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An Empirical Study on Social and Legal Opportunities among Transgender in Vellore district of Tamilnadu, India

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ABSTRACT

Transgender people face ongoing social and legal disadvantage, such as lack of social acceptance, legal assistance, civic engagement, and political involvement. The present study aimed to investigate the social and legal opportunities of the transgender in Vellore district, Tamilnadu with six dimensions namely marital life status, access to legal aid, social inclusion, civic participation, political advocacy and media awareness. The quantitative descriptive research design was used with a sample of 120 transgender people who were chosen by snowball sampling. Primary data was collected by the use of a self-structured interview schedule. Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = 0.808$) was used to determine the reliability of the instrument, which showed good internal consistency. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and one sample t-test. The findings revealed the married transgender respondents (51.7%) and the majority of the respondents were living in town areas (68.3%). The one-sample t-test showed statistically significant differences ($p < .05$) across all six dimensions: marital life status ($t = 27.486$, mean difference = 2.042), access to legal aid ($t = 20.811$, mean difference = 2.008), social inclusion ($t = 21.001$, mean difference = 2.033), civic participation ($t = 17.975$, mean difference = 1.800), political advocacy ($t = 23.077$, mean difference = 1.900) and media awareness ($t = 20.134$, mean difference = 2.208). The mean difference for media awareness was the highest of the six dimensions and the lowest was for civic participation. The results thus suggest differences in the dimensions of social and legal opportunities measured, notably in the case of civic participation and political advocacy. The study provides district-level empirical information of social and legal opportunities available to transgender people in Vellore District. The results indicate that there is a need to strengthen legal aid services, promote social inclusion, facilitate civic and political participation, strengthen inclusive governance and expand public awareness and community-based social work interventions. The limitations are being a cross-sectional study, the sample size (120), study restricted only to Vellore District, and the data was self-reported and the snowball sampling technique was used which may not be generalizable. The study shows that enhancing institutional support and inclusive social and legal channels are crucial to equality, dignity, participation and sustainable empowerment of transgender people.

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1. Introduction

The transgender community is one of the most relegated and socially excluded groups worldwide. Transgender persons often experience discrimination, stigma, violence and unequal access to education, work, healthcare, accommodation and others services. These forms of exclusion adversely affect their social integration, livelihood security, wellbeing and overall quality of life (World Health Organization [WHO], 2022; Kumar, 2023; Kcomt, 2019). Although transgender rights have gained increasing national and international recognition, substantial challenges remain in achieving substantive equality (United Nations Human Rights Office, 2023).

Social and legal challenges are closely interconnected and influence nearly every aspect of transgender persons' lives. Family rejection, social exclusion, limited employment opportunities, educational inequalities, inadequate healthcare services, poor access to legal aid and restricted political participation continue to hinder their empowerment and social inclusion (King & Gamarel, 2021; Green, 2017; WHO, 2022). Although legal reforms have established a framework for protecting transgender rights, inconsistent implementation at the district and community levels remains a significant concern (UNDP, 2017; Government of India, 2020).

Vellore District in Tamil Nadu provides an important setting for examining these challenges because it has a sizeable transgender population, expanding urban and semi-urban communities, active civil society organizations and several government welfare initiatives targeting transgender welfare. Understanding social & legal experiences of Trans persons in this district can provide valuable evidence for policymakers, social workers and community organizations to strengthen inclusive interventions and improve policy implementation (National Human Rights Commission, 2018; UNDP India, 2019).

The present studies therefore try to find out the social & legal challenges experienced by transgender persons in Vellore District. Specifically, it examines access to legal aid, social inclusion, political participation and media awareness to generate empirical evidence that can strengthen governance, inform social work practice and support evidence-based policymaking. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of sustainable strategies that promote equality, human rights, self-respect and the overall wellbeing of Trans persons (United Nations Human Rights Office, 2023; Wandrekar et al., 2026).

1.1. Research Gap

The existing literature has been on discrimination, health or legal identity of transgender individuals. Fewer studies have tested the social and legal opportunities empirically, having assessed access to legal aid, civic participation, political advocacy and media awareness and perceived social inclusion in a single study.

Moreover, there is a lack of quantitative evidence at the district level in Vellore District. Hence, the study aims to fill the gap by giving empirical evidence related to social and legal opportunities among transgender people living in Vellore District.

