

Transmisia and Psychological Distress with the Mediation of Unemployment and Moderation of Social Acceptance – A Study of Indian Transgender Citizens

— *Review of* —
**Integrative
Business &
Economics**
— *Research* —

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ABSTRACT

The transgender population is one of the most vulnerable groups facing constant violence and ostracization. Discrimination in the most fundamental aspects, such as education, employment, housing, and healthcare, has a devastating effect on their mental well-being. This study explores the impact of transmisia (TM) on the psychological distress (PD) of the transgender population and how unemployment (UE) mediates this effect. Additionally, this paper examines the moderation effect of social acceptance (SA) between TM and PD. The study was conducted in four Indian states – Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, and Tamil Nādu, out of top seven considering transgender population. The sample of this study included 318 transgender individuals from the states mentioned above and was selected by adopting a purposive sampling method. The results exhibit that TM has a significant positive impact on the PD of transgender citizens, and UE mediates this effect. However, the aforesaid impact is moderated by SA, highlighting the pressing need for interventions in amplifying the social inclusion and acceptability of transgender individuals. This study holds practical implications for all stakeholders, including employers and policymakers. The effective implementation of best human resource practices and anti-discriminatory policies further the prospects of building an ethical workspace and equitable society.

Keywords: Transmisia, Psychological Distress, Unemployment, Social Acceptance

Received 20 April 2023 | Revised 23 July 2023 | Accepted 30 August 2023.

1. INTRODUCTION

Transgender is an umbrella term encompassing a heterogeneous spectrum of identities, expressions, appearances, and behaviors that contradict or transcend conventional gender norms (Biswas & Soora 2021). In India, Hijra is a popular term used for transgender people and their roots go back to ancient times (Chatterjee 2018; Anusha & Hunnur 2019; Bal 2020). As per the census, India is home to 488,000 transgender citizens (Census 2011), and until recent times, this community was not legally recognized. In 2014, Supreme Court, in its historic ruling in the case of National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) versus Union of India, granted recognition for various transgender rights and considered them as "third gender" (Anusha & Hunnur 2019; Biswas & Soora 2021). The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act 2019 (Bal 2020) guarantees the right to "self-perceived" gender identity, prohibits gender-based discrimination, and promotes equality. However, due to inefficient enforcement of the Act and lack of stringent legal measures, discrimination against transgender individuals remains a perennial issue. As per the census, total literacy stands at 46% out of the transgender population in India. Employment is low at 6% while most of them are engaged in menial jobs (NHRC, 2017) with abysmally low income. According to Williams Institute (2021), India holds 51st position in the social acceptance index. Unethical hiring practices, hostile work environments, social ostracization, and transprejudice contribute to poverty and subsequent mental trauma among the transgender population (Stelzner 2022). This background heightens the relevance of this study which examines the sample of four Indian states - Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu, from the top seven as per the transgender population concentration based on Census (2011). Although more than half (50.12%) of transgender citizens residing in urban India are from these four states, their literacy rate (58.57%) and work participation rate (37.25%) are just moderate (Mal & Mundu 2023). Hence, while evaluating the persistent unemployment issues, this paper tries to study the mediating effect of the same and the moderating mechanism of social acceptance on the impact of transmissia on psychological distress.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESIS

2.1. Transmissia (TM) and Psychological Distress (PD)

Transmissia is frequently recognized as "Transphobia", despite a subtle distinction in their connotation. Both terms originate from the Greek language, where "phobia" denotes "fear" and "misia" signifies "hatred" (Simmons University 2023; Wiktionary 2022). Transmissia can be defined as aversion, hatred, or mistrust directed toward individuals who identify as transgender or whose gender expression does not align with traditional gender norms (Loyola Marymount University 2023; Planned Parenthood 2023). The prevalence of transmissia or transphobia in society significantly contributes to the marginalization and discrimination of transgender individuals. Transprejudice-based violence perceptibly persists across various cultural contexts and countries, regardless of their economic status, whether high, middle, or low-income nations (Wirtz et al. 2020; Xie et al. 2021; Noor 2022). Cross-sectional research of trans women in thirteen provinces of Cambodia indicated that at least one-third of participants had difficulties finding employment (31.5%), experienced sexual assault (39.5%), or were compelled to have sex (51.6%) because of their gender identification (Yi et al. 2020). A Pakistan-based study established that transwomen encountered various forms of verbal and psychological abuse predominantly perpetrated by men, including family members, classmates, intimate partners, employers, and co-workers (Noor 2022). Numerous studies steered in different

countries reveal alarming information on hate crimes, including rape, murder, forced sex work, human trafficking, and other forms of violence targeted towards transgender, nonbinary or gender non-conforming individuals as a manifestation of cissexism or transphobia (Chatterjee 2018; Rafael et al. 2021; Barua & Khan 2023; Müller et al. 2021; Wirtz et al. 2020; Rosenberg et al. 2020; Jackson et al. 2023). India has reported several incidents of stigmatization and violence against its transgender citizens; a study by Priya and Kumar (2020) establishes this with few anecdotal evidence. Uma, a transwoman who was sitting next to a metro station in Delhi, the national capital, was dragged by two policemen into a room who brutally raped her and extorted money. Another transwoman Jhumroo narrated the horrifying experience of her friend Neelam who had to use the restroom urgently, was “chased away from a public washroom, and had to resort to urinating in a remote open area”. Transgender and nonbinary individuals endure substantial psychological health challenges due to the social apathy, violence, and ostracization they experience.

