

## Gender Role Orientation and Quality Of Life among Transwomen

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**Abstract:** A gender role is a set of societal norms dictating what types of behaviors are generally considered acceptable, appropriate or desirable for a person based on their actual or perceived sex or sexuality. These are usually centered on opposing conceptions of femininity and masculinity, although these are exceptions and variations. Transgender is a gender involving tendencies to vary from culturally conventional gender roles. The present study was designed to explore the relationship between gender role orientation and quality of life of Transwomen community in Kerala. A transwomen is a male -to -female transgender or transsexual person. The study consisted of a sample size of 100, within the age range of 20-60. Bem Sex Role Inventory and Quality of Life Scale are used to assess the variables.<sup>[1][2]</sup> A positive correlation between gender role and quality of life is observed. The variables were found to be related with various socio demographic aspects too. The detailed result and its implications are discussed in the paper. Based on these findings interventions can be given to this community.

**Keywords:** Gender role orientation, Quality of life, Transwomen, Transsexual

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### I. INTRODUCTION

A gender role is a societal expectation of behaviors from the part of persons based on their sex or sexuality. The World Health Organization defines gender role as 'socially constructed roles, behaviors, activities and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women'.<sup>[3]</sup>

Gender roles are usually centered on conceptions of femininity and masculinity even though there are exceptions and variations from this aspect. A Transgender individual emerges from these exceptions and variations. It is a state that occurs when one's "gender identity" (identification of oneself as woman or man) does not match with ones "assigned sex" (identification by others as male or female). Due to the incongruence with gender and sex, transgender may or may not undergo medical treatment, such as hormones or surgery.<sup>[4]</sup>

Transgender refers to a person, male or female, who dresses, acts or presents in a manner that differs from his or her gender norm. They are generally viewed as a part of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and queer (LGBQ) community and are commonly known in acronym LGBTQ. Mostly, 'Transwomen' and 'Transman' are two of the variations found among transgender community. A transman is the one who was assigned female sex at the time of birth. Whereas, a transwomen is the one who was assigned male sex at the time of birth.

Quality of life is the general well being of individuals and societies, outlining negative and positive features of life. It observes life satisfaction, including everything from physical health, family, education, employment, wealth, religious beliefs, finance and the environment<sup>[5]</sup>. The person's level of consciousness and responsible attitude towards life and others seem far more important for the global quality of life and health. A study states that, the factors important for QOL and health are derived from good relations, with the close as well as the distant world, and overall view of life<sup>[6]</sup>. Even though many 'quality of life' studies have come up, only limited studies focused on 'transgender community of Kerala'. One such study in Kerala found that the transgender individuals of Kerala are having moderate to good quality of life<sup>[7]</sup>.

In a wider perspective, the transgender community of Kerala is facing serious issues regarding their acceptance in the society. Majority of the transgender individuals are victims of ostracism. They are excluded from the social and cultural functions, voting rights. They have restricted access from education, health services and public spaces. Moreover, conflicts regarding 'actual sex' and preferred sex', creates confusion and leads them to various psychological and physical difficulties in life. Of late, many NGOs have come up with many public activities to support this group. This has shed light up on the living standards of this community and their quality of life. The present study attempts to explore the gender role orientation and its influence upon their quality of life of Transwomen community in Kerala.

## II. METHOD

### 2.1 Sample

The present study was designed to explore the relationship between gender role orientation and quality of life of Transwomen community in Kerala. The sample of the present study was selected from the various Transgender NGOs in Trivandrum, Kollam and Ernakulam districts of Kerala. A total of 100 male to female Transgender (transwomen) ranged from 20 to 60 years were selected for the study. The purpose of the study was debriefed to the sample group and their consent was obtained.

### 2.2 Tools Used

- i. Bem Sex Role Inventory (Bem, 1974).
- ii. Quality of Life Scale (Warrier, J.K & Sananda Raj, 1999).
- iii. Personal data schedule.
- iv. Statistical methods: Correlation, t-test, ANOVA.

## III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1 Correlation analysis

Correlations of female role orientation and quality of life

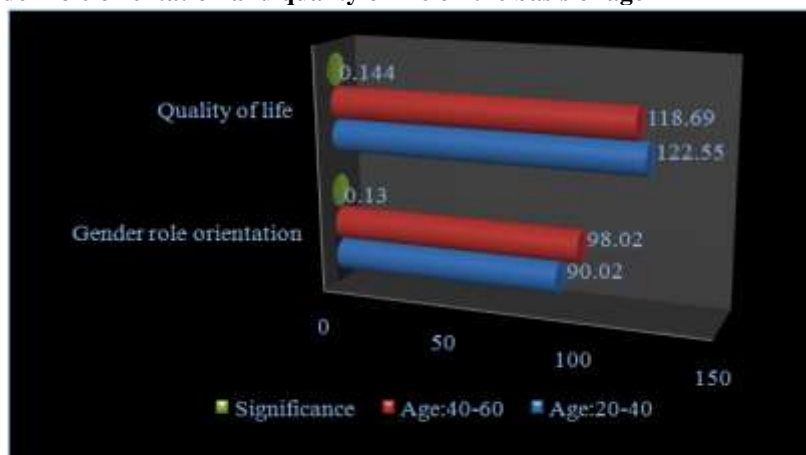
	QOL
BEM	.201*

N=100

*Note.* \* indicates correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2 tailed).

