



## Protecting Transgender Youth: Understanding the Intersection of Gender Identity and Child Abuse

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### Abstract

*Transgender children encounter societal disapproval beyond the confines of educational institutions, as they are not embraced as esteemed constituents of the populace. The socio-economic circumstances of transgender individuals within our nation unequivocally illustrate that attaining education eludes them. Their primary apprehension resides in their very survival. In essence, transgender individuals at large, and transgender children specifically, are persistently disregarded by consecutive administrations and policy makers. This article examines the complex relationship between gender identity and child maltreatment, highlighting the difficulties faced by children who identify as gender nonconforming as well as the value of fostering inclusive, secure environments that uphold children's rights and dignity.*

**Keywords:** Transgender, child abuse, social exclusion, sexual assault, domestic violence.

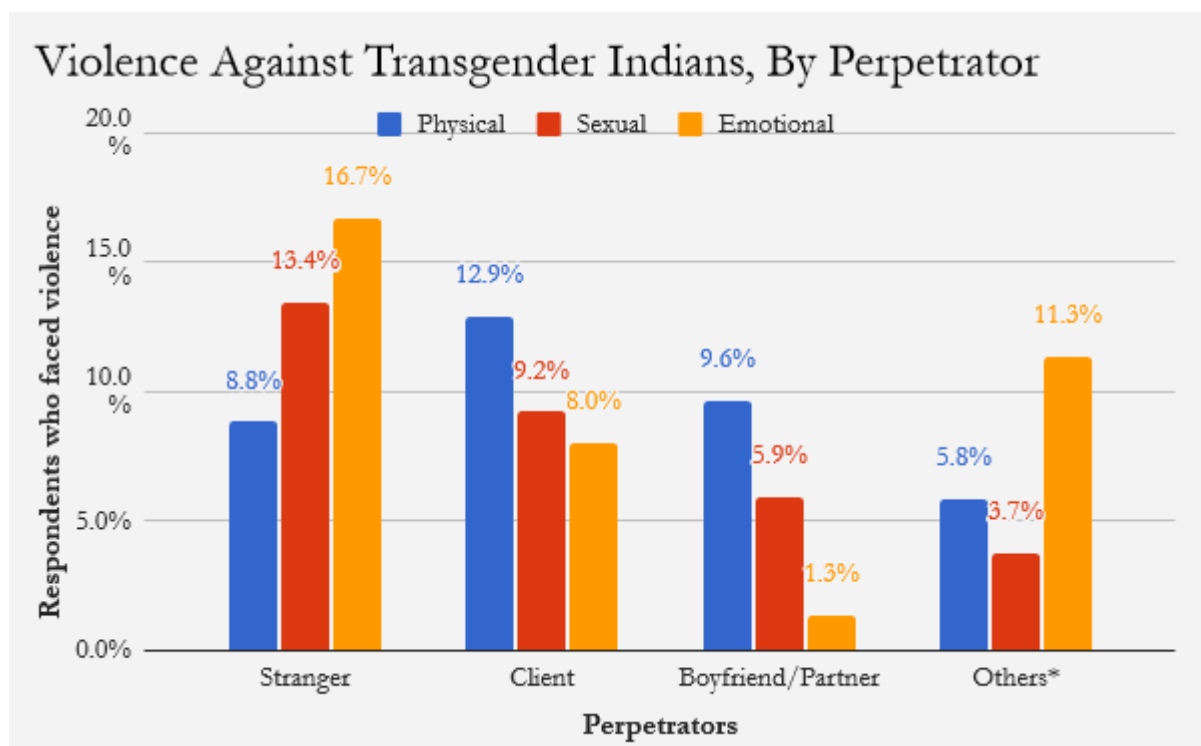
### Introduction

An individual's sense of being male, female, a combination of the two, or neither is reflected in their gender identity, which is a very personal and important component of their self-concept. It is a facet of human variability that manifests very early in life, frequently long before a kid reaches puberty. For a child to be mentally and emotionally healthy, it is essential to recognize and respect their gender identity. Unfortunately, a child's identification can often leave them open to other types of maltreatment and discrimination because of this component of their makeup (Hillis, 2016). The suicidal tendency among transgender individuals is in an alarming rate due to the violence or abuse they are facing in the day to day life. In a study, it is revealed that 82% of transgender individuals have considered killing themselves and 40% have attempted suicide, with suicidality highest among transgender youth. In a study there were 6800 adolescents aged 15-17 years, including 1130 (16.5%) who indicated some degree of same-gender attraction, 265 (4.3%) who were unsure of their



attraction and 50 (0.6%) who reported a transgender identity. Compared with cisgender, heterosexual adolescents, transgender adolescents showed 5 times the risk of suicidal ideation and 7.6 times the risk of suicide attempt. Youth questioning their sexual orientation had twice the risk of having attempted suicide in their lifetime.

