



Original Article

Exploring shame and guilt among gender diverse population: A qualitative approach

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Abstract

Transgender/Gender Queer is an umbrella term encompasses individuals whose gender identity, gender expression, or behavior does not conform to sex assigned at birth. Later in life, the physical and psychological personality leads them to face many challenges, which cause shame and guilt. The study aims to explore the experience, coping strategies, predictor factors for shame and guilt, and suggestion for mental health experts regarding diverse populations' concerns. The study utilizes a qualitative approach, adopting a narrative analysis method to delve into the complex and nuanced experiences of shame and guilt. A purposive sampling method was employed to select twenty gender-diverse individuals aged 21 to 39 years. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather data, allowing in-depth exploration of participants' lived experiences and perspectives. The significant findings of the study reveal that societal attitudes imposed narrow expectations, perpetuated stereotypes, and fostered a lack of understanding and empathy, contributing to feelings of shame. Participants also highlighted the

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need for sensitivity and respect in healthcare settings, as misgendering and lack of respect from healthcare professionals were reported. Long-term impacts of guilt included social stigma, isolation, and mental health consequences, such as self-harm and the development of inferiority complexes. Participants suggested that mental health professionals should provide active listening, validation, culturally competent care, and avoid pathologizing. Family dynamics, societal

and cultural factors, and pressure to conform to societal norms were identified as contributors to guilt. The study emphasizes the importance of removing stigma, increasing awareness, and educating society about gender diversity in addressing guilt. Finding support and community within the gender-diverse population was crucial for acceptance, validation, and letting go of guilt.

Introduction

Individuals from gender diverse population experience an incongruence between their gender identity and their sex assigned at birth. When this incongruence causes persisting and invasive distress, individuals can be diagnosed with Gender Dysphoria, according to the American Psychiatric Association. Body dysphoria and conflicting feelings between body and identity are central themes in transgender experiences^[1], although not in all.^[2]

Research has shown that gender queer individuals experience higher rates of discrimination, harassment, and violence compared to cisgender individuals.^[3] This discrimination can manifest in a variety of ways, such as being denied employment or housing, experiencing physical violence, or being subjected to verbal abuse. Additionally, genderqueer individuals often face challenges in accessing healthcare that is affirming of their gender identity, which can contribute to poor mental health outcomes.^[4]

Despite these challenges, genderqueer individuals have also demonstrated resilience and creativity in developing supportive communities and advocating for their rights.^[5] The concept of gender identity has been evolving globally, including in India. The population, which includes individuals who do not identify as either male or female, has emerged as a significant demographic in India in recent years. However, there is limited research available on the experiences and

challenges faced by the gender queer population in India. In 2014, the Supreme Court of India recognized Transgender people as a third gender and directed the government to provide them with equal rights and opportunities.

Despite these legal advancements, the gender queer population in India continues to face numerous challenges in accessing healthcare, education, employment, and housing. Discrimination and stigma also remain rampant, with many individuals facing harassment and violence. This highlights the urgent need for further research to understand the experiences of the gender queer population in India and to develop effective interventions to address their unique challenges.

Shame

Shame has been described as a painful emotion involving feelings of powerlessness that can make a person want to disappear.^[6] Shame has further been explained as an emotion directed towards the whole self, involving components of anger, anxiety, and disgust.^[7] Several factors can contribute to the experience of shame. One important factor is the cultural and societal expectations placed on individuals. Research has shown that women are more likely than men to experience shame related to their appearance. In contrast, men are more likely to experience shame related to their perceived inadequacy in providing for their families.^[8] Additionally, individuals from marginalized groups may experience shame related to their identity, such as shame related to their race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation.

Shame is also closely related to other cultural concepts such as honour, dignity, and respect, which are highly valued in Indian culture.^[9] Understanding the nature and impact of shame in the Indian context is therefore essential for gaining insights into the cultural and psychological dynamics of this society. In

the Indian context, shame has been linked to issues such as mental health, gender-based violence, and social stigma.^[10] Therefore, understanding the role of shame in these issues is critical for developing effective interventions and policies to address them.

Guilt

Guilt is a complex emotion arising when individuals believe they have violated their values or moral standards. It can result from a wide range of actions or situations, including actions that have caused harm to oneself or others, or failure to meet personal or societal expectations. While guilt can be a natural and appropriate response to certain situations, it can also become excessive and pathological, leading to negative consequences for mental health and well-being.^[8] Understanding the causes and consequences of guilt is crucial to developing effective interventions and support programs for individuals experiencing guilt-related distress.

