact of intersectional stigma on academic performance, social marginalization, and absence of support systems. The results indicate that the combination of intersectional stigmas leads to substantial obstacles in achieving academic success and well-being, resulting in discrimination, exclusion, and insufficient assistance from institutions. These challenges have a detrimental impact on mental well-being, drive, self-worth, and overall scholastic achievement. The report asserts that it is imperative to tackle structural problems such as discriminatory regulations, inadequate teacher training, and limited resources in order to cultivate an inclusive and supportive university atmosphere. By implementing gender-neutral facilities, encouraging tolerance and acceptance, and offering dedicated support services, the academic and emotional experiences of transgender students can be improved, allowing them to reach their maximum potential.

Keywords: Intersectional Stigma, Educational Performance, Transgender Students, Mental Health, Motivation, Educational Engagement

Introduction

Transgender students often struggle to find safe and supportive settings in schools, according to research. Seelman et al. (2017) found that transgender students had higher rates of verbal harassment, physical assault, and academic issues than cisgender students. The merging of transgender identity with other marginalized identities exacerbates these issues (Ryan et al., 2020). Transgender students from low-income homes may face financial challenges that limit their study. To reduce the negative effects of intersectional stigma on transgender students' academic

performance, an inclusive and supportive atmosphere is needed (Seelman et al., 2017). University policies that protect transgender rights and provide gender-neutral facilities, counseling, and support groups can reduce intersectional stigma (Levitt et al., 2015). Rankin et al. (2010) found that safe surroundings and inclusive policies improve transgender students' schooling (Malik, R. 2018). Awareness and education among academics, staff, and students are also vital. This type of teaching can foster understanding, compassion, and support, creating inclusive classrooms that benefit transgender students. Inclusive language and acknowledging preferred names and pronouns help create a welcoming environment. Strauss et al. (2021) found that supporting transgender kids' identities in the classroom improves their mental health and academic performance. To create inclusive universities, we must understand the complicated relationship between inter-sectional stigma and transgender academic performance (Malik, R. 2018). Intersectional stigma, which promotes discrimination and prejudice, may hinder academic attainment (Seelman et al. 2017). Transgender students' issues have been acknowledged and addressed by universities, but more needs to be done. Policy improvements, instructional initiatives, and a strong sense of inclusion for transgender kids can lessen intersecting kinds of prejudice and help them succeed academically. Educational institutions must adapt to society's gender diversity and intersectionality understanding (Strauss et al., 2021). Universities should recognise and actively address transgender stereotypes to create an inclusive environment that values diversity, encourages academic success, and prepares students for a future of equal opportunity. Educational gender discrimination is likely to have serious consequences for transgender students. Grimm states that when a pupil is picked out and told they are different and should be separated from their peers, it can greatly increase their stress and misery. Both theoretical and empirical transgender literature supports Grimm's views. According to the Minority Stress Model, transgender people experience stresses related to their gender identity, threat of victimization, and internalized transphobia. Studies have indicated that transgender people endure increased stress and victimisation (Warrier et al., 2020), which is associated to depression (Balingit, M. 2016), attempted suicide, substance abuse, and risky sexual activity. However, not all transgender students experience these detrimental effects. Social support, whether perceived or actual, can also protect against minority stress (Mehmud, T., & Idris, M. 2019). Supportive schools can protect children, especially transgender youth of color, from victimization and insecurity (Balingit, M. 2016). Transgender adolescents' resilience in the face of stress, victimization, and negative outcomes illuminates how they navigate life and overcome hurdles to their well-being. School belonging may mediate the relationship between peer victimization and drug use among transgender students, building on previous research on victimization, negative behavioral outcomes, and resilience (Mehmud, T., & Idris, M. 2019). The study also examines how SES and YOC status affect peer victimization, school membership, and drug usage. Race, ethnicity, socioeconomic origin, and disability status often compound social misunderstandings and biases against transgender people (Gryphon, 2019). Intersectional stigma can manifest as microaggressions, stereotyping, or exclusion. Emotional distress, mental health issues, and academic failure can result. This research defines transgender as those who experience or express their gender in a way that contradicts, expands, or exceeds conventional expectations based on their natal sex. Intentionally inclusive, "transgender" encompasses many gender identities. It covers people who transition between genders, exist outside the male-female binary, and fluidly move between genders (Mehmud, T., & Idris, M. 2019). Transgender identities and social and medical transitions are not covered in this study. We cover all gender expansiveness within the word. Balingit (2016) estimates that 150,000 US teens between 13 and 17 identify as transgender. This represents 0.7% of US high school students. According to a recent poll, 50.9% of transgender kids said their schools forbade them from using their correct names and pronouns (Gryphon, 2019). In addition to institutional

constraints on their names, restroom use, and sports participation, transgender youth face higher peer victimization and social stigma in school.