In India abuse of transgender persons begins at the early childhood. In a study conducted by Swasti Health Resource Centre, an NGO, it is revealed that the 4 out of 10 transgender persons were abused during their childhood itself. According to the data, the percent of abuse is 18% in 5-10 age group, 68% in 11-15 age group and 14% in 16-17 age group.



*Source: Swasti Health Resource Centre*

Some common acts of violence and stress faced by transgender children are:

### **Social exclusion**

Transgender children often face significant social exclusion and discrimination, which can have profound and lasting effects on their mental, emotional, and physical well-being. Here are some key aspects of the social exclusion experienced by transgender children:



1. **Bullying and Harassment:** Transgender children are at a higher risk of experiencing bullying and harassment at school or in their communities. They may be subjected to verbal, physical, or online abuse, which can lead to feelings of isolation and fear.
2. **Peer Rejection:** Many transgender children struggle to find acceptance among their peers. They may face rejection, ostracism, or exclusion from social activities, which can lead to feelings of loneliness and alienation.
3. **Family Rejection:** Some transgender children experience rejection from their own families when they come out as transgender. This can result in homelessness or the need to seek alternative living arrangements, making them vulnerable to further social exclusion.
4. **Lack of Inclusive Spaces:** Transgender children often lack safe and inclusive spaces where they can express their gender identity freely. This can lead to social isolation and a sense of not belonging.
5. **Discrimination in Healthcare and Education:** Transgender children may encounter discrimination from healthcare providers or educators who are unaware of or insensitive to their unique needs. This can result in limited access to necessary medical care and a challenging educational experience.
6. **Mental Health Challenges:** Social exclusion and discrimination can have a significant impact on the mental health of transgender children. They may experience higher rates of depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation compared to their cisgender peers.
7. **Legal and Policy Challenges:** In some regions, legal and policy frameworks do not adequately protect the rights of transgender children. This can lead to further social exclusion and discrimination in areas such as name and gender marker changes on identification documents.
8. **Access to Support:** Transgender children often lack access to support networks, such as LGBTQ+ youth groups or mental health services, which can help mitigate the effects of social exclusion.

## **Sexual assault**



All children should be very concerned about sexual assault, and unfortunately, transgender children are not exempt from the dangers of such abuse. They could experience particular difficulties and vulnerabilities because of their gender identification. The following are some crucial considerations with regard to sexual assault and transgender children:

1. **Greater Vulnerability:** Due to the prejudice and social marginalization that transgender children frequently experience, they may be more vulnerable to sexual abuse. Because of their histories of bullying, rejection, or homelessness, they may be more susceptible to abuse from those who prey on those they believe to be marginalized or who are less likely to disclose the abuse.
2. **Perpetrators who particularly target transgender people** do so because they think they will be less likely to have their claims believed or supported if they do so.
3. **Lack of Support:** Transgender children may encounter barriers to reporting sexual assault, such as fear of being outed or concerns about how authorities will treat them. They may worry about not being believed or facing victim-blaming.
4. **Barriers to Healthcare:** Access to appropriate healthcare and support services following a sexual assault can be more challenging for transgender children, especially if healthcare providers are not knowledgeable about transgender-specific needs.
5. **Mental Health Impact:** Sexual assault can have severe and lasting mental health effects on transgender children, potentially exacerbating existing feelings of anxiety, depression, or post-traumatic stress.
6. **Legal Protections:** Laws and policies related to the rights and protections of transgender individuals can vary by region. In some places, transgender children may not have legal protections that specifically address their unique needs in the context of sexual assault.

## **Sexual exploitation and abuse**

Sexual exploitation is a serious and deeply concerning issue that affects vulnerable populations, including transgender children and adolescents. Transgender children can be particularly susceptible to various forms of sexual exploitation due to the discrimination and social challenges they often face. Here are some important points to consider regarding sexual exploitation and transgender children:



1. **Vulnerability:** Transgender children may be more vulnerable to sexual exploitation due to the discrimination and social exclusion they experience. They may face higher rates of homelessness, which can expose them to exploitation on the streets.
2. **Survival Sex:** Some transgender children engage in "survival sex" as a means of meeting their basic needs, such as finding shelter or food. They may exchange sexual acts for necessities due to limited resources or a lack of safe housing options.
3. **Grooming and Manipulation:** Perpetrators of sexual exploitation may specifically target transgender children, recognizing their vulnerability. They may use grooming tactics to build trust and manipulate these children into exploitative situations.
4. **Online Exploitation:** The internet can be a platform for sexual exploitation of transgender children. Online predators may use social media or other online platforms to target and exploit vulnerable individuals.
5. **Lack of Awareness:** Many transgender children may not be fully aware of their rights or the resources available to them, making them less likely to report exploitation or seek help.
6. **Stigma and Shame:** Transgender children may experience feelings of shame, stigma, or self-blame related to their gender identity, which can further deter them from reporting exploitation or seeking assistance.