A study by Rendina et al. (2020) in the United States found that transwomen subjected to physical and mental abuse were more prone to report severe depression and anxiety. Based on the data collected from the United States Transgender Survey 2015, Becerra et al. (2021) conducted a study among Asian American transgender individuals that established transphobia-based violence cause “serious psychological distress” (SPD). A Canadian study demonstrated that transgender youth were more susceptible to high stress, self-injury, episodes of major depression, suicide ideation, and attempted suicide (Veale et al. 2017). According to Testa et al. (2015), “internalized transphobia (ITP)” is a kind of minority-oriented stress that ascends when transgender individuals internalize negative perceptions towards themselves because of constant exposure to societal discrimination and harassment. Numerous studies on transgender samples have established that ITP positively correlates with adverse mental health (Jackman, Dolezal & Bockting 2018; Bretherton et al. 2021). According to several studies, the repeated episodes of anxiety attacks caused by ITP can eventually culminate in self-annihilation (Veale et al. 2017; Becerra et al. 2021; Rafael et al. 2021). A Williams Institute (2019) report, based on the United States Transgender Survey 2015, displays that 51% of transgender individuals who experience repeated violence and harassment attempted suicide. Grounded on the rich literature, we hypothesize

H1: TM significantly impacts PD

2.2. Unemployment (UE), Transphobia (TM) and Psychological Distress (PD)

Transprejudice seems to have a devastating consequence on the employability of transgender persons. A national survey in the US established a high unemployment rate among transgender people, which is twice the national unemployment rate (United Nations Programme on HIV and AIDS 2014), also validated by McKinsey (2021). The obstacles for the transgender community while trying to secure employment are complex, and studies suggest that transphobia is linked to hiring discrimination as a major cause (James et al. 2015; Leppel 2021; Shannon 2022). Mizock et al. (2018) explicate that unfair recruiting practices, bigotry in the workplace, and poor working conditions cause low employment rates and lower wages for transgender people. A field experiment in twelve labor markets in Sweden by Granberg, Andersson and Ahmed (2020) reveal that employment discrimination among transgender people is higher than among cisgender individuals. Unemployment based upon transprejudice and discrimination is established through studies in various Western, European, and South-Asian countries, for instance, the

US (Bradford et al. 2013; Shannon 2022), Australia (Bretherton et al. 2021), EU (Fric 2019; Drydakis 2021), Pakistan (Waqar, Waqar & Jamal 2022), Bangladesh (Abedin & Sarker 2022), and India (Chatterjee 2018). According to National Human Rights Commission data, 96% of transgender people in India have severe difficulties finding a job, with many being driven into sex work or begging since they have no other options (NHRC, 2017). Mishra and Negi (2021) and Kumar (2022) elucidate that major barriers to transgender career opportunities include unfair hiring policies and the absence of legal protections for the transgender community in India.

According to Van Borm and Baert (2018), hiring bias and mistreatment aligns with the model of “taste-based discrimination theory” (Becker 1957), where employers' or colleagues' reluctance to work with transgender persons may be associated with transmissia. This theory specifies that employers who harbor an aversion to transgender people may pay less for work of equal productivity to make up for the psychological harm caused by coming into contact with members of this group or opt not to hire them in the organization (Drydakis 2021). Discrimination can also be based upon the model "statistical discrimination theory" (Arrow 1973), which may be a stigma associated with the health of transgender individuals (Drydakis 2021) since they are at higher risk of physical, mental, and transitioning related illness (Granberg, Andersson & Ahmed 2020). Van Borm and Baert (2018) argues that this type of discrimination could be inaccurate and result from false perception regarding particular groups of transgender people. Numerous studies have explored the types of workplace inequity confronted by transgender people. For instance, Darwish and Naidoo (2021) examined South African transgender individuals who reported constant criticism and harassment within the work domain. Gender identity and expression have caused hostile workplace outcomes like not being hired but fired, being underpaid, or being denied promotion (Fric 2019). Apart from explicit victimization, they also face microaggressions like sarcastic gaze, purposeful misuse of pronouns, and other subtle insensitive remarks (Galupo & Resnick 2016). Most workplaces adhere to a gender binary system and lack gender-neutral bathrooms; therefore, bathroom usage is a significant concern for transgender, nonbinary or gender non-conforming individuals (Davidson 2016). A survey by National Centre for Transgender Equality reported that 59 percent of gender non-conforming or nonbinary individuals dread using public restrooms since they are afraid and ashamed of being tormented, mocked, or confronted (James et al. 2015).