Guilt can contribute to developing and maintaining these problems by increasing negative affect and decreasing positive affect, leading to feelings of hopelessness and despair.^[11] Moreover, guilt can lead to rumination, or the repetitive and persistent focus on negative thoughts and feelings, which has been linked to various mental health problems.^[12] Therefore, understanding the causes and consequences of guilt is critical to developing effective interventions and support programs for individuals experiencing mental health problems.

Need of the study

Experiencing discrimination and violence can have significant mental and emotional health effects on transgender individuals. Research has shown that discrimination and victimization are associated with increased levels of psychological distress, anxiety, and depression.^[10] Transgender individuals who experience these forms of discrimination are

also at a higher risk of suicide and suicidal ideation.^[14] Additionally, experiencing discrimination and violence can lead to a range of adverse health outcomes, including substance abuse, sexually transmitted infections, and HIV.^[2,10,18] Therefore, understanding the experience of shame and guilt among genderqueer individuals can provide valuable insights into their mental health, resilience, and social integration.

The current study aims to explore the concepts of shame and guilt among the gender queer population. The term genderqueer has changed over time, earlier, we only considered transgender members, but today the spectrum has broadened, and it includes multiple genders such as Agender, non-binary, Bigender, Pangender, and so on. Earlier in time, what is now coined “Gender dysphoria” was clinically considered to be a gender identity disorder. However, in recent times, through observation, it is found that members who do not fall under the label transgender also experience gender dysphoria, and it is not necessary that they choose gender reassignment surgery. This study aims to cover that population along with transgender population, which makes it significant and relevant.

Review of literature

Exploring the previous research is done to identify the significance of shame, guilt, and gender dysphoria in the lives of transgender individuals, as well as their implications for guidance and counselling. Most studies in this area have used qualitative approach to understand the depth of the subject.

The significance of forgiveness in transgender individuals was explored by qualitative research using a phenomenology design to observe the significance of forgiveness for transgender individuals living as minorities in society. The findings indicated that forgiveness among transgender individuals is associated with experiences such as regret,

self-reflection, and emotional regulation. Furthermore, the study emphasized the role of individual perception in the forgiveness process.^[14] Another study compared the sexual self-concept (SSC) of binary transgender individuals and cisgender individuals. The research indicated significant divergence in several components of sexual esteem and sexual views. Self-concept discrepancies were found to mediate the association between gender dysphoria and SSC elements related to body perception, behaviour, attractiveness, and sexual anxiety.^[9,15]

Understanding shame in transgender individuals was explored, drawing from biographical stories, psychiatric literature, and artistic works. The study highlighted the historical underestimation of shame in clinical psychology and explored its distinct characteristics. Franz Kafka's writings were utilized to provide nuanced insights into the experiences of shame among transgender individuals.^[14,16]

Effects of a forgiveness intervention on LGBT adolescents: study investigated the effectiveness of a forgiveness intervention for LGBT adolescents who experienced homophobic offenses. Through a randomized controlled trial, it was found that the intervention led to improvements in anxiety and forgiveness levels among the experimental group. Additionally, the waitlist-turned-experimental group showed improvement in forgiveness measures. These findings underscore the potential benefits of forgiveness interventions for LGBT youth.^[14]

Collectively, these studies provide valuable insights into the experiences of shame and gender dysphoria among transgender individuals. They underscore the importance of addressing these psychological aspects in guidance and counselling settings and highlighting the need for further research in these areas. This literature review contributes to a deeper understanding of the complexities

and implications of shame, guilt, and gender dysphoria in the lives of transgender individuals.

Despite the growing body of literature on shame and guilt among transgender individuals, there is a notable research gap when it comes to including the entire spectrum of gender-diverse populations. Previous studies have primarily focused on binary transgender individuals, thereby neglecting the experiences and psychological well-being of non-binary, genderqueer, and other gender-diverse individuals. This research gap is significant because gender-diverse individuals face unique challenges and experiences that may differ from those of binary transgender individuals. The limited representation of diverse gender identities in existing research limits our understanding of the nuances and complexities of shame, guilt, and forgiveness within this population. Consequently, the current body of knowledge may not fully capture the experiences and psychological processes of gender-diverse individuals, hindering the development of targeted interventions and counselling approaches that adequately address their needs.