Statement of the problem:

Transgender individuals are exposed to inter-sectional stigma, which can take on subtle or overt manifestations, due to the convergence of identities such as gender identity, race, socioeconomic class, and disability (Strauss et al., 2021; Warriier et al., 2020). The negative perception associated with this stigma can result in unequal access to mental health services, less confidence, and a sense of being socially disconnected (Gryphon, 2019). Consequently, these factors can impede their academic performance. Although previous research has examined the impact of stigma on the well-being of transgender students (Seelman et al. 2017), there has been a lack of focus on the specific relationship between intersectional stigma and academic performance in a university environment. This study gap highlights the necessity of further exploring how the combined experiences of prejudice intersect to impact the educational journey of transgender students. This study seeks to examine the impact of inter-sectional stigma on the academic achievement of transgender students at the university level in order to fill this research vacuum. This research aims to provide valuable insights into the impact of intersectional stigma on the academic performance, mental health, and overall well-being of transgender students. By examining the nuanced ways in which this stigma affects them, the study seeks to contribute to the development of targeted interventions, policies, and support systems that promote inclusivity, equity, and academic success for all students.

Research Objectives:

The objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To highlight the impact of intersectional stigma on the academic performance of transgenders.
2. To highlight the impact of intersectional stigma on the academic performance of transgender individuals, including its effects on their mental health, motivation, and engagement in educational activities.

Research Questions:

The Research questions are:

1. What is the effect of intersectional stigma on the academic performance of transgenders?
2. How does intersectional stigma effect the academic performance of transgender individuals, including its impact on their mental health, motivation, and engagement in educational activities?

Theoretical framework

The research of the impact of inter-sectional stigma on transgender educational performance utilizes recognised theories from relevant fields as its theoretical foundation. Kimberlé Crenshaw established the intersectionality theory, which posits that individuals face numerous intersecting kinds of oppression and privilege due to their social identities (Seelman et al. 2017). Within the realm of transgender educational performance, intersectionality theory highlights the significance of how transgender students may encounter social disapproval not alone based on their gender identity, but also owing to other overlapping characteristics such as race, socioeconomic background, and disability (Gryphon, 2019). The intersectionality hypothesis posits that individuals face intersecting kinds of discrimination and oppression as a result of belonging to various social categories, such as gender identity, race, and socio-economic background (Seelman et al., 2017). This theory can provide insight into how the intersectional stigma impacts the educational achievement of transgender students by examining the ways in which many influences cross and shape their experiences.

Importance of the Research

The study's importance lies in its contribution to a more thorough comprehension of the impact of intersectional stigma on transgender students in the university setting. Although previous studies have shed light on many parts of transgender individuals' lives, there is still a lack of study on the precise impact of intersectional stigma on their academic achievement. This study seeks to fill this void and has significant implications: it can offer empirical information to guide the creation of policies and programmes that attempt to cultivate a university atmosphere that is more inclusive and supportive for transgender students. Implementing evidence-based policy changes can effectively establish secure environments that foster fairness and guarantee equitable access to educational opportunities. The findings obtained from this study can provide universities with valuable guidance in improving their support systems for transgender students. Gaining insight into how intersectional stigma impacts academic achievement can guide the creation of focused interventions, counseling services, and mentorship programmes that tackle the unique difficulties these students encounter.

Delimitations

The delimitations of this study are as follows:

1. The scope of the research encompasses both public and private universities in Islamabad.
2. The target population consists of transgender individuals who are currently enrolled at both private and public universities in Islamabad.

Literature Review

Concept of Stigma

Stigma refers to the negative attitudes, beliefs, and stereotypes that society has towards certain individuals or groups based on characteristics such as their race, gender, or disability. A stigma refers to the act of devaluing and rejecting someone, associating them with socially undesirable traits or attributes (Goffman, 1963). Stigmatisation refers to the condition where an individual possesses a recognised, easily noticeable, prominent, and disreputable social standing (Miller & Grollman, 2015). The use of stigmatising language can elicit both subtle and obvious negative reactions towards individuals who are stigmatised, making them more susceptible to discriminatory treatment and psychological discomfort (Quinn & Chaudoir, 2009; Stutterheim et al., 2011). Stigmatisation is a social phenomenon that can significantly impact the lives of those who bear the mark of stigma (Goffman, 1963; Pescosolido & Martin, 2015). It can result in social condemnation, loss of status, and discriminatory treatment (Bos et al., 2013; Pescosolido & Martin, 2015). There are multiple forms of stigmatisation that can be identified (Pescosolido & Martin, 2015). In this study, the term "enacted stigma" is used to describe the actions of individuals in society who engage in discrimination and prejudice against those who are stigmatised (Pescosolido & Martin, 2015). Enacted stigma encompasses several negative behaviours such as avoidance, rejection, exclusion, verbal abuse, bullying, and even physical assault (Budge, Adelson, et al., 2013; Budge, Katz-Wise, et al., 2013; Februari, 2013; Keuzenkamp, 2012; Kuyper, 2012; Miller & Grollman, 2015; Norton & Herek, 2013; Stotzer, 2009). Anticipated stigma is a different form of stigma when individuals expect to undergo stigmatisation and believe that others will view them negatively (Quinn & Chaudoir, 2009; Teh et al., 2014). Anticipated stigma, also known as "felt" stigma, refers to the fear of experiencing stigma and the discomfort that comes with being connected with a stigmatised group (Herek et al., 2009; Scambler, 2004). The prospect of experiencing stigma can serve as a driving force for individuals to employ self-presentation tactics in order to evade being stigmatised (Chaudoir & Quinn, 2016; Scambler, 2009; Teh et al., 2014). Concealment can also cause social identity denial and social isolation (Herek et al., 2009; Kosciw et al., 2015; Teh et al., 2014). Moreover, it has the potential to adversely affect one's mental well-

being and can be more disruptive than directly experiencing stigma (Chaudoir & Quinn, 2016; Herek et al., 2013; Pachankis, 2007; Scambler, 2004).