Unemployment leads to financial instability, poverty, and subsequent hunger (Matsuzaka & Koch 2019). There are plenty of studies that exemplify the positive association between poverty and homelessness of transgender individuals with their anxiety and psychological distress (Mizock & Mueser 2014; Chatterjee 2018; Matsuzaka & Koch 2019; Bretherton et al. 2021; Waqar, Waqar & Jamal 2022). A national community survey in Australia has reported that unemployed Australian transgender individuals exhibited high depression (73%), self-harming tendencies (63%), and suicide attempts (43%) (Bretherton et al. 2021). Chaudhary and Agrawal (2022) expound that in India, transgender citizens face employment discrimination and denial of bank loans, credits, and other financial aid for self-employment, further intensifying their vulnerability and irreparable psychological trauma. Literature indicates that unfair hiring practices, unemployment, and workplace mistreatment have a severe influence on the mental well-being of transgender people; hence, we hypothesize:

H2: TM positively impacts UE

H3: UE positively impacts PD

H4: UE mediates the impact of TM on PD

2.3. Social Acceptance (SA), Transmisia (TM), Psychological Distress (PD)

Social acceptance signifies the magnitude to which individuals feel valued, respected, and included by fellow members of society. Despite their contributions to the social order and entitlement to equal opportunities, transgender individuals continue to experience severe disparities in accessing primary resources like housing, education, employment, and healthcare (Davidson 2016; Anusha & Hunnur 2019; Tantirattanakulchai & Hounnaklang 2020). Social acceptance encompasses an eclectic range of aspects which includes autonomy to gender identity and expression, safe housing, financial stability, access to gender-affirming healthcare, and even more, assimilation in the broader political, cultural, and social fabric of the society (Kumar 2014; Tantirattanakulchai & Hounnaklang 2020; Xie et al. 2021). Studies have underscored the importance of transgender individuals' education, which can be crucial for acquiring knowledge, skills, and critical thinking abilities for their personal, professional, and social development (Biswas & Soora 2021; Kamali et al. 2021). Social inclusivity in schools and universities helps reduce cissexism, and transgender students can acquire the necessary education without being bullied for their gender identity (Greytak, Kosciw & Boesen 2013; Weekley 2017; Omercajic & Martino 2020). Furthermore, a study by Gorrotxategi et al. (2020) in a university explicated that promoting inclusivity and visibility of transgender students' diminished transphobia considerably among cisgender students. A study by National Human Rights Commission (2022) in India highlights that establishing a transgender-friendly milieu in education institutions promotes equality and ensures a platform for all children to learn and foster foundational values of diversity and social acceptance. Studies also establish that organizational support and social inclusion can amplify employability and reduce workplace challenges of transgender individuals (Ozturk & Tatli 2016; Mizock et al. 2018; Mishra & Negi 2021). A study steered by Poornima (2022) in Kerala, India, validates that social acceptance can be obtained through interventions and decisive involvement. According to the study media reports and social activism that portrayed transgender individuals in a positive light have heightened their visibility and increased awareness contributing to a supportive atmosphere in the region.

Matsuzaka and Koch (2019) examined the "intersection of transphobia and misogyny" and its relationship with the victimization of transgender women in New York city. This study underscored the role of social support in alleviating the stigma produced by transmisogyny. Xie et al. (2021) surveyed 1309 transgender citizens from China and observed 56.4% suicidal ideation and 16.1% suicide attempts. The findings indicate that "family support and social acceptance" can reduce self-destructive tendencies among the Chinese transgender population. Social support not only diminishes anxiety and depression but is a catalyst to enhance the sense of belonging and overall mental well-being, suggests (Tantirattanakulchai & Hounnaklang 2020) based on their study among Bangkok transgender citizens. An investigation on African American trans-women proves that "body satisfaction," which can be attained by gender confirmation therapies, will boost their mental well-being and enhance their acceptance in society (Klemmer, Arayasirikul & Raymond 2021). A similar study in the UK has echoed this finding by stating that acceptance and support from society help transgender individuals to build resilience, especially during transitioning (Ellis, Bailey & McNeil 2016). Based on their observation (Budge, Adelson & Howard 2013) accentuated the importance of "interventions that reduce avoidant coping strategies" and "increasing social support" to augment the mental health

of transgender individuals. Barry University School of Social Work, USA, explored the relationship of social connectedness and transphobic stigma on the self-esteem of transgender adults. The study overtly advocates "micro and macro interventions" to amplify social connectedness (Austin & Goodman 2017). Social support is a positive resource one can get from good social connections (Shim & Lee 2023). Numerous research findings demonstrate a positive connexion between social acceptance and support with the mental well-being of the transgender population (Mizock & Mueser 2014; Trujillo et al. 2017; Sun et al. 2022; Hajek et al. 2023). Hence, we hypothesize:

H5: SA moderates the impact of TM on UE

H6: SA moderates the impact of UE on PD

H7: SA moderates the impact of TM on PD

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Data and population

A pilot study was steered in four states of India - Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, and Tamil Nādu, out of top seven considering transgender population as per the Census (2011). One hundred transgender respondents participated in the study. The questionnaire was modified slightly based on the input received from the respondents after confirming the validity and reliability of the measurement instrument.