Methodology

The current study aims to explore the concepts of shame and guilt among the gender queer population.

Objectives

1. To investigate the experiences and psychological effects of shame and guilt among individuals within the gender-diverse population, focusing on their internal processes and self-perceptions.
2. To examine the social dynamics and interpersonal aspects of shame and guilt among gender diverse individuals, exploring how these emotions and concepts influence their relationships, social interactions, and sense of belonging within different social contexts.

3. To investigate the cultural influences and variations in shame and guilt experiences among the gender-diverse population, examining how cultural norms, values, and expectations shape these emotions and their expression, focusing on understanding the intersectionality of culture and gender diversity.

Sample

Twenty gender-diverse participants who are living in Bangalore were identified. The purposive sampling method was adopted. The researcher contacted a non-profit organization and a few online support groups for the same. The samples above 18 years whose self-identification is within queer spectrum, who are willing to give the data and who are capable of articulating information in English were considered. The diverse population suffering from any kind of mental illness was excluded from the study.

Research design

The qualitative approach utilizes a narrative analysis method to comprehensively investigate the complex and nuanced experiences of shame and guilt within the context of a gender-diverse population. This analysis method is particularly suitable for this research due to its ability to capture the multifaceted nature of personal stories and subjective experiences. The study lasted ten months, from September 2022 to July 2023.

Procedure

For the study, the researcher contacted a non-profit organization and online support groups catering to LGBTIQ+ community members. Once initial contact was made, the researcher established rapport, followed ethical guidelines, and fulfilled the informed consent formalities. The participants were provided with detailed information about the study, its purpose, and the potential risks and benefits of their involvement. The researchers ensured

that the participants understood their rights, including the voluntary nature of their participation and the confidentiality of their information. Participants were allowed to ask questions and clarify any concerns before providing their informed consent to participate in the study. After obtaining informed consent, the researchers explained the interview process to the participants. Due to geographical constraints and the diverse locations of the participants, interviews were conducted through phone calls. This method allowed for flexibility and accessibility, ensuring that participants could engage in the study without needing physical presence.

During the interviews, the researcher employed a semi-structured approach, using a set of predetermined questions as a guide while allowing for an open and in-depth exploration of the participants' experiences. The interviews were recorded, with the participants' consent, to ensure the accurate capture of their responses and to facilitate later data analysis.

Following the completion of the interviews, the recorded data was transcribed and anonymized to maintain participant confidentiality. The transcriptions served as the primary data source for analysis. The researchers utilized a narrative method of analysis to comprehensively explore and understand the complex and nuanced experiences of shame and guilt within the context of the gender-diverse population.

The analysis involved identifying key themes, patterns, and connections within the participants' narratives. The researchers conducted a systematic and iterative analysis, examining the data for recurring concepts, emotions, and experiences related to shame and guilt. This process allowed for a thorough understanding of the participants' perspectives and provided insights into the psychological, social, and cultural aspects of these emotions within the gender-diverse population.

Data collection method

The study utilized semi-structured interviews for data collection, which provided a flexible yet focused approach to collecting in-depth and nuanced information about the participants' experiences. The interview protocol was developed based on relevant literature and preliminary exploration of the research topic. The protocol included a set of core questions and prompts that guided the discussion while allowing participants the freedom to express their unique narratives and perspectives.

Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations were rigorously followed throughout the research process.

- ◆ The research proposal was presented for Institutional Research Review Committee and approval was obtained. The ethical committee approval reference number is REC/2023/10-02/
- ◆ The interviews were conducted in a safe and confidential environment, either in person or through virtual platforms, based on participants' preferences and feasibility. Each interview lasted approximately 30-65 minutes, allowing sufficient time for participants to share their experiences and reflections related to shame and guilt within their gender-diverse identities.
- ◆ Informed consent was obtained from each participant, and steps were taken to maintain confidentiality, anonymity, and data protection. The participants had the autonomy to decide whether to participate freely and were informed that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any point without penalty or negative consequences.
- ◆ To mitigate any harm or distress that may arise during or after the study, the

researcher informed the participants about the availability of a queer-friendly counsel or who specializes in working with gender-diverse individuals.

Results and discussion

Exploring shame among a diverse population

The participants' responses highlighted its complex interplay with personal values, external judgment, and psychological well-being. The insights gained from participants' narratives provide valuable knowledge for understanding and addressing shame-related issues.