Transgender individuals' experiences in higher education institutions

The majority of study on LGBTQ individuals in higher education has been concentrated on gay or lesbian individuals, with only limited inclusion of transgender individuals, if any. Research conducted so far has revealed that discrimination, harassment, invisibility, and marginalisation are frequently encountered by transgender individuals in colleges and universities (Bilodeau, 2007; Finger, 2010; Rankin, Weber, Blumenfeld, & Frazer, 2010; Seelman, 2013; Seelman et al., 2012). College settings often lack the necessary institutional and social support and affirmation that might enhance resilience, coping, and academic performance among transgender individuals (Bilodeau, 2005; Dugan, Kusel & Simounet, 2012; Singh, Meng, & Hansen, 2013). Moreover, those who identify as transgender and belong to racial or ethnic minority groups were found to have a higher likelihood of encountering harassment compared to individuals who identify with the gender they were assigned at birth and belong to the same racial or ethnic minority groups. Non-white respondents, in general, were more prone to experiencing racial harassment compared to white respondents. This suggests that exclusion on campuses is a complex issue that affects multiple groups simultaneously (Rankin et al., 2010).

The Connection Between Multiple Forms of Discrimination and Transgender Students

As to the findings of Walsh et al. (2018), transgender kids frequently face unfavorable views and prejudices from their peers, teachers, and educational institutions. This can lead to long-term stress, social marginalization, and feelings of being disconnected from others. The antagonistic school environment diminishes their educational involvement, self-worth, and overall state of being. Additionally, it results in higher levels of absenteeism, dropout, and diminished academic performance. The research conducted by Strauss et al. (2021) highlights another significant determinant impacting the academic performance of transgender students, which is the absence of inclusive policies and supporting surroundings. Educational institutions without gender-affirming policies and procedures create an unwelcoming environment and impede the academic success of transgender students (Brown et al., 2020). In contrast, educational institutions that have adopted accommodating measures, such as including inclusive syllabi and providing gender-neutral amenities, have shown enhancements in the mental well-being and academic achievements of transgender students. In addition, a study conducted by Seelman et al. (2017) emphasises the negative impact of intersectional stigma on the academic achievement of transgender pupils. Educational institutions must prioritise the acknowledgment and resolution of the distinct obstacles encountered by transgender individuals, specifically through the implementation of comprehensive policies and the establishment of secure and nurturing settings (Grant et al., 2011). By taking this action, we can reduce the negative effects of intersectional stigma and establish fair and inclusive educational opportunities for every student. Moreover, Seelman (2014b) discovered that specific subcategories of transgender individuals, such as people of colour, those with disabilities, individuals residing in rural areas, or those who were more frequently identified as transgender by others, faced significantly higher chances of being denied access to school bathrooms or other facilities solely because of their transgender identity. Moreover, MTF persons were shown to have a higher likelihood of being denied entry compared to gender non-conforming individuals (Seelman, 2014b). There is a limited amount of research that provides comprehensive information on the challenges faced by transgender college students when it comes to obtaining campus housing. Problematic practices in housing include the exclusive provision of gender-segregated housing, the assignment of housing and roommates based solely on birth sex, the absence of any single occupancy housing options, the denial of housing access to transgender

students, and the failure to take measures to ensure that housing is a safe and harassment-free environment for all students (Beemyn, Curtis, Davis, & Tubbs, 2005; Bilodeau, 2007; Finger, 2010; Seelman, 2014a, 2014b; Singh et al., 2013). Transgender individuals may face significant difficulty in college living, especially when there is a discrepancy between their gender identity and their assignment to gender-segregated campus accommodation (Pusch, 2005). Problematic situations encompass challenges in accessing information on gender-inclusive housing options, instances where transgender pupils are exposed without their consent, and the determination of whether to establish gender-inclusive toilets being chosen through a majority vote among residents (Seelman et al., 2012). According to Seelman (2014b), individuals with lower present wages were more prone to being refused admission to campus housing that aligns with their gender identity because they are transgender. According to Seelman (2014b), transgender individuals who identify as male-to-female (MTF) were more frequently denied university housing that aligns with their gender identity compared to individuals who identify as gender non-conforming.