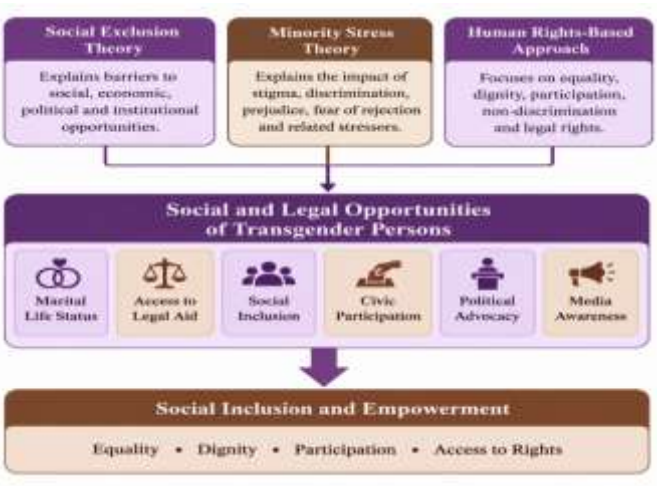
1.2. Research Questions

I. What are the social and legal opportunities of transgender people in Vellore District?

II. What are the perceptions of transgender persons regarding social inclusion, legal aid and political participation?

III. Do the social and legal opportunity variables selected manfully differ from what is expected?

1.3. Theoretical Frame work



2. Materials & Methods

2.1. Objectives

- To assess the social and legal opportunities among transgender persons in Vellore District.
- To analyze the perception of the respondents about legal assistance, social inclusion and civic involvement, political participation and awareness of the media.
- To assess the statistical significance dimensions of social and legal opportunities.

2.2. Research Design

This study adopted a quantitative-descriptive research design, which was used to analyze social and legal opportunities for transgender people in Vellore District, Tamil Nadu. A descriptive method to systematically analyze the perceptions of the respondents about social inclusion, access to legal aid, civic participation, political advocacy and media awareness.

2.3. Study Universe

Transgender people were included in the present study in the Vellore District of Tamilnadu. The study area was chosen considering the visibility of transgender population, presence of

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government welfare programs, existing community organizations and the rural–urban gradient with rural, semi-urban and urban settlements. These contextual features created an appropriate context for analyzing the access of social and legal opportunities for transgendered people.

2.4. Sampling Technique

A snowball sampling technique was used to recruit the study participants. Community contacts and local support groups in Vellore District were used to identify a few transgender who met the inclusion criteria first. The initial participants were asked to recommend other eligible transgender individuals in their social networks. The referral process was continued until sufficient sample size of 120 respondents was obtained. The decision to use snowball sampling was made given that the transgender community might be hard to find and reach through traditional sampling methods because of social marginalization and limited visibility. The approach helped to reach those who would not have been accessible through any other method, and to coax them to participate through trusted peer referrals. It also facilitated the researcher to reach transgender people residing in the different localities of Vellore District.

2.5. Development and Validation of the Research Instrument

The researcher designed a self-structured interview schedule, which was based on the study's objectives and the literature review on the social and legal opportunities for the transgender community. The instrument contained questions about socio-demographic variables and some aspects of social and legal opportunities such as social inclusion, civic participation, political advocacy and media awareness, marital life status and access to

legal aid. Content validity was determined by presenting the self-structured instrument to two experts who have academic and professional background in the areas. The experts checked the items for their relevance, clarity, appropriateness and relevance to the study goals. Their recommendations were taken on board and the instrument was modified accordingly so that it's clarity and content coverage will be improved prior to the administration to the respondents.

2.6. Reliability and validity testing.

A re-worded instrument was reliability tested to measure the internal consistency of the items. The reliability of the instrument was evaluated by Cronbach’s alpha which the value obtained was 0.808, which means that the instrument has good internal consistency. Content validity was determined by two experts' evaluation. They provided assessment that the items reflected the desired social and legal opportunities dimensions of transgendered people. The validated instrument was then utilized to gather primary data.

2.7. Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were followed throughout the research process. Before data collection, the purpose and nature of the study was provided to the respondents and each individual gave consent. There was no coercion to participate and no harm would come to the participants if they withdrew from the study. Responses were kept confidential and anonymous, and data gathered were only for academic/research purposes. Personal identifying data were not given in reporting the findings. Data collection was done after obtaining ethical approval from the appropriate ethics committee/institutional authority. The researcher also made sure that the dignity, privacy, safety and rights of the transgender participants were respected in the research process.

2.8. Statistical Analysis

Collected data were then coded, entered and analyzed with the help of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 26. The study used both descriptive and inferential statistical tools