As Kothari (2004) suggested, this study used the purposive sampling method and distributed 600 questionnaires to the respondents using google forms. Since the respondents were concerned about their privacy during the pilot study, the questionnaire included a privacy statement. A total of 410 responses (68.3%) were received. However, due to inadequate information, 92 responses were discarded, and the balance of 318 accurate responses (77.6%) were considered good enough due to the nature of the study. Most of the respondents, 98(30.8%) were from Uttar Pradesh, followed by 84 (26.4%) from Andhra Pradesh, 78 (24.5%) from Maharashtra, and 58 (18.2%) from Tamil Nadu respectively.

3.2. Measurement

TM was measured with a combined 12 item scale from Chakrapani et al. (2017) and Rendina et al. (2020), cronbach's alpha .912. UE was measured with a combined 10 item scale from Total Jobs (2016) and Bradford et al. (2013), cronbach alpha 0.933. PD was measured with a 10 item scale from Jones et al. (2019), cronbach alpha 0.911. SA was measured with a combined 9 item scale from Zimet et al. (1988) and Bozani et al. (2020), cronbach alpha .869. The cronbach value of all 4 constructs are greater than .850 signifies that the constructs are reliable. The scale reliability was analyzed using SPSS.

4. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Initially, in order to test the model without the influence of moderator variable, the above given SEM model was framed and run using Smart PLS. The result values obtained from the PLS model signify the acceptance of hypothesis (H1 to H4) which are discussed below. The values of the above model (Figure 1) are presented in Table 1; the outer loadings, internal construct reliability, (ρ_a), multi-collinearity (VIF), and path coefficient R^2 value are used to interpret the model.