Intersectional stigma as Discrimination

Intersectional stigma encompasses both individual and structural manifestations of discrimination. According to Grant et al. (2011), it can impact students' academic achievement, psychological well-being, and access to resources. Intersectional stigma is the phenomenon where various types of prejudice combine to provide an extra layer of oppression. Intersectional stigma refers to the recognition of how several marginalised identities are interconnected and the subsequent compounded prejudice that person's experience (Walsh et al., 2018). This phenomenon transcends the comprehension of each facet of an individual's identity in isolation and emphasises the interplay between several elements of marginalisation (Brown et al., 2020). It holds particular significance in the lived experiences of marginalised groups, including transgender individuals, people of colour, individuals with impairments, and those from lower socioeconomic origins. Intersectional stigma refers to the recognition that individuals frequently face discrimination, prejudice, and disadvantage as a result of the combination of different components of their identity (Grant et al., 2011). An example of this is when a transgender individual who is also a person of colour experiences prejudice not just because of their gender identity, but also because of their racial heritage (Brown et al., 2020). This interconnection can result in distinctive and frequently more severe manifestations of discrimination and exclusion. The significance of intersectional stigma rests in its capacity to offer a more intricate comprehension of how many types of oppression intersect to mold individuals' experiences (Brown et al., 2020; Grant et al., 2011). It emphasises that an individual's identity is not exclusively determined by a single trait, but rather by the intricate interaction of multiple factors. This concept questions the conventional method of studying discrimination as separate and distinct, promoting a more thorough examination of individuals' actual experiences. The recognition of intersectional stigma has extensive consequences for multiple disciplines, such as sociology, psychology, and public policy (Crenshaw, K. 1989). This statement urges researchers, policymakers, and advocates to acknowledge the complex nature of prejudice and create interventions that tackle the combined impacts of marginalisation (Brown et al., 2020; Grant et al., 2011). By acknowledging the interconnectedness of discrimination, society may strive to establish inclusive and fair environments that truly address the varied needs and experiences of marginalised individuals.

Psychological and social well-being of transgender individuals in university environments

There is limited study that has investigated the correlation between the psychological and social well-being of transgender individuals in college environments, specifically through the use of quantitative data. In his study, Bilodeau (2007) observed signs of "severe stress" (p. 92) among transgender college students. This stress was linked to their belief that they must be seen by others

as the gender specified on the toilet sign in order to use the facility without facing any form of harassment. The study conducted by Seelman et al. (2012) revealed that the absence of transgender representation and consideration in bathroom designs leads to exclusion and invisibility for transgender students, staff, and faculty. Consequently, they feel less secure on campus and actively avoid using campus bathrooms. Participants in the study also indicated that they used bathrooms less frequently than they would if they felt secure, and they avoided drinking water on campus to minimise the need to use the bathroom (Seelman et al., 2012). The participants in the Colorado study likewise mentioned feelings of being excluded and unnoticed in regards to gender-segregated campus housing (Seelman et al., 2012). Seelman (2014a) highlights that LGBTQ-specific campus housing, intended to provide support for this group of students, may not always be perceived as safe for transgender students, particularly those who prefer not to openly disclose their gender identity. This lack of safety likely contributes to increased stress levels among this population. According to Beemyn (2005), it is important to note that not all transgender individuals identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual, and may not necessarily feel at ease in housing specifically designated for LGBT individuals. Next, I will explain the minority stress model, which offers a conceptual framework for examining the connection between transgender individuals being excluded from certain areas and its impact on their own well-being. TGNB individuals are a minority group whose gender identification diverges substantially from their assigned sex at birth, as stated by the Institute of Medicine (IOM, 2011). The individuals in this category exhibit a wide range of gender identities, gender expressions, and sexual orientations, making them a heterogeneous group (Bockting, 1999, 2014). TGNB individuals may employ fluid terminology to articulate their identities, which might vary according on the setting and undergo changes throughout time. Therefore, the term transgender is commonly employed as a broad category to encompass this group of individuals. Gender nonbinary refers to gender identities and expressions that do not conform to the traditional gender binary. This includes individuals who identify as both man and woman, neither, another gender, or no gender (Nestle, Howell, & Wilchins, 2002). It is important to note that the word gender dysphoria should not be mistaken for the phrase gender identity disorder. Gender dysphoria refers to the distress experienced when there is a mismatch between one's gender identity and the sex assigned at birth (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Some individuals who identify as transgender or gender non-binary may experience gender dysphoria at certain times in their lives. They may find relief from this dysphoria by making adjustments to their gender identity and expression, or by undergoing gender-affirming medical procedures such as hormone therapy or surgery (Coleman et al., 2012).

Effects of stigmatization on mental health.

Research has demonstrated that minority stress is a significant predictor of suicide attempts, depression, and psychological distress among TGNB individuals (Clements-Nolle, Marx, & Katz, 2006; Nemoto, Bödeker, & Iwamoto, 2011; Nuttbrock et al., 2015; Bockting, Miner, Swinburne Romine, Hamilton, & Coleman, 2013). The National Institutes of Health designated transgender and gender-nonconforming individuals as a health disparity population due to the increased prevalence of certain disorders, such as depression, and the significant levels of stigmatization they face (National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities, 2016). Minority stress processes span from immediate to remote. Proximal processes are strongly connected to the social significance of minority status or identity, encompassing an individual's perception and evaluation. The factors encompassed in this category are: the anticipation of rejection and discrimination (referred to as felt stigma), the internalization of negative attitudes towards oneself (known as internalized homo- and transphobia), and the act of hiding one's minority identity (Bockting et al., 2013; Meyer, 1995, 2003). Distal processes refer to external circumstances and occurrences that are less influenced by individual interpretations. These processes encompass biased incidents or

