

To what extent do the social perceptions affect transgender adolescents' life in China

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Abstract. This is a secondary research focusing on the relationship between unoptimistic circumstances of Chinese LGBT adolescents and social perceptions, concluding by analyzing data from different journals and a combination of real-life situations. The analysis found that the traditional views held by conservatives had a significant impact on the education system as well as the health care system, exacerbating the misunderstanding and stigmatization of transgender people. Young transgender is subjected to varying degrees of discrimination and violence at school and at home, and there is an urgent need to change give this issue a much higher profile among the community.

Keywords: Transgender, adolescent, China

1. Introduction

Acknowledging by law, the alienation and stigma towards transgender people are deeply rooted in the public's mind. "Transgender used to describe individuals whose gender expression and/or gender identity differs from conventional expectations based on the sex they were assigned at birth" (Amnesty International, 2019, p.6). The transgender topic which involves complex unequal gender relationship is sensitive and arouse various controversy on the Internet. However, the native transgender group loses voice at home while the western advanced movement, such as LGBT right movement, thrive, which brings confusion to the Chinese public, and keeps its underground status. Under the changing policy of the Health Department, the anxiety coming from the wrong gender bothers them since they can't access hormone therapy not to mention sex reassignment surgery. While statistics show an increasing rate of supporting attitude in young generation speeds up due to the internet, the social attitude remains strongly influencing on transgender adolescents who stay in a relatively closed environment such as school and home, and some non-LGBT teenagers who don't meet social stereotypes due to the traditional values and unbalanced region development in China.

2. Negative effects

Without the support of the natal family, trans adolescents not only are merely incapable to seek any support but also face serious family problems. Abusing behaviors happening with the control came from guardians that bring detriment to their unmaturred mentality. UNDP (2017) reported the unpromising attitude of respondents' natal family: only 10.9% of their parents totally accepted their gender identity compared to 38.9% completely rejected rate, while 59.7% of participants didn't receive any form of support such as emotional support, economic support from their parents. Nevertheless, only 6 respondents in 1640 people didn't encounter domestic violence, on-premise that their parents had known their identity already. A high rate of abuse and neglect enhances the occurrence rate of mental disorder in this special group, subsequently displaying suicide tendency. The discrimination brought by social attitudes stopped adolescents' step in searching for mental health dependent. Being Highly depended on guardians, trans adolescents have no economic source to undergo ought medical procedure, and getting therapy needs parents' permission. The hormone medicine will not be discussed in this article because even if the parents fully support and respects trans children, they will still be stopped by the limited medical resources. Amnesty International (2019) 's interview revealed that there were only a few hospitals in the first and second biggest city in China had qualifications to conduct relative consultations, and the surgery fee must be paid by

patients because this was classified into plastic surgery, which was listed out of national health insurance. Therefore, those families may encounter financial difficulty to access the medical resources in first-tier cities not to mention affording surgery costs.

Unappropriated and biased gender education pushes trans teenagers to a dangerous school environment when students are closed to each other and involved in others' life. The high rate of bullying experience at school contributed to another biggest suicidal factor of trans adolescent. A report from Peng et al. (2019) demonstrated the severe situation in which 76.6% of respondents had been abused or bullied in school, including 68.6% of verbal bullying and 64.4% of cyberbullying, and there was a statistically significant difference in the proportion of adolescents who had lifelong suicidal thoughts compared to those who had not experienced such traumatic experiences according to research. In Cheshire (2020)'s interview with a transgender adult, he talked about the previous bullying behavior from his classmate such as being smacking and pushing downstairs. The differences between the two genders begin to become apparent in the adolescence, where gender awareness is completely developed. Transgender can be hidden in society, but not in a closed environment like home and school. As China increases its efforts to promote bullying prevention in schools, the figures for physical violence are gradually decreasing, although verbal violence and social isolation are difficult to regulate. Under the closed supervision of most schools in China, the psychological environment of students is vulnerable to outside influences. What's more, very few schools have separate toilets for the disabled, let alone third-gender toilets. "The vast majority of primary and secondary schools in China require students to wear school uniforms based on their legal gender identity and only provide gender-specific dorms, restrooms, and bathrooms for their students – all of which are informed by a binary notion of gender" (Luhur et al. 2021, p.p2). Many transgender people choose not to drink water to reduce their trips to the bathroom or choose to go when no one is around for fear of being discriminated against. Bathrooms and dormitories have a high incidence of group bullying, and transgenders are likely to expose their gender identity to others and face pressure.

Social tolerability gradually decreases with the exclusion of different voices, which affects non-LGBT people. Considering the wide gender gap in China, the feminine male will face more severe bullying more than verbal at puberty. Chan (2021) interviewed a boy who lived in Shanghai, who was excluded by other boys due to his feminine action such as high voice and playing with girls, and the recent government announcement point out many unmasculine boys' bullying experiences like him. With official propaganda of masculinity, people are bonded with gender stereotypes given by social attitudes. Official media directly claimed that they started to ban "Niang Pao" appearing in public's view ("Niang pao" is an insulting word in Chinese that describes feminine males, the same meaning as "sissy boy") and strengthened "masculinity" education to boys to prevent "bad phenomenon". In this "masculinity theory", males are tied to excellence in standardized tests and good athletic ability, while females are tied to temperaments such as not being good at studying and being sentimental. Following the document, social networks blocked more "feminine men", plus LGBT content that would have been "forced to disappear". This has led to the further invisibility of the trans community (not only in reality but also online) and the loss of voice of non-mainstream groups, such as the loss of jobs for some video self-publishing cross-dressers. It further reinforces the propagation of gender stereotypes and undermines cultural diversity.