A positive correlation ( $r=.201^*$ ) is found between female role orientation and quality of life. The femininity scores of Bem's Inventory is correlated with the scores of Quality of Life Scale and the sample is found to have a better quality of life with respect to their gender role orientation. Even though at the time of birth they are assigned a 'male' sex, later their gender orientation shifts from the assigned sex to their preferred 'female' sex. As they realize, accept and express their preferred gender, they begin to face myriad challenges from various facets regarding their gender identity. There occurs a psychological conflict between their actual and preferred sex as because of their inability to identify to either of the gender (male or female). Most families do not accept if their male child starts behaving in ways that are considered feminine. Consequently, family members may threaten, scold or even assault their son/sibling from behaving or dressing-up like a girl or woman.<sup>[8]</sup> After facing challenges from family, friends and society, the individual either becomes strong and stable in their preferred gender or remains silent and suffer the consequences. A study found that, the interpersonal relationship and lasting friendship among transgender pave way for better understanding of oneself and firm gender identity development <sup>[9]</sup>. This indicates that the more they express and remain stable in their preferred sex; the better is their quality of life. Now a day, the transgender community is striving for their wellbeing in society through various ways such as conducting protests against the inequalities they face in the society and thus seeking better living conditions by means of law and order. And also, there are many NGO's which come forth and provides assistance for them. All these have serious impact on their quality of life.

### 3.2 t-TEST: Gender role orientation and quality of life on the basis of age

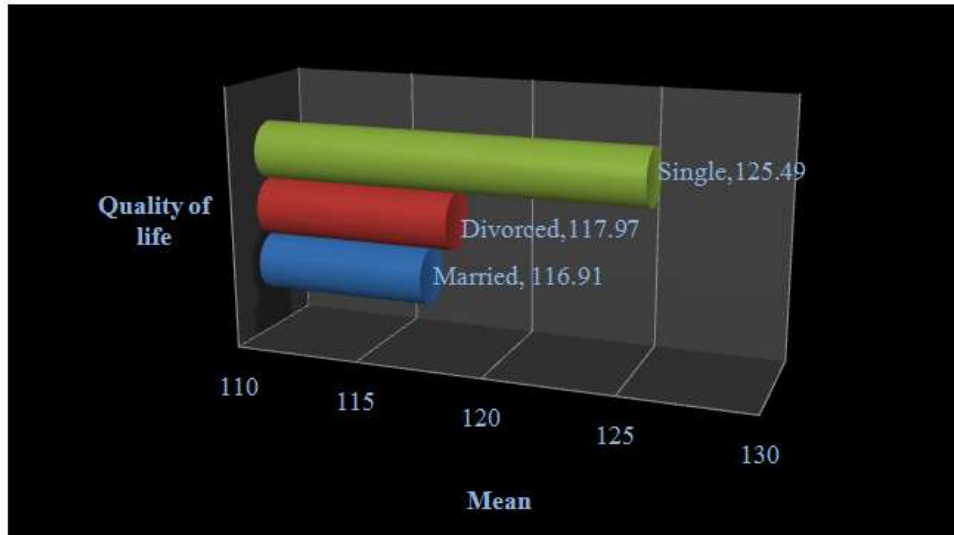


**Figure3.2.1** Gender role orientation and Quality of life with respect to age

The age group 40-60 is found to possess more female gender role orientation when compared with the other age group (20-40).

That is, gender role orientation is found to be increased with age. As age increases, their preferred gender interest, identification and roles will become more stabilized and life experiences make them stronger. So as they become older, they identify with their preferred gender. On the other hand, they become less concerned about the social norms and criticisms. And overall, the personal experience one gets from all these years influences their female role orientation. There is no change observed in the quality of life of transwomen with age. As far as transgender are concerned, they are not expected to follow any age related norms like the rest of the population do. This made them to negotiate in a stress free manner with the outer world. In effect, their quality of life, with respect to age, remains more or less unaffected.

### 3.3 One way ANOVA: Gender role orientation and quality of life on the basis of marital status



**Figure 3.3.2** Quality of life in relation with marital status

The gender role orientation is not affected by the marital status of transgenders.

The quality of life varies with the marital status. Unmarried transgenders are found to have significantly high quality of life than the married and divorced transgender groups. This is in agreeing with a similar study which also reveals significant relationship between these two study variables in general population.<sup>[10]</sup>

The married and divorced transwomen are affected psychologically and financially by their current status. The married transwomen are bound with responsibilities and as they report, they often find it very difficult to adjust with the demands of family. This is probably due to lack of social support and acceptance. Some of them have kept their female identity hidden, since they are afraid of the consequences they have to face including the fear of losing their loved ones. The unmarried group has high quality of life because they have accepted, revealed and has become stable in their identity. This has a positive impact up on their quality of life.

#### IV. MAJOR FINDINGS

- The quality of life of transwomen increases with an increase in female role orientation.
- The female role orientation of transwomen increases with age.
- There is no change observed in the quality of life with age.
- The female role orientation is not found to be affected by the marital status.
- The quality of life varies with the marital status. Unmarried individuals are found to have high quality of life than other transwomen groups (married and divorced).

#### V. IMPLICATIONS

- i. Better female role orientation predicts a better quality of life among transgenders. Efforts are to be taken to stabilize transwomen in their preferred gender role.
- ii. Married transwomen have a lower quality of life. Social support is to be amassed for married transwomen so as to ensure quality of life.

## VI. CONCLUSION

The main focus of the present study was to find out the gender role orientation (male to female) and quality of life of transwomen of Kerala. It is found that the gender role orientation and quality of life are positively correlated. The findings of the study are relevant according to the transgender community of Kerala. Based on the findings, interventions can be given to this community to minimize their inhibitions and thus help them to identify with their preferred gender so as to enhance their quality of life. Adequate therapeutic intervention can be given to them so as to promote their gender orientation and to provide necessary opportunities namely; social, occupational, personal, psychological, medical and legal assistance. Programs may be conducted to create awareness on transgender community about their rights and privilege; and also to the society for reducing the stigma and to acknowledge them as an accepted gender.

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