instances of discrimination, including firsthand encounters with prejudice (Bockting et al., 2013; Meyer, 2003). Group-level resilience elements may help alleviate the adverse effects of stigmatisation on mental health. Research conducted by Bockting et al. (2013) found that TGNB individuals who had support from their families experienced reduced psychological discomfort. Similarly, Nuttbrock, Rosenblum, and Blumenstein (2002) discovered that transfeminine sex workers who had family support reported fewer depressive symptoms. Furthermore, research has demonstrated that participation in the TGNB community and receiving support from other TGNB individuals can help mitigate the negative impact of discrimination on the psychological well-being of TGNB individuals (Bockting et al., 2013; Nuttbrock et al., 2015). Additionally, these factors have been found to be linked to lower levels of anxiety and depression symptoms among transfeminine individuals (Pfum, Testa, Balsam, Goldblum, & Bongar, 2015).

The Impact of Intersectional Stigma on Academic Performance

Additional determinants of resilience include gender literacy and political participation. Gender literacy encompasses the ability to recognise and comprehend society gender norms and their impact on those who identify as transgender, gender nonconforming, or nonbinary (National Centre for Gender Spectrum Health, 2018). A study using qualitative research methods discovered that being conscious of the oppression associated with not conforming to traditional gender identity and expression can help protect individuals from the harmful impacts of being stigmatised, hence benefiting their overall health and well-being (Singh, Hays, & Watson, 2009). Engaging in political action in response to oppression has been identified as a beneficial coping mechanism and a crucial component of developing a positive TGNB identity (Budge et al., 2012; Frost, Fine, Torre, & Cabana, 2019; Riggle & Mohr, 2015). Furthermore, transgender activism can help safeguard individuals and their peers against discrimination based on gender, enhance the bonds between transgender and gender non-binary individuals and communities (Riggle, Rostosky, McCants, & Pascale-Hague, 2011), and make it easier to access supportive transgender-friendly resources, legal assistance, and healthcare services (Singh & McKleroy, 2011). Among 2003, Meyer introduced the minority stress model as a way to explain the health inequalities observed among LGB persons. This model was then modified to include individuals who identify as transgender, gender nonbinary, or genderqueer (Hendricks & Testa, 2012; Hofman, 2014; Testa, Habarth, Peta, Balsam, & Bockting, 2015). The minority stress concept suggests that individuals who identify as sexual or gender minorities endure persistent stress due to societal stigma and prejudice, leading to detrimental effects on their mental well-being. Minority stress processes are specific to persons belonging to minority groups, and they contribute to overall stress levels. These processes help to explain, to some extent, the disparities in mental health observed among populations identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual (LGB), and transgender and gender non-binary (TGNB) (Hendricks & Testa, 2012; Meyer, 2003).

Methodology

Research method

This study will employ a qualitative research methodology. Qualitative research methodologies are a suitable approach to investigate the impact of intersectional stigma on transgender individuals' educational success (Crenshaw, K. 1989).

Research Design

This study will employ a grounded theory approach. A qualitative research design that works well for classifying causes and effects is grounded theory (Brown et al., 2020). It approaches research using both deductive and inductive methods. Because of this, it is perfect for researching novel and cutting-edge subjects, such the forms and consequences of intersectional stigma on the

academic achievement of transgender people. Data collection for grounded theory research usually entails focus groups and semi-structured interviews.

Population

Twenty transgender students who are enrolled in public and private universities in Islamabad make up the study's population.

The size of the sample

Ten transgender students, or half of the total expected number of transgender enrolled students (20 students in total), will make up the study's sample size. The research will be carried out at Islamabad's public and private universities. In-depth interviews that are semi-structured will be used to gather data.

Sampling technique

In this study, the snowball sampling technique is applied. Instead of choosing individuals at random, this kind of sampling technique chooses them depending on their availability or willingness to participate. It is a productive and economical method of obtaining a sizable sample size. It is also a useful method for gathering opinions from a variety of sources (Brown et al., 2020).

Instrument:

A semi-structured, open-ended, in-depth interview is the study's instrument. The purpose of semi-structured interviews is to get detailed information from a wide range of transgender pupils. In order to confirm their willingness to participate in the study, participants will be asked to provide their formal consent prior to the interview process starting. Ensuring the secrecy of the interviewee and the privacy of any data they provide is contingent upon taking this vital step.

Analysis

To better comprehend the experiences of the participants, the student investigator will provide open-ended questions. Private settings will be used for the interviews, and participants will have the chance to ask questions and share their thoughts. Every piece of information will be gathered in confidence and anonymously. The interviews will be transcribed after being audio recorded. We will conduct an analysis of the transcribed data to find recurring themes and patterns.