For instance, one participant said, "Shame as I feel... I think it's intertwined with guilt. And it's a way of thinking, saying, OK. What I did was wrong. Now, the wrong why it is wrong is it depends on. Moral beliefs or whatever I have. What? What is morally right, and that is again something. Yeah. OK. In other people personally, as it's about to start that so basically so time, time, really shame for me is that. It's something some decision I made is wrong and not because the outcome was wrong or not because I made the not because.... yeah, not because the region was not taken by others correctly, but well, but more because I could have made a better decision, yeah".

Another participant said, "I would describe it as. In this particular moment, when you cannot accept everything that is you. In this moment of shame, that is a moment when you lose everything that you used to find beautiful and attractive, and just turn into the objects of pain and suffering, I believe".

When asked what triggers shame for them and how they cope with it, participants' responses highlighted how cultural treatment, religious teachings, and societal expectations can shape perceptions of forgiveness. While some participants mentioned positive aspects of forgiveness within their cultural and religious

backgrounds, others noted the stigma, lack of acceptance, and struggles faced by genderqueer individuals.

For instance, one participant said, "I basically cope with.... cope with it by being very inactive. Or indecisive, not necessarily in inaccurate measures. Indecisive, really just doing. Like similar thing I mentioned in the last 5 minutes, also similar to random walks basically so. It's a little later because, yeah, OK. There's a component of self-isolation. OK, I finally just put on my earphones and just walked away, randomly walking around. Just go on some random tracks. Yeah, I would be pushing people away that I already know. I wouldn't mind going out and meeting random people. Well, in fact, like a pub or something, maybe I would not as extrovert as I would be, but I say I could be sometimes, but I would still be interested in meeting new people. But that's still when you interact with these random people, right? This, this, this new person I have. To be cautious, I wouldn't mind that, but otherwise I would move I... I set myself away from familiar people".

Another participant narrated an incident that talks about similar concepts: "so right now, like I have done my transition, and I can pass as well like no one can tell I'm trans. So, I come from the business environment, and so we own a shop and all. So, there are people around me. Who knows about my identity? So, I am not the one who has told them, but I am quite open when it comes to social media and all, and in my social media, it is mentioned that I am a transman. And stuff like that. The reason I mentioned it is like that my account is open like anyone can go to my page. So, I have kept the account publicly so that people would come to know because I know everyone uses social media. To the people around me, they know. I haven't told them, but they know because of my social media accounts or from some other people, so they like they behave like they don't know anything. When I'm in a

public space, they say oh you've got a beard, moustache and all that, but basically, they know about the transition, so it makes me feel bad. The way I cope with that is that I just ignore it, or I'll just say the person was saying you got a beard. I'll be like, yeah, it suits my personality. So, I like to keep it. I never give them the clarification I've done, transition and all. So basically, I assume it's to ignore people that the only way".

When asked if they have experienced shame that was tied to gender identity and gendered expectations, the participants' responses expressed feelings of self-doubt, pressure to conform, and the internalized shame resulting from societal judgment.

For instance, one participant expressed remorse for not realizing their gender identity sooner; they believe that that could've helped avoid a lot of negative consequences experienced by them and the co-parent of their child. They said, "Yeah, I mean, OK, gender identity. I, in fact, still sometimes feel like I should have known how I did not know for so long I. So basically, I do experience shame in that sense. I could have figured it out. I could have put. This together before getting married. Sometime back, and it was bad for Somebody also? Yeah, answer your question. I'm not sure. One situation for example, is when I end up talking to my Co parent about gender identity and stuff, and how she reacted and how she was not able to take it as like.... After that, I was like.... I could have figured it out before. I could have saved her the trouble. Whatever this, she ended up going through and stuff. So yeah, that one".

When asked in what ways societal attitudes have contributed to feelings of shame in their life, most participants' responses described narrow societal attitudes that impose limited socially accepted lifestyles on genderqueer individuals, unwarranted judgments from strangers, lack of awareness and understanding about genderqueer identities which in turn

highlight the need for education and empathy to combat ignorance and create a more inclusive society.

For instance, one participant expressed their grief about how society strongly believes that being genderqueer is a “choice.” They said, “I hear people just talk about trans identities is you know you’re going to be poor. You know you’re going to be stuck in prostitution. Why would you make this choice? You know, this sort of situation. You’re going to end up in. But If I knew if that’s the choice I’m going to make, why would I make the choice? There’s gonna be some other reason than it being a choice. Speaking and putting myself in a situation where I might end up homeless or something, I have to do to like people constantly. To undermine who you are, just because it’s not something they know, it’s not something they understand”.