## **Domestic violence**

Domestic violence can affect individuals of all genders and ages, including transgender children. Transgender children who experience domestic violence may face unique challenges and vulnerabilities related to their gender identity. Here are some important points to consider regarding domestic violence and transgender children:

1. **Types of Domestic Violence:** Domestic violence can encompass various forms of abuse, including physical, emotional, sexual, and financial abuse. Transgender children may experience any of these forms within their families or households.
2. **Isolation:** Perpetrators of domestic violence often use isolation as a tactic to control their victims. Transgender children may be further isolated due to discrimination, making it harder for them to seek help or support.



3. **Transphobia:** Domestic violence in the context of transgender children can involve transphobic abuse, such as derogatory comments, misgendering, or threats related to their gender identity.
4. **Barriers to Reporting:** Transgender children may face barriers to reporting domestic violence, such as fear of being outed or concerns about not being believed or supported by authorities.
5. **Impact on Mental Health:** Domestic violence can have severe and lasting mental health effects on transgender children, potentially exacerbating existing feelings of anxiety, depression, or post-traumatic stress.
6. **Lack of Support:** Transgender children who experience domestic violence may lack access to supportive networks or services that understand their unique needs (Hillis, S. et.al., 2016)

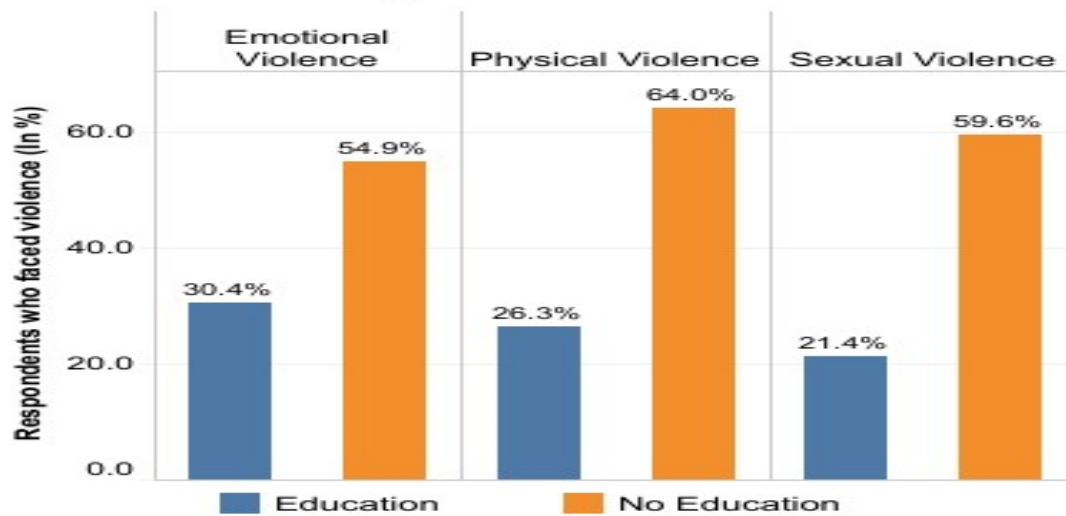
## **Denial of services**

The denial of services to transgender children is a form of discrimination that can have serious and harmful consequences for their well-being and development. This discrimination can occur in various contexts, including healthcare, education, housing, and social services. Here are some key points to consider regarding the denial of services to transgender children:

1. **Healthcare Services:** Transgender children may encounter barriers to accessing appropriate healthcare services. Some healthcare providers may refuse to provide gender-affirming care or treatments, such as puberty blockers or hormone therapy, to transgender children. This denial of care can have profound physical and psychological effects on their health.
2. **Mental Health Services:** Transgender children often face higher rates of mental health challenges due to discrimination and social exclusion. The denial of mental health services or therapy that is knowledgeable about transgender issues can exacerbate these challenges.
3. **Educational Services:** In educational settings, transgender children may experience denial of services in the form of bullying, harassment, or discrimination from both peers and educators. They may also face challenges in accessing gender-affirming facilities like restrooms and changing rooms (Chaturvedi, 2017).