Analysis of data

The study was conducted using semi-structured interview transcripts (Krippendorff, 2009). Using inductive analysis, new themes emerged from the data. Prior to beginning the coding process, an initial list of potential codes was generated using the interview questions. As the analysis went on, new themes emerged, old codes were abandoned, and new codes were created (Charmaz, 2006). After going over the transcripts, Miles and Huberman (1994) produced the first theme code book. After reading the transcripts aloud multiple times, the material was divided into manageable chunks using open line-by-line coding. I examined earlier codes and contrasted them with recently emerging codes in an effort to collapse and eliminate duplicate themes that did not end up being the most significant. I examined earlier codes and contrasted them with recently emerging codes in an effort to collapse and eliminate duplicate themes that did not end up being the most significant. We employed an iterative process for topic classification, rephrasing, and examination. If intercoder disagreements on how to code a particular piece were significant, we talked about them and ultimately reached an agreement on all coding decisions. The coding method benefited from the use of the qualitative data analysis software.

The Effect of Intersectional Stigma on Academic Achievement

We determined the following subdivisions for the second theme: (a) The effect of intersectional stigma on mental health (b) Intersectional stigma's causes and effects (b) The sensation of intersecting stigma and self-worth.

Mental health and its effect of intersectional stigma

Experiencing anxiety and stress throughout presentations as a result of one's transgender identity affecting one's perspective and self-worth, which has an impact on one's mental and academic well-being. Harassment and discrimination in schools create a hostile atmosphere that affects mental health and makes scholastic difficulties worse since students may be afraid to ask for assistance due to prejudice fears. A participant talked about their personal experiences:

I felt really anxious because I had to give a presentation in front of the class, and I was worried about how people would react because of my transgender identity. It made me feel really stressed out and scared, and I had a hard time preparing for the presentation. In the end, I didn't do as well as I wanted to, and it made me feel disappointed in myself. It's tough when your identity affects how people see you and how you feel about yourself, and it can definitely impact your mental health and academic performance.

Harassment in the classroom makes it difficult for transgender students to succeed academically, which makes some of them choose to conceal their identities or put off getting assistance, which makes problems worse. One of the participants said what they had.

Harassment from peers and educators can create a hostile learning environment. Transgender students often face verbal abuse, bullying, and microaggressions, which not only affect our emotional well-being but also mental health. Fear of discrimination may also lead some transgender students to conceal their identity or avoid seeking help when needed, further exacerbating academic challenges.

Participant shared their experience:

When I feel like people see me that way, it makes me doubt myself. I worry that I won't do as well in university because of who I am. It can make me feel sad and stressed out, which affects how well I do in my classes. It's like a weight on my shoulders that makes everything harder. This negative stereotype threat affects my confidence, mental health and even my academic outcomes, as it can make it harder for me to perform to the best of my abilities.

Unfavorable preconceptions make transgender students doubt themselves, which affects their mental and intellectual well-being and prevents them from reaching their full potential.

Motivation and effect of intersectional stigma

Being transgender and feeling left out during group projects at university interfered with focus and performance, which questioned one's sense of competence. Participants talk about their experiences as stated below:

I remember when we had group work at university, I felt like no one wanted to work with me because I'm transgender. It made me feel really bad. I wanted to do well in university and show everyone that being transgender doesn't make me any less smart or capable. But it was hard because people kept treating me differently. It made it tough to concentrate on my work and do my best.

My confidence and motivation in academic settings were hampered by being ridiculed and excluded from groups because I am transgender. A participant revealed that:

One time, during a group project, my classmates didn't want to work with me because I'm transgender. They made jokes and ignored my ideas, which made me feel really excluded and upset. It was hard to focus on the project because I felt like I wasn't being taken seriously. This experience made me doubt myself and my abilities, which affected my motivation and confidence

in class. It was a reminder that being transgender sometimes makes it harder to be treated fairly and do well academically.

Feeling pressured to constantly prove myself due to transgender stereotypes hindered confidence and focus on studies, impacting academic performance. Participant shared their experience:

I felt like I had to work extra hard to prove myself because of stereotypes about transgender people. It made me feel like I wasn't good enough and that I had to constantly prove myself to others. This pressure effected my confidence and made it harder for me to focus on my studies. It's tough when you feel like you're being judged before you even get a chance to show what you're capable of.

Feeling undervalued for my efforts due to being transgender undermined motivation and self-worth, highlighting the challenge of recognition in academic settings. Participant shared their experience:

Sure! There have been times when I've worked really hard on something, like a project or a presentation, and then it felt like people didn't take it seriously just because I'm transgender. It made me feel like all my effort didn't matter, which was really discouraging. It made me doubt myself and wonder if I was good enough. It's tough when you feel like people don't see your worth because of who you are. It can make it harder to stay motivated and feel good about yourself.

Participant share their experience:

In the context of my academic pursuits, the stigma associated with being transgender has exacerbated these mental health challenges. The fear of being judged or ridiculed by peers and educators can make it difficult for me to fully engage in classroom discussions, seek help when needed, or participate in extracurricular activities.

The stigma surrounding being transgender intensifies mental health struggles, hindering engagement in class and extracurriculars, and discouraging seeking help or participation.

Self-esteem, Wellbeing and experience of intersectional stigma

Experiencing harassment or stigma might sap one's enthusiasm and drive to study. It can be challenging for students to find the drive to succeed academically or pursue educational ambitions when they feel marginalized or invalidated all the time. as reported by the participant: As a transgender student in a Pakistani university, the relationship between my self-esteem and experiences of stigma or discrimination is deeply intertwined. Stigma and discrimination based on my transgender identity can significantly impact my self-esteem and overall well-being.