Figure 1: Mediating Model TM, UE, PD

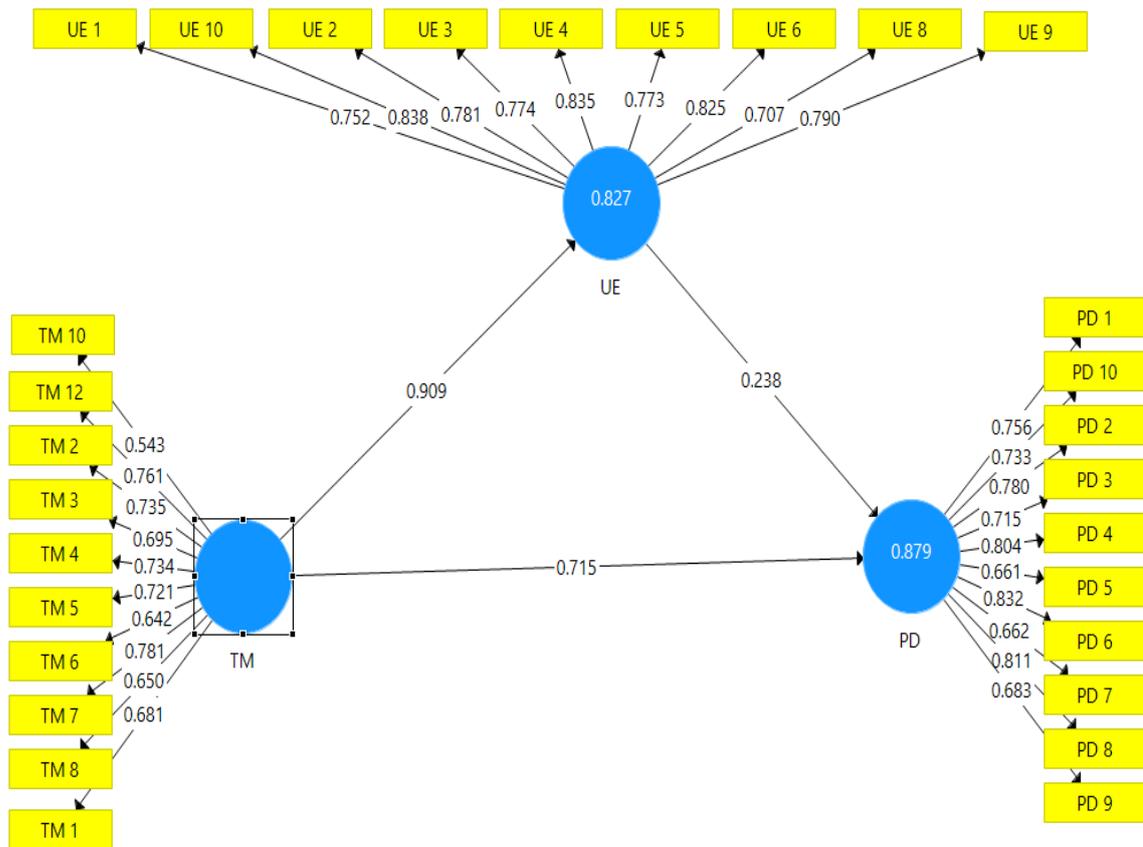


Table 1: Model Results

	Estimate	p- Value	Cronbach Reliability	rho_a	Composite Reliability	AVE	R ² (t-value, p-Value)
Transmisia							
TM1	0.681	***	0.881	0.886	0.904	0.486	
TM2	0.735	***					
TM3	0.695	***					
TM4	0.734	***					
TM5	0.721	***					
TM6	0.642	***					
TM7	0.781	***					
TM8	0.650	***					
TM10	0.543	***					
TM12	0.761	***					
Unemployment							
UE1	0.752	***	0.923	0.928	0.936	0.620	0.826
UE2	0.781	***					
UE3	0.774	***					
UE4	0.835	***					
UE5	0.773	***					
UE6	0.825	***					

UE8	0.707	***					
UE9	0.790	***					
UE10	0.838	***					
Psychological Distress							
PD1	0.756	***	0.911	0.916	0.926	0.557	0.878
PD2	0.780	***					
PD3	0.715	***					
PD4	0.804	***					
PD5	0.661	***					
PD6	0.832	***					
PD7	0.662	***					
PD8	0.811	***					
PD9	0.683	***					
PD10	0.733	***					

In order to determine the convergent validity of the constructs i.e. to establish that the items of each construct converge to the same construct, the AVE values were considered. As it is suggested that AVE should be $> .50$ (the outer loading of the construct should be $> .708$) which implies it explains at least 50% of the construct (Hair et al. 2016). Though certain outer loading values were less than .708 in TM and PD constructs, with respect to PD it was considered as its AVE was $> .50$ which is acceptable. In the case of TM though AVE is less than .50 but its construct reliability is greater than .8, hence, it is also considered for the study. The AVE of each constructs taken for model 1 is PD (0.557), UE (0.620) and TM (0.486) (Table 1).

To assess multicollinearity of items, the VIF values of each item was considered. It was noted that, VIF of TM9, TM11 and UE7 were greater than 5 and the VIF of all other items ranged between 1.833 to 4.689, hence excluding the above three items all other item with VIF was less than 5 was considered.

As PLS-SEM is a non-parametric method to analyze the statistical significance of the indicators bootstrapping was done. With reference to model (Figure 1) it could be noted that there exists a significant and positive relation between TM and PD (β -value=0.715, t-value=9.865, p-value=0.000), (Table 2). The relation between TM and UE was also found to be positively significant (β -value=0.909, t-value=75.730, p-value=0.000) (Table 2). It was also noted that there exists a significant positive relation between UE and PD (β -value=0.238, t-value=3.163, p-value=0.000) (Table 2). As the significance value for all the three relations were < 0.05 , null hypothesis was not accepted and alternate hypothesis i.e., H1, H2 & H3 were accepted (Table 2)

Table 2: Hypothesis Results (H1, H2, H3)

Hypothesis	Estimate	t-Value	p-Value	Accepted/ Rejected
H1	0.715	9.865	0.000	Accepted
H2	0.909	75.730	0.000	Accepted
H3	0.238	3.163	0.000	Accepted

In order to analyze the mediating effect of UE between TM and PD, the indirect effect was taken into consideration. It was found that there exists a significant positive relation of the mediator value, hence, H4 was accepted (Table 3).