Another participant said, “So there are instances where a person respects me just because they assume I’m a man. That kind of strains you because you are like, OK. Being a man equals getting respect, and when you come out or when you tell them that you are queer, non-binary or anything that you can see that shift in the attitude”.

When asked if they have experienced/felt shame within the LGBTQ+ community itself, most responses portrayed experiences of feeling shame within the LGBTQ+ community. The themes that emerged from their responses included a lack of acceptance, body shaming, intra-community discrimination, misunderstandings and expectations, and the intersectionality of identities.

For instance, one participant said, “Of course, yes. In my earlier transition, the earlier trans people who had done the surgeries felt very superior. So that time in every in you know in front of everybody. I mean, they’ll use some harsh words to, you know, like they shame peoples in. Within the community itself, like

misgendering. Likewise. OK. Yeah, I felt within the community itself”.

Another participant said, “Oh yeah, again, inside the community. Also, there is a lot of transphobia and homophobia, so they just abruptly come and ask, like, you know, you pick a side. You either have to be a lesbian or a transman straight transman, or else if you are. These genderqueer thing, like you know of agender thing, and all doesn’t exist. They just come up to me and talk like that and that point like, you know, we again, I don’t know about like it’s not particularly about my like, you know, gender. I’ll not say that it might be the way I dress. And again, people calling me ugly behind my back”.

Similarly, another participant said, “So within the community. The... community itself has its Different labels and different people who have that label for many reasons. And on top of other issues, they have with their own past experiences. But I feel that there are communal boundaries. like I haven’t experienced it, but I have heard it from others. Like even the LGBTQ community, they have boundaries within themselves”.

When asked how they think healthcare professionals could better address the shame experienced by gender-diverse patients in medical settings, responses highlighted the need for inclusivity, respect, sensitization, validation, and emotional support within healthcare systems.

For instance, one participant said, “So I feel at the very first thing healthcare people should do is we should sensitize their entire staff at the ground level to the higher authorities everywhere, because most of the hospitals if you go, they don’t even know about transition or anything. We have been to major government hospitals as well. Well, in Bombay. But there are places where people. I don’t know at all about anything. They are ahead of the departments, and they don’t know about the

process or how it happens. I think sensitization is the first thing they should do for every person because the hospital is where you feel you can't discriminate. OK. We don't have any other option, right? If I'm going out for dinner and if the hotel is a discriminatory, I have another option to go out and eat at some other place I can order at home. But in hospitals, we don't have, and this thing should majorly. Because the majority of people. Private, private, most things happen, and some of them are educated like private hospitals, people know, or even if they don't mind if you have enough money, they treat you well. Yeah, depending on how much money you can pay, you can get a private ward, and everything is there, but when it comes to government, there are only males and females. Where should you get admitted before? You guys should. You will be admitted after surgery. It's a challenge".

The responses to the questions related to the variable "Shame" emphasized the complex interplay of personal values, external judgment, and psychological well-being in understanding and addressing shame-related issues. They describe shame as intertwined with guilt and personal moral beliefs, as well as the perception of not living up to one's standards or making better decisions. Participants cope with shame by isolating themselves, engaging in random walks, and avoiding familiar people.

Regarding shame triggered by gender identity and societal expectations, participants express feelings of self-doubt, pressure to conform, and internalized shame resulting from societal judgment. They regret not realizing their gender identity sooner, feeling that it could have prevented negative consequences for themselves and others. Participants also mention societal expectations that limit the lifestyles of genderqueer individuals and the lack of acceptance and struggles faced within the LGBTQ+ community itself.

Societal attitudes contribute to shame by imposing narrow expectations, perpetuating stereotypes, and fostering a lack of understanding and empathy. Participants mention the belief that being genderqueer is a choice, leading to negative assumptions and discrimination. They also note the shift in attitudes and loss of respect when disclosing their queer or non-binary identities.

Regarding healthcare professionals addressing shame experienced by gender-diverse patients, participants emphasize the need for inclusivity, respect, sensitization, validation, and emotional support within healthcare systems. They stress the importance of sensitizing staff at all levels and increasing awareness and understanding of gender diversity. Participants share instances where healthcare professionals misgendered them or showed a lack of respect, highlighting the need for healthcare settings to be more sensitive and respectful.