Stigma and discrimination in education erode self-worth and confidence, fostering internalized shame and reinforcing harmful societal stereotypes. As participant shared:

When I face stigma or discrimination in educational settings, whether it's through verbal harassment, exclusion, or microaggressions, it can deeply undermine my sense of self-worth and confidence. These negative experiences can reinforce harmful stereotypes and societal prejudices, leading me to internalize feelings of shame, inadequacy, and unworthiness. Furthermore, experiencing stigma or discrimination can erode my motivation and passion for learning. When I feel constantly invalidated or marginalized, it can be difficult to find the motivation to excel academically or pursue my educational goals. This can ultimately impact my academic performance and hinder my overall success in university.

Another experience of a transgender student:

Stigma or discrimination effects my self-esteem when I see others being treated better than me just because they're not transgender. It makes me feel like I'm not as important or worthy as them, which can really hurt my confidence and how I see myself. It's tough when you feel like you're not valued or respected for who you are.

Conclusion, Summary, Findings, Discussion and Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, a thorough summary, findings, discussion, conclusion, and recommendation are made in this chapter. It clarifies for stakeholders, policy makers, and those implementing policies the implications of the study and the paths forward for policy makers. The purpose of the study was to determine how transgender students in Islamabad's universities are affected by intersectional stigma. The conceptual framework, which was developed in accordance with the elements chosen, served as the foundation for the study (Effect of intersectional stigma on the academic performance of transgender individuals, including its effects on their mental health, motivation, and engagement in educational activities).

Summary

The purpose of the paper is to investigate the impact of intersectional stigma that transgender students encounter in higher education, particularly in Islamabad. It seeks to understand the ways in which various aspects of their identities—such as gender, race, and background—affect their experiences. Through interviews, the project aims to gather information regarding the difficulties faced by transgender students and how they impact their academic performance. The study centers on an important concept known as intersectionality. This implies that transgender students experience prejudice based on a variety of factors, including their color and financial status, in addition to the fact that they are transgender. The goal of the research is to determine how these many elements combine to make the lives of transgender students more difficult and how this affects their educational experiences by hearing their personal stories. The study looks into the difficulties transgender students in Islamabad universities encounter using a grounded theory design and snowball sampling. Researchers seek comprehensive narratives of transgender students' experiences through semi-structured interviews, emphasizing the intersectional stigma they face and how it affects their academic achievement. The study looks for recurring themes and patterns in the interview data to give light on the intricate relationship between social identities, discrimination, and educational outcomes.

Findings

The current study examines the emotions that transgender students experience when enrolled in college, especially in light of different types of discrimination. Ten different transgender students' lived experiences are examined in order to show how intersectional stigma affects transgender students' academic achievement at the university level.

- First, research has shown that a number of variables, including their gender identity, race, handicap, and socioeconomic standing, might come together to put people in difficult situations.
- According to the findings, transgender identification has compounded these challenges by interacting with other stigmatized aspects of identity. Individuals who identify as transgender and come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may have additional financial strains that hinder their capacity to give their academic work their full attention.
- This study reports that transgender students have a hostile environment in the classroom due to discrimination, which affects their academic performance. Some of these students choose to conceal their identities or avoid seeking assistance, which exacerbates their problems.
- Research indicates that unfavorable preconceptions engender self-doubt in transgender students, which impedes their success by negatively affecting their mental and intellectual well-being.

- According to this study, feeling marginalized in university group projects because of one's gender identity interfered with focus and performance, casting doubt on one's capacity.
- The findings underscored the difficulty in receiving acknowledgement in academic environments, since feeling underappreciated for one's efforts because of one's gender diminished motivation and self-worth.