Table 3: Indirect Effect

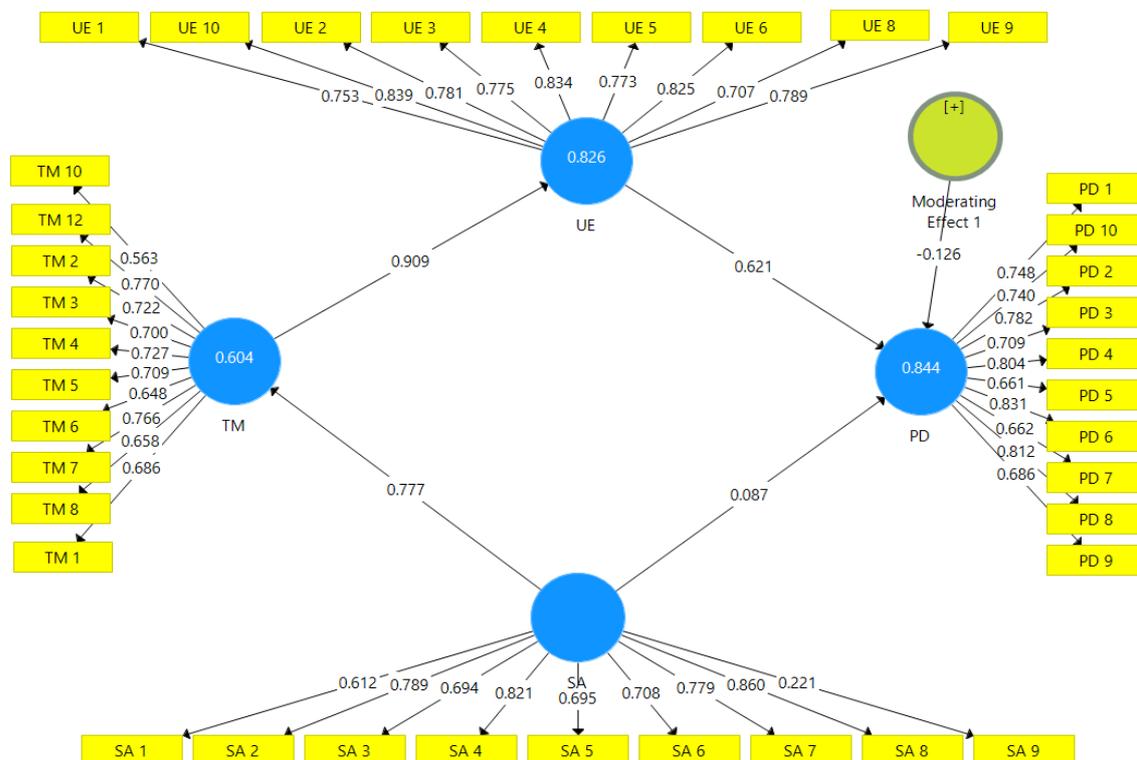
	Estimate	t-Value	p-Value
TM→UE→PD	0.217	3.164	0.002

Hair et al. (2019) specifies that R² values as, substantial (.75), moderate (.50) and weak (.25) because they stand as the predictive power of the endogenous variable. R² values in model 1, implies that 82.6% change in UE is explained by TM, 87.8% change in PD is explained by TM and UE (Table 1). Since the R² values of both the endogenous variable were greater than .75 it indicates it is substantial.

Moderator analysis Results

It is evident from various studies that SA stands as a deciding factor for UE and PD which is the consequence of TM (DeWalla & Bushman 2011; Ozturk & Tatli 2016; Mizock et al. 2018; Mishra & Negi 2021). Thus, to examine the moderating effect of SA between UE and PD, and TM and UE the following model was executed (Figure 2). As suggested by Aiken and West (1991) all the constructs were mean-centered to examine the moderating impact of SA. The results of model 2 is presented in Table 4 and discussed below.

Figure 2 Moderating Model SA, TM, UE, PD



In the above model, the internal reliability construct values of TM (0.881- 0.884- 0.904), UE (0.923-0.928-0.936), PD (0.911-0.915-0.926) SA (0.864-0.903-0.905) were < .95 which implies that the values are good (Drolet & Morrison 2001). To analyze the convergent validity of the constructs, AVE value was considered, (TM-0.486, PD-0.557,

SA-0.503 and UE-0.620). It was found that except TM for other three constructs AVE were $>.5$, which is acceptable. With respect to TM though its AVE is $<.5$, its reliability is $>.88$, so it was considered for the study. In the above model (Figure 2) SA was set as the moderator variable, between UE and PD. To determine the significance of the relation between the constructs bootstrap was executed. It was found that there exists a significant positive relation on inclusion of SA as moderator of TM on UE (β -value=.706, t-value=18.258, p-value=0.000). Hence H5 was accepted. With respect to moderating impact of SA between UE and PD, it was noted that there exists a slight significant negative impact of SA (β -value= -.126, t-value=3.078, p-value=0.001) in direct effect (Table 4), but the indirect effect showed a significant positive relation, SA \rightarrow TM \rightarrow UE \rightarrow PD (β -value=.438, t-value=6.954, p-value=0.000). Hence H6 and H7 were accepted. The above results suggest that the moderator variable supports the impact of dependent variable and independent variable.

Table 4: Moderating Effect Results (Direct Effect, Indirect Effect):

	Path Co-efficient	t-value (O/STDEV)	p-value
Direct Effect			
Moderating Effect1 \rightarrow PD	-0.126	3.708	0.001
Indirect Effect			
SA \rightarrow TM \rightarrow UE	0.706	18.258	0.000
SA \rightarrow TM \rightarrow UE \rightarrow PD	0.438	6.954	0.000

To further strengthen the discussion on moderating effect, simple slope analysis result is presented below (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Slope Analysis



UE=Unemployment, PD=Psychological Distress, SA=Social Acceptance

From the above figure it implies that, as UE increases, PD also increases significantly. In particular, it could be observed that as there is a unit increase in these two constructs, similar rate of decrease is witnessed in SA and after particular level it gets narrowed down and intersects. After that point of intersection, it could be noted that SA reverses. Thus, the above graph (Figure 3) signifies that SA moderates the impact of UE on PD.

5. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The study first explored the impact of transmissia on the psychological distress of transgender individuals, with the results displaying a significant effect. This finding aligns with previous studies that indicate aversion and phobia toward transgender individuals

elevate their psychological distress as a negative consequence of overt stigmatization (Jackman, Dolezal & Bockting 2018; Rendina et al. 2020; Jackson et al. 2023). Furthermore, this study identified that unemployment mediates the impact of TM on PD which echoes the literature that transphobic-based hiring discrimination, unemployment, and workplace inequity amplify the stress level of transgender individuals (Mizock et al. 2018; Van Borm & Baert 2018; Granberg, Andersson & Ahmed 2020). Additionally, this paper explored the moderating mechanism of social acceptance in the relationship between transphobia, unemployment, and psychological distress. While empirical evidence on the associations among these constructs in a single study is scant, these results are in congruence with various prior studies that examined the relationships of these variables in different combinations. For instance, previous studies have identified the impact of transphobia on anxiety and stress (Mizock & Mueser 2014; Matsuzaka & Koch 2019; Klemmer, Arayasirikul & Raymond 2021), the positive association between transphobia and unemployment (Mizock et al. 2018; Abedin & Sarker 2022), and the effect of social acceptance/support on mental well-being (Trujillo et al. 2017; Tantirattanakulchai & Hounnaklang 2020; Xie et al. 2021). While linking these studies it is evident that transgender individuals who experience higher levels of SA are less likely to experience UE and PD as an aftermath of TM. There are two aspects this study tries to discuss, the social psychology angle to understand the variable “Social Acceptance” and also view the concept of “hiring discrimination and unemployment” through the business ethics lens.

A study by DeWall and Bushman (2011), throws light on the psychology behind the statement, “Social acceptance is sweet, and rejection is bitter”. According to the study, the “need to belong” means an individual’s desire for social contacts and relationships. Furthermore, “offering socially rejected people a small taste of acceptance, even from one stranger, is enough to reduce their aggression” (DeWall & Bushman 2011). Emerged from social psychology, the “need to belong,” a craving for interpersonal relationships (Allen et al. 2022), reflects the “social needs” facet from Abraham Maslow’s “Hierarchy of Needs” theory as explained by Aruma and Hanachor (2017). “Hierarchy of Needs” (Maslow 1943) postulates that “social needs” are one of the fundamental elements of human motivation and prerequisite for well-being (Buijs et al. 2021), and this study supports that assertion by highlighting the critical importance of social acceptance for transgender individuals. The moderation effect of SA demonstrates that employability increases for socially accepted transgender individuals. This is consistent with the literature, as explained by DeWall and Bushman (2011) “examples of acceptance include being chosen for a desirable job”. While reflecting Maslow’s “Hierarchy of Needs”, one must first acknowledge the foundational tiers of the pyramid: “Physiological Needs” and “Safety Needs” (Aruma & Hanachor 2017). Transgender individuals must have the financial stability to meet these most basic needs, including food, water, clothing, and shelter, which is tier one of the “Hierarchy of Needs”. This highlights the importance of employment. Additionally, the “safety or security needs”, as per Maslow’s model, indicates the essence of having a conducive environment where the transgender population does not have to fear abuse, violence, or microaggressions. The below section of this study tries to understand how the act of discrimination in employment, fits into the unethical genre.

Discrimination is a form of unfair treatment of one group over another, and in the workplace, it denotes a deviation from an organization’s ethical code that specifies principles of equity and justice (Stelzner 2022). Employment discrimination towards transgender individuals due to irrational transphobia is an infringement of the human right

of equal treatment; hence it can be considered unethical. Dietz and Kleinlogel (2018) argue that employment discrimination is unethical since it violates five moral principles, “utilitarianism, distributive justice, righteousness of actions, virtuousness, and ethics of care”. The underlying philosophy of utilitarianism depends on the principle that the morality of our deeds should be evaluated based on the consequences, particularly whether they lead to someone’s happiness or prevent giving them pain (Bowden 2009). Distributive justice highlights equity theory and can be explained as how an employee perceives the “fairness of the outcome received” (Pan et al. 2018). Righteousness of actions can be explained from the organization milieu as “employers do not have the right to discriminate, and discrimination infringes on employees’ rights of fair treatment” (Dietz & Kleinlogel 2018). Virtuousness in an organization has three essential elements, “human impact, moral goodness, and social betterment” (Cameron & Dutton 2003). Ethics of care focuses more on “caring and empathy” and underscores the importance of “responsibility, social interconnectedness, and collaboration” (Groot et al. 2019). Transgender employment discrimination, when scrutinized based on all the aforementioned ethical approaches, can be judged as unethical (Dietz & Kleinlogel 2018).