### Violence Against Transgender Indians By Education



Source: Swasti Health Resource Centre

4. **Housing and Shelter Services:** Some transgender children may experience denial of housing or shelter services due to discrimination or lack of safe and inclusive housing options. This can result in homelessness and further vulnerability.
5. **Social Services:** Transgender children may be denied access to social services, such as youth programs or support groups, that are not inclusive and welcoming of their gender identity.
6. **Legal Protections:** In some regions, there may be insufficient legal protections to prevent the denial of services based on gender identity, leaving transgender children without recourse.

### Harassment/sexual harassment

Harassment against transgender children is a significant concern that can have profound and detrimental effects on their mental, emotional, and physical well-being. Transgender children may face various forms of harassment due to their gender identity. Here are some key aspects to consider regarding harassment and transgender children:

1. **Bullying in Schools:** Transgender children are at a higher risk of experiencing bullying and harassment in school settings. They may face verbal abuse, physical attacks, exclusion from social activities, or cyber bullying.



2. Name-Calling and Misgendering: Harassment often includes derogatory name-calling and intentional misgendering, where individuals use incorrect pronouns or gendered terms to demean and invalidate a transgender child's identity.
3. Peer Rejection: Many transgender children struggle with peer rejection, which can lead to feelings of isolation, loneliness, and low self-esteem.
4. Family Rejection: Some transgender children experience rejection from their own families, which can exacerbate their vulnerability to harassment outside the home.
5. Online Harassment: The internet can be a platform for harassment and cyberbullying against transgender children. They may be targeted on social media platforms or through online communities.
6. Discrimination in Sports and Extracurricular Activities: Transgender children may face harassment, discrimination, or exclusion when participating in sports or extracurricular activities that do not have inclusive policies (Kingsbury, et. al. 2022).

## Research Gap

Every child possesses an inherent entitlement to reside with integrity and obtain impartial treatment. Individuals of young age who identify as transgender have perpetually encountered ostracism, confronted prejudice within the confines of India, and have been deprived of a life characterized by integrity. The term "Third Gender" presents notable predicaments. It induces within them a perception of inferiority in comparison to the remaining two genders. Despite the Supreme Court's provision of legal acknowledgment, the practical circumstances have not undergone transformation as it has proven ineffective in mitigating their marginalization.

The complex relationship between gender identity, child maltreatment and the difficulties faced by transgender children is a major problem faced by the society which needs to be tackled and solved before it leads to more issues in the future.

## Objectives:

1. To study the problems faced by the transgender children in the society.
2. To spread awareness and highlight the major issues that the transgender children go through in the society.





## Research Methodology:

The utilization of methodology facilitates the selection of the most suitable strategies for any investigation. It not only supports the development of research inquiries, but also assists in identifying the most effective approach for conducting any study. Methodology serves as a resource and guide for researchers in addressing research-related issues.

This paper primarily focuses on derivative data. Secondary data is acquired from various sources including books, newspapers, published materials, census reports, reports from the International Labour Organization and the World Health Organization, etc.

## Findings

It will take a collaborative effort from families, communities, educational institutions, healthcare providers, and policymakers to address the social exclusion that transgender children experience. These young people can be helped to grow and realize their full potential by fostering open and welcoming environments, educating others about transgender concerns, and giving them access to mental health support.

In the end, preventing sexual assault against transgender children necessitates an all-encompassing strategy that addresses both the particular vulnerabilities they experience and the larger societal problems of stigma, victim-blaming, and prejudice.

Transgender children's sexual assault must be addressed with compassion and understanding. To assist transgender kids who have been sexually assaulted:

1. **Believe and Support:** If a transgender child discloses a sexual assault, it is crucial to believe and support them. Listen to their feelings and concerns without judgment.
2. **Seek Professional Help:** Encourage the child to seek medical attention and counseling from professionals who are knowledgeable about transgender issues and trauma.
3. **Report to Authorities:** If the child wishes to pursue legal action, support them in reporting the assault to the appropriate authorities.
4. **Create Safe Spaces:** Advocate for and create safe and inclusive spaces where transgender children can find support and protection.



5. **Raise Awareness:** Work to raise awareness about the vulnerabilities of transgender children to sexual assault and advocate for policies that protect their rights and safety.

It is essential to approach the issue of sexual exploitation among transgender children with sensitivity, compassion, and a commitment to providing them with the support and protection they need to live safe and fulfilling lives. Addressing sexual exploitation among transgender children requires a multi-pronged approach:

1. **Education and Awareness:** Raise awareness about the specific vulnerabilities of transgender children to sexual exploitation among communities, law enforcement, and service providers.