Discussions

The study emphasizes the effects of intersectional stigma while focusing on the difficulties and discrimination encountered by transgender students in higher education. The study finds and investigates a number of themes associated with these experiences through the use of semi-structured interview transcripts and an inductive analysis technique (Krippendorff, 2009). As the investigation went on, this approach allowed for the formation of additional themes and codes (Charmaz, 2006), which finally resulted in a thorough knowledge of the problems at hand. Having so many transgender students suffering from anxiety, sadness, and low self-esteem as a result of discrimination, mental health has become a crucial area of concern. Their capacity to concentrate on their studies and do well academically might be seriously impacted by the ongoing stress of navigating a hostile environment. Participants discussed how stress affects their academic performance and mental health, highlighting the need for stronger support networks. Self-worth and motivation are strongly related to these events. Transgender students frequently experience an overwhelming and demoralizing demand to prove themselves on a regular basis. Negative preconceptions and being left out of group projects might cause self-doubt and lower participation in school-related activities. Participants talked about the psychological toll that feeling unappreciated takes and how it affects their academic achievement. The study's conclusion emphasizes how intricate and varied the difficulties encountered by transgender students in higher education are. Their motivation, academic performance, mental health, and self-esteem are all greatly impacted by intersectional stigma. Universities must create inclusive policies, offer focused support, and create an atmosphere that is more tolerant and understanding in order to address these problems. By doing this, they may contribute to ensuring that every student has the chance to thrive academically, regardless of gender identity. According to Pament (2019), transgender students faced high rates of gender-based assault and harassment, which got worse during the COVID-19 epidemic. Transgender students in Peshawar, KP, experienced mental health problems, homelessness, unemployment, and social marginalisation (Shah et al., 2023). According to a recent study, Pakistan's legal system continues to discriminate against transgender kids (Alamgir, 2024). A cycle of impunity is created and the pursuit of justice is hampered when hate crimes against the transgender student community in Peshawar go unreported or are withheld (Alamgir, 2024). Transgender students also face increased violence, marginalisation in society, and prejudice in family environments (Alizai et al., 2017; Greenberg, 2012; Ullah et al., 2020). In addition to being the setting for initial encounters with the stigma associated with gender nonconformity, the family is frequently the place of primary socialization and the formation of group identity (Narendran et al., 2021). Our research shows that the family is frequently a significant source of the stigma that is applied to transgender pupils. In Swat, transgender pupils have endured violent killings on multiple occasions and were frequently cut apart from their family (Ullah et al., 2019). In an effort to "correct" their family member's gender nonconforming behaviors, some family members have resorted to physical, verbal, and emotional abuse (Ullah et al., 2019). According to our research, transgender students are primarily harmed in educational settings. According to Noreen and Rashid (2024) and Mehmud and Idris (2019), transgender students encounter challenges such as inadequate teacher training, inadequate school facilities, and a lack of supporting school policies. Their marginalization in society as a result of these experiences results in the rejection of their

fundamental human rights (Sher et al, 2022). According to James et al. (2016), third gender individuals are more likely to engage with physicians, hospital/emergency department personnel, and first responders and to be denied access to care, verbally and physically abused, and denied care altogether. People who identify as third gender face widespread prejudice in the workplace, in social, health, and educational contexts (Bhattacharya et al., 2020; Jain 2018; Ung Loh, 2018), which eventually affects their access to medical care. Being stigmatized can result in service denial, harassment, discrimination, and a delay in getting medication when seeking medical attention (Cruz, 2014). Health care system interactions have the potential to sustain stigma and function as catalysts for ongoing vulnerability (Dolan et al., 2020).

Conclusion

The purpose of this study is to investigate the complex relationship that exists between transgender students' academic achievement in Pakistan and intersectional stigma. Through the identification and comprehension of the diverse forms of stigma encountered by transgender individuals in higher education, including stigma based on gender, religion, and class, this study sheds insight on the multiple obstacles these students confront. Intersectional stigma has a significant negative influence on transgender students' mental health, motivation, and participation in their academic pursuits. It is characterized by overlapping and related societal categorizations that result in discrimination. The study highlights that transgender students face several, overlapping types of oppression because of their social identities, which has a substantial impact on their academic performance. It does this by utilizing Kimberlé Crenshaw's intersectionality theory. Through the use of this theoretical framework, the research illuminates the ways in which gender identity intersects with socioeconomic position, disability, and race to produce distinct and compounded experiences of discrimination that impede educational success. Grounded theory design, the study's qualitative research methodology, enables an in-depth examination of these concerns through semi-structured interviews with transgender students at Islamabad's public and private universities. This method assists in pinpointing the precise mechanisms—such as stress, social exclusion, and a lack of support networks—through which intersectional stigma affects academic performance. Semi-structured interviews and snowball sampling guarantee the gathering of thorough and varied data, offering a solid basis for research. In data analysis, transcripts of interviews are coded using an inductive technique to find recurring themes and patterns. Through the identification of new themes and the improvement of preexisting ones, this process—which is made possible by qualitative data analysis software—ensures a comprehensive understanding of the effects of intersectional stigma on transgender students' academic experiences. The study's conclusions highlight the complex obstacles that transgender students encounter in higher education, emphasizing the ways in which intersectional stigmas—which can be caused by a person's gender identity, disability, socioeconomic status, race, or any combination of these factors—intersect to produce particular and compounded obstacles to their well-being and academic achievement. Students who identify as transgender frequently face prejudice, rejection, and a lack of institutional support, which has an impact on their mental health as well as their drive, sense of self, and general academic success. Their capacity to succeed academically may eventually be hampered by these experiences of stigma and marginalization, which can also result in increased stress, social alienation, and a lack of access to vital support networks.

Recommendations

- To guarantee a non-discriminatory, inclusive environment for transgender students, develop and execute comprehensive policies that address concerns relating to gender identity, race, disability, and financial position.

- To reduce financial burden and free up time for academic pursuits, provide transgender students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds tailored financial support and scholarships.
- Create a welcoming climate that encourages transgender students to ask for assistance and engage fully in class by establishing clear procedures to address and oppose discrimination in educational settings.
- Encourage education and awareness campaigns to combat harmful stereotypes, lower self-doubt, and enhance transgender kids' mental and academic well-being.
- Encourage transgender students to feel competent and appreciated by creating inclusive group work environments and training courses. This will improve their focus and academic achievement.
- Give transgender pupils credit for their academic achievements; this will increase their self-worth and motivation and guarantee that their contributions are recognised.

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