Establishing an ethical work culture that prioritizes equity and a social culture that values diversity and inclusivity is not only a moral imperative but a practical one that benefits both individuals and organizations. A satisfying work environment will produce valuable employees and attract fresh talents (Johnson and Johnson 2021). This study holds practical implications for policymakers, employers, healthcare providers, educators, social activists, and the general public to make a substantial effort to improve the social acceptance of transgender individuals. Stringent policies and legal measures that proscribe discrimination are indispensable to affirm equity in the education, employment, and healthcare of transgender individuals. Based on the findings, few suggestions the stakeholders may consider of implementing are:

- Anti-discrimination policies can be put in place that strongly condemn any form of prejudice and bias based on gender identity and expression, including micro-aggressions such as using intentionally incorrect pronouns, asking intrusive questions, or even giving subtle stares. The Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in the US has executed wide-ranging anti-discrimination policies in their education, employment, and all other activities by the institute (MIT 2016).
- Employee training programs, workshops, and sharing of other informative materials in organizations that increase insights into non-binary community may help to foster a better inclusive workplace. For instance, diversity and inclusion training by Google helps to “create spaces of belonging” for transgender community (Google 2022).
- Representation and visibility programs, such as media talk shows, forums, and events like pride parades, along with the involvement of transgender individuals in various responsible roles in society and organizations, will not only enhance their mental well-being but also enable them to motivate fellow individuals in the transgender community. Two inspiring examples of such transwomen from India are Akai Padmashali (Vijayakumar & Padmashali 2022) and Laxmi Narayan Tripathi (Vijayashree & Geetha 2021).

- Fostering an inclusive environment through establishing gender-neutral restrooms and locker rooms widely available in public spaces and organizations is vital to make transgender community safer and less vulnerable. The Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Delhi recently made its first-ever gender-neutral restroom accessible to the LGBTQ+ community, and it is imperative for more educational institutions, government and private organizations to follow suit to be more inclusive. This would ensure they can access essential facilities without fearing harassment (IIT Delhi 2023).
- Increasing access to gender-affirming surgeries, hormone therapies, and transitioning requirements is essential, which can help transgender individuals feel more comfortable and confident in their bodies. For instance, Hindustan Unilever Limited, an Indian FMCG organization is providing support for gender reassignment surgery (GRS) of their employees who identify themselves as transgender individuals (HUL 2021).

Apart from the above, Transgender quotas and reservations are vital in the field of education and employment to reduce discrimination. As far as India is concerned, government and private organizations should work in tandem to create appropriate job opportunities for transgender individuals based on their education and skills, ensuring greater economic stability and independence. Social aid and grants for self-employment will allow them to embrace their entrepreneurial skills. In conclusion, society must cultivate inclusivity and establish a fair and just community that prioritizes equity and respects the rights and welfare of transgender individuals.

6. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study has a valuable contribution to the literature on the intersection of transprejudice, unemployment, and mental health and the moderation effect of social acceptability of transgender individuals. However, there are no studies without limitations, and the ones with this study are being acknowledged.

One significant limitation is that the study included participants who were willing and able to participate and who met specific eligibility criteria from four Indian states. This sample may not represent the larger transgender population from India. Additionally, since this study is done in the Indian milieu, the findings may not entirely apply to the transgender population of other cultures or countries. The sample size was relatively small, which may limit the study's statistical influence by making it hard to perceive significant effects.

Another limitation is the study's cross-sectional design, where the data were obtained at a particular time. Longitudinal studies provide a better understanding of the connection of variables over different times. Furthermore, the study did not include demographic variables such as age, education, and income that may influence the relationships between the examined variables. Future studies could address these limitations and examine the impact of the above-discussed variables concerning transmen, transwomen, and gender non-conforming people separately to enhance our understanding of the subject. This study limited its scope to unemployment as a mediator, where future studies can include variables like “body shaming” or “microaggressions” to understand their effect on psychological distress. Similarly, along with social acceptance, future studies can include “anti-

discrimination policies” as another moderator between transmisia and psychological distress to get a better perspective on the topic.

Disclosure statement – Authors do not have any potential conflict of interest associated with this paper and authors have not received any funding for this study.

Data Availability Statement – Data can be made available from the corresponding author, [MR], upon reasonable request, and after considering the ethical aspects.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Authors hereby thank all the transgender citizens who contributed to this study. We also thank the NGOs and community service associations who connected us with the transgender population of four states in India. We thank the anonymous reviewers who provided suitable comments and suggestions to enhance the quality of this paper.

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