3. Cause

The traditional value shapes the social perception with the conservation inside governmental propaganda. The concept of family is highly emphasized in the traditional values which cause the unacceptable attitude from natal family. "People in Chinese society emphasize family honor and dignity, and value maintaining 'face' (reputation) in social interactions. Being LGBT is still considered a form of shame for one's family ('losing face'). Having an LGBT family member could make the family the subject of vicious gossip, and stigmatize the family name" (Wang et al., 2020, p.2).

Luhur et al. (2021) state that 90% of family non-acceptance and 70.8% exposure to violence in schools from a nonprobability study reflects the traditional Chinese culture of gender norms. Conservatism takes the dominant position in the social propaganda after the fading of Marxism due to the re-open market economy in the 1970s. The shrinking of cultural policy in recent decades strongly affects the degree of social openness that marginalizes the LGBT group. The lower rate of acceptable and common misunderstood occurred in this period. When the related words disappeared in the news, the article, and the literary works, the channel of knowing the LGBT concept is closed to the majority of people. The stigma coming from incomprehension forces transgender to close their mouth, which adds more misunderstanding to this group of people, finally forming a vicious circle. Those toxic notions are combined with the traditional family concept, cause trans's dilemma. There is one word in Chinese called "Chuan Zong Jie Dai" which means offer-springs carry the duty of extending family line. What's more, only males have the inheritance right in tradition. For this sake, "losing the only boy" is huge destruction in parents' world. That's the reason why the violence and discrimination were more severe happening in transgender women. "Of these, those most likely to experience rejection were transgender women" (UNDP, 2017, P.12).

The unbalanced development in China brings a split in a different region, different groups of people. The social civilization development did not match the rapid growth of the economy, and the backward social concept cannot fulfill the gender minority's needs. In Wang et al. (2020)'s statistical report, a scatterplot was used to present the social attitude towards LGBT people in different provinces, which showed a higher friendly rate happened in economically developed areas like a coastal city in contrast to hostile attitudes in relatively backward areas. First-tier cities in China such as Shanghai are starting to build gender-neutral bathrooms; on the contrary, people in other regions still reckon that homosexuality is a kind of mental illness. Many laws or policies are lagging, which doesn't meet the current circumstances. The medical system acknowledges transgender as "transsexualism", classified as mental disorders. Those differences between regions limited adolescent access to information. Imagine that a trans teen in a North-western province may not know what LGBT is and hold the doubt of self-gender identity, while Shanghai children have seen LGBT organizations and activities, being capable to know news from abroad. Therefore, with the difficulty to seek formal medical assistance, many adolescents on their own buy drugs with hormones, take them and extrapolate doses based on the experiences of others. According to Amnesty International (2019), the internet is the most important way or only channel for interviewers to know about hormone treatment.

4. Solutions

It is imperative to fulfill the trans adolescents' physical needs by implementing small policies and raising their visibility, starting from their families. Enhancing parents' education level greatly alleviates the mental stress of both trans children and their parents. Wang et al. (2020) illustrates that family acceptance and transgender mental health levels are positively correlated, ranking at top of the important aspect of social acceptance, "previous research has indicated that family rejection can be predictive of suicide attempts and substance misuse among the transgender population" (Wang et al. 2020, p.8). The internal support given by the family goes a long way to counteracting external pressures. Changing the concept of guardianship directly improves the lives of the transgender community, particularly young people who do not have the financial means to become independent from their parents' guardianship. Having parental support can go a long way in changing the mental state of transgender people and allowing them to seek outside help.

Amending misunderstands, changes happen in the education system is indispensable that meet the needs of modern education. The school is the best place to popularize the current circumstances and concept to the public and directly improve the living environment of trans adolescents. According to Peng et al. (2019) 's proposal, mental health intervention should be implemented to intervene in suicide tendency and improve psychological well-being condition, taking relevant mistreatment

behavior came from school and family into account. In addition to this, education related to gender and sexual diversity towards faculties and students needs to be popularized. Luhur et al. (2021) 's report points out that people with higher education are more likely to be unsupportable towards transgender because of the importance of traditional culture and the negative attitudes towards transgenderism in the Chinese education system. It is extremely difficult to change many people's notions which are shaped by many years of social experience, and the most effective way is educating children. If the education system is reformed in some way in terms of gender awareness, a new generation of young people will grow up to change the social environment. As Luhur says, there is still prejudice against transgender people in Chinese textbooks and some sources, for example pathologizing them as a mental disorder. Successful education can change this situation, giving more people a proper understanding of the trans community and increasing the visibility of this group in society.

5. Counterclaim

The advanced economy prompts the moderation of society and emancipates people's minds. The higher education level and the construction of an open network changes people's views, and the environment will become friendlier to transgender people over time. Luhur et al. (2021) illustrated that a high percentage of respondents reckoned that China's tolerance degree is higher with the wish that more effort will be put into supporting transgender. What's more, only a few of them agree transgender is contrary to the traditional values and China does too more in giving them the right of dressing as another sex. Many interpretations hold positive views claim that China's society will become more advanced and higher LGBT-supported rate among people in sort of raising the right of LGBT is on time. It still takes a long time to reach this stage under a temporary social environment, and before that, LGBT especially transgender will be experienced unequal treatment.

6. Conclusions

In conclusion, social attitudes contribute to discrimination and stigma of transgender adolescents, both at school and at home, which leads to exacerbated mental health conditions and being exposed to violence. Considering the impact on transgender and other adolescents in general, society should support transgender people and the awareness of gender fluidity behind them to improve the unpromising situation by changing the education system and strengthening parental education.

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