2. **Support Services:** Ensure that there are accessible and culturally competent support services available for transgender children who have experienced exploitation, including shelter, counselling, and legal assistance.

3. **Prevention Programs:** Develop and implement prevention programs that address the unique needs of transgender children and promote their safety.

4. **Legal Protections:** Advocate for and enforce legal protections that address the exploitation and abuse of transgender children.

5. **Empowerment:** Empower transgender children with knowledge about their rights and available resources. Encourage them to seek help when needed.

6. **Safe Housing:** Work to increase the availability of safe and inclusive housing options for transgender children to reduce their risk of exploitation on the streets.

It is crucial to approach the issue of domestic violence among transgender children with sensitivity, empathy, and a commitment to providing them with the support and protection they need to live safe and fulfilling lives. Addressing domestic violence among transgender children requires a comprehensive and empathetic approach:

1. **Counselling and Support Services:** Provide access to mental health counselling and support services that are knowledgeable about transgender issues and trauma.

2. **Legal Protections:** Advocate for and enforce legal protections that address domestic violence in the context of transgender children and their families.



3. Education and Training: Offer education and training to service providers, law enforcement, and healthcare professionals on the unique needs and vulnerabilities of transgender individuals experiencing domestic violence.
4. Empowerment: Empower transgender children with knowledge about their rights and available resources. Encourage them to seek help when needed.
5. Crisis Helplines: Establish crisis helplines or hotlines specifically tailored to the needs of transgender children facing domestic violence.
6. Community Support: Create safe and inclusive community spaces and networks where transgender children can find support and protection.

Ensuring that transgender children have equal access to services and support is crucial for their well-being and for fostering a more inclusive and equitable society. Discrimination and denial of services can have serious and long-lasting negative effects, so it is essential to address these issues promptly and effectively. Addressing the denial of services to transgender children requires a concerted effort to combat discrimination and promote inclusivity:

1. Legal Protections: Advocate for and enforce legal protections that explicitly prohibit discrimination based on gender identity in various service sectors, including healthcare, education, and housing.
2. Education and Training: Provide education and training to service providers, educators, and healthcare professionals to increase awareness and understanding of transgender issues and the importance of providing inclusive services.
3. Supportive Policies: Develop and implement policies that support the rights of transgender children to access gender-affirming care and inclusive educational environments.
4. Support Networks: Create supportive networks and organizations that offer services specifically tailored to the needs of transgender children, including mental health support, legal advocacy, and shelter options.
5. Community Awareness: Promote community awareness and acceptance of transgender individuals to reduce discrimination and bias in service provision.



6. Empowerment: Empower transgender children and their families with information about their rights and available resources to help them navigate and challenge denials of services (Austin, 2022).

It is essential to take a proactive stance against harassment targeting transgender children, as it can have severe and lasting consequences on their well-being. Creating safe and inclusive environments, raising awareness, and promoting acceptance are critical steps toward ensuring that transgender children can thrive and be themselves without fear of harassment or discrimination. Addressing harassment against transgender children requires a multi-faceted approach:

1. Safe School Environments: Schools should implement anti-bullying policies that explicitly include protections for transgender children. Educators should receive training on gender diversity and inclusion.
2. Peer Education: Promote peer education and awareness programs to foster understanding and acceptance among students and reduce harassment.
3. Reporting Mechanisms: Ensure that there are clear and accessible reporting mechanisms for harassment incidents, and take swift action to address them.
4. Legal Protections: Advocate for and enforce legal protections that explicitly prohibit discrimination and harassment based on gender identity.
5. Supportive Families: Provide resources and support to families of transgender children to encourage acceptance and reduce family rejection.
6. Mental Health Services: Offer mental health services and counseling to transgender children who have experienced harassment to help them cope with the emotional toll of harassment.
7. Community Support: Create safe and inclusive community spaces and networks where transgender children can find support, mentoring, and a sense of belonging.
8. Online Safety: Educate transgender children about online safety and provide guidance on how to protect them from cyber bullying (United Nations Children's Fund, 2017).

## Conclusion



Transgender children need ongoing advocacy and assistance within the educational framework in order to effectively confront societal prejudices surrounding their self-identification. The implementation of inclusive educational policies and curricula focused on gender inclusivity holds the potential to instigate a fundamental shift in prevailing societal outlooks. As Lakshmi Narayan Tripathi, a transgender activist once said, “I don’t want anything else, just treat me with dignity and normalise our existence in the society. I don’t want your sympathy. I want your love and respect.” And this longing for dignity and love can only end with gender-sensitive social spaces and a gender-inclusive education system.

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