Exploring guilt among a diverse population

When asked to define guilt, participants' responses associated it with personal accountability and self-imposed growth.

For instance, one participant said, "Guilt comes when there was an opportunity in front of me, but I let it go because of my issues. After some time, I start regretting my decisions, which, according to me, is guilt".

Similarly, another participant said, "Guilt is when you know you're doing something wrong or bad, but you choose to do it despite".

When asked about social norms and stigmatization contribute to feelings of guilt, participants' responses highlighted themes such as the pressure to conform to binary gender expectations emerged as a significant factor contributing to feelings of guilt and the need for courage to express one's authentic self. Lack of societal awareness and education

were identified as critical issues, with participants advocating for the removal of stigma and the recognition of their struggles. The influence of societal norms on guilt was discussed, along with the impact of social interactions, including instances of misgendering and discrimination. Inherited societal norms and the need for awareness and education were emphasized, highlighting the deeply ingrained nature of biases. It also reflected on the internalized guilt and self-doubt resulting from society's constant messaging that deviating from societal norms is wrong.

For instance, one participant said, "We have made a set of.... like.... this is how to be masculine, and this is how to be feminine. Each person has their way of expressing this. And the guilt comes in the form of that. If you have been blessed with a certain body organ... You are assumed to perform all the tasks and routines of this particular community, making it very hard to be yourself. And that causes guilt because for a person to truly come out of the closet, they first have to tell themselves that this is me, which takes a lot more courage".

When asked how family and friends alleviate their feelings of guilt, participants' responses highlighted themes of familial pressure to conform to societal norms (Participant 1), negative emotions within family dynamics (Participant 2), the impact of societal and cultural influences on guilt (Participant 5), and the importance of supportive relationships in mitigating feelings of guilt (Participant 9).

For instance, one participant said, "for the genderqueer people, family sense always have this template of how typical life Standard Life, so-called putting quotes in there. Yeah, yeah. So-called "normal" life should be. And I find this. I have felt family and friends guilt-tripping me just for me, carry the judges and my job for being long before my gender-any of this kind of picture. So yeah, they play quite a

bit of Guilt tripping? I called guilt tripping because they're like whenever you deviate from the script of what they think is Ideal or normal.? OK, one if you want. For example, here's one example. Yeah, so here's an example. So typically, this is very famous if you have a kid. This is considered a scholar by many people. It's a big happiness for your mom. More than so recently, my mom, you know, I'm going to teach this. See that? Give me send a picture? No, my mom already knows and is transitioning, but I have. She's never seen me in full, my look or anything. She has only seen me in T-shirt jeans before transition-jeans for most part. No, I just sent her this time. Since I'm out at work and stuff, I am full. I just sent a picture of me in teaching. She has not responded to a single word for that. He even spoke. He even talked about other things afterwards, but nothing about that thing, because otherwise, it would be very. So, I was surprised for her that I'm teaching the teachers and stuff, which is big because she's all the teacher and she is also a teacher. Yeah. So that's how big. So, it will happen".

When asked how do gender queer individuals navigate the intersection of their gender identity and other identities, such as race, class, and sexuality, when experiencing guilt, most participants' had not faced much in regard to other intersections, such as caste and so on. Still, in terms of sexuality and gender identity, participants highlighted the societal misconceptions surrounding their orientation and gender expression. They expressed frustrations with the lack of understanding and recognition of their unique identities.

For instance, I have colleagues who asked me if you are bisexual, then why did you have to change the gender? I'm like. I'm pretty sure I'm not straight, even with a change gender what I'm trying to say. So basically, given that sex itself is considered centred around one specific interesting act itself. I think society needs a lot in some sense of what this seems to be".

When asked about the long-term impacts of experiencing guilt related to gender identity, participants' responses highlighted issues such as social stigma, isolation, and mental health consequences.

For instance, one participant said, "So actually, those impacts are pretty heavy. It differs from person to person, I would say, but one common thing that I've heard from every person in the community where I have interacted with, I've spoken to, is the fact that the whole concept of trying to accept yourself is a very big, long journey and then. I would say today that I have accepted myself as a genderqueer to this question. But I still have certain things that I am not OK with. I cannot accept the way that I look. And the guilt that I have. You know, done something to it. I haven't tried. Anything towards it? OK. And the thing that comes with the fact that you know I wanted my life to go a certain way, especially with identifying myself as gender fluid. Just this is. Not what I where I wanted to go. But it has turned complete. Life has taken me completely in a different direction, which is a guilt. Because it felt like I could have, stopped it, or like couldn't. I could have done something. To change the direction of it to do something. But you know, life had other plans, and I had to accept it, and trust me, it's taking me a solid five years to tell myself that baby girl is OK. And you should just let this go with the flow. You will find yourself somewhere. You will find that path you've been dreaming of or want to go there. Because identifying ourselves is not enough; we have that whole journey of being able to let it go and be proud of it freely. So, coming to that point was a damn long journey".

Another participant said, "Self-harm is one. Non acceptance is one. Inferiority complexes personality to create being in a position where a personality disorder starts forming a lot of mental health issues. Because these lead to physical health issues while having eating disorders and not taking care of their body

properly. Because why is it worth taking care of? I shouldn't be here in the first place like".

When asked how mental health professionals can best support gender-diverse individuals can experiencing guilt related to their gender identity, the suggestions provided by the participants involved significant themes such as active listening, validation, culturally competent care, and continuously re-educating themselves to avoid pathologizing.

For instance, one participant narrated an experience they faced with a mental health professional and how it led to a lot of unnecessary situations later in their life. They said, "The thing is, with mental health professionals, they are trying to have some empathy and show compassion, and stuff like that. But what I... The compassion and empathy that they are used to showing is. It has its its limitations and is basically what you call more of a template thing. So, for example. I had met this mental health professional long back in 2017, and he did answer any question in general pretty seriously the first time. And she listened to my story, whatever, sometimes, and then just went and live with the trans people and saw how I felt, eventually dismissed, and at the time, at that moment, for example, even the suggestion was creatively sound. It comes from the whole back... Back then, there was this entire real life experience idea.

Yeah, and do not follow templates. So, if this is OK let me start making one more difference in this decision. To the people. Nongender queer person, for example, uh. It will be a lot easier to feel sympathy for another person but think it is empathy. Your mistake, they may feel they are. They're feeling empathy and company, being compassionate. But if you think about how the sympathy and empathy feels, you end up simulating. Another person inside the head. To be able to. Help them out. Do you want to be friends with them to some extent? So, I feel like. Just gender queer people need a little bit more work and mental health who are not in

trouble with it because they don't know what even. To think. Yeah, it's a. I don't even just blame them. Also, to some extent, because I understand why he did that. It happened that way.

When asked about how gender-diverse individuals find support and community to cope with feelings of guilt related to their gender identity, participants' responses highlighted themes such as acceptance, validation, sharing and relating stories, creating new memories, and letting go of guilt.

For instance, one participant said, "I do find support, but that is a beautiful aspect of this community, right, we all have almost gone through very similar stuff. When two people go through similar stuff, they tend to bond, and they tend to be able to help each other out. Being queer in this country has become a kind of criticism or kind of a crime that when two people are going through the same pain, you can support each other that's why this community is so beautiful, according to me, because it was there for me at a time when I was not there for myself".

On similar lines, another participant said, "That's very, quite good, as all we are in LGBT umbrella. So we feel a little inter connected because we all go through the same situations, like same things. So if we talk, most of the things will be the same. So, we know our pain within the community itself. So, we always try to help each other".

The responses to the questions related to the variable "Guilt" emphasized the role of social norms and stigmatization in contributing to feelings of guilt. The pressure to conform to binary gender expectations, lack of societal awareness and education, and instances of misgendering and discrimination were identified as factors that contribute to guilt. They emphasized the need to remove stigma, increasing awareness, and educating society about gender diversity.

Regarding family and friends, participants mentioned experiences of familial pressure to conform to societal norms, negative emotions within family dynamics, and the influence of societal and cultural factors on guilt. Supportive relationships were seen as necessary in alleviating feelings of guilt, but some participants also mentioned experiences of guilt-tripping and non-acceptance from their families.

Regarding the intersection of gender identity with other identities such as race, class, and sexuality, participants expressed frustrations with societal misconceptions and lack of understanding. They faced questions and judgments about their orientation and gender expression, leading to a sense of misunderstanding and a need for society to broaden its understanding of these identities.

The long-term impacts of experiencing guilt related to gender identity were mentioned as social stigma, isolation, and mental health consequences. Participants discussed issues such as self-harm, non-acceptance, inferiority complexes, and the formation of personality disorders. They highlighted the need for self-acceptance and a long journey to reach a point of being proud of their unique identities.

When it comes to mental health professionals, participants suggested that active listening, validation, culturally competent care, and avoiding pathologizing are essential in supporting gender-diverse individuals experiencing guilt. They shared experiences of mental health professionals who lacked understanding or provided limited solutions based on templates, emphasizing the need for professionals to be more aware and sensitive to the unique challenges faced by gender-diverse individuals.

In terms of finding support and community, participants mentioned the importance of acceptance, validation, sharing and relating stories, creating new memories, and letting go of guilt. They found support within the

gender-diverse community, as they could, connect to, and bond with others who have had similar experiences.

The primary major reason for shame was the limited expectation, perpetuated stereotypes and fostered a lack of understanding and empathy. The misgendering and lack of respect from healthcare professionals highlighted the need for sensitivity and respect towards health care settings. The social norms and stigmatization contributed to the feeling of guilt, particularly the pressure to conform to binary gender expectations. The long-term impacts of guilt included social stigma, isolation, and mental health consequences, such as self-harm and inferiority complexes. Mental health professionals were suggested to provide active listening, validation, culturally competent care, and avoid pathologizing. Family dynamics, societal and cultural factors, and pressure to conform to societal norms influenced feelings of guilt. Finding supports the community within the gender-diverse community was necessary for acceptance, validation, and letting go of guilt. Removing stigma, increasing awareness, and educating society about gender diversity were crucial in addressing guilt. Cultural and religious beliefs both promoted and hindered forgiveness, with cultural norms often failing to accommodate genderqueer identities and spiritual teachings influencing perceptions of gender diversity.

Limitations

The study's major limitation was that the data was captured in digital mode, through phone-in interviews, due to which the body language, gestures, and non-verbal cues could not be recorded. The sample did not consist of individuals belonging to the lower strata in terms of socio-economic status from the gender-diverse population.

Scope for further study

Exploring shame, guilt, and forgiveness in gender-diverse individuals belonging to all

social strata. Exploring shame, guilt, and forgiveness among gender-diverse population from other than metropolitan cities or from gender-diverse population who belong to rural areas.

Implications

Major findings suggest that there are significant long-term impacts of experiencing guilt among gender-diverse individuals, this prompts researchers to further explore specific mechanisms and processes involved in forgiveness among gender-diverse individuals, including the interplay between forgiving and forgetting and the impact of fear and conflict avoidance. Also the long-term physical and mental health impacts of forgiveness on gender-diverse individuals, particularly the associations with depression, weight fluctuations, and strained relationships. Therapeutic interventions should focus on addressing self-judgment, guilt, and past experiences that hinder self-forgiveness, emphasizing the importance of self-compassion and resolving unresolved issues. Mental health professionals should receive training and education on gender diversity, including sensitization, cultural competence, and avoiding pathologizing, to better support individuals experiencing guilt and shame related to their gender identity. Laws and policies should promote awareness and education about gender diversity, both within the healthcare system and in society as a whole, to ensure inclusivity and sensitivity in providing healthcare services to gender-diverse individuals and legal protections should be put in place to safeguard against misgendering and lack of respect experienced by gender diverse individuals in healthcare settings, ensuring their rights to dignity, respectful treatment, and appropriate care.

Conclusion

The study reveals that societal attitudes imposed narrow expectations, perpetuated stereotypes, and fostered a lack of

understanding and empathy, contributing to feelings of shame. Participants also highlighted the need for sensitivity and respect in healthcare settings, as misgendering and lack of respect from healthcare professionals were reported. Long-term impacts of guilt included social stigma, isolation, and mental health consequences, such as self-harm and the development of inferiority complexes. Participants suggested that mental health professionals should provide active listening, validation, culturally competent care, and avoid pathologizing. Family dynamics, societal and cultural factors, and pressure to conform to societal norms contributed to guilt. The study suggests the need for further research on forgiveness, shame, and guilt processes and the physical and mental health consequences they have on gender-diverse individuals. Therapeutic interventions should address self-judgment and promote self-forgiveness, while mental health professionals require training in gender diversity to support those experiencing guilt. Legal measures should promote awareness and protect against misgendering and lack of respect in healthcare, ensuring the rights and appropriate care for gender-diverse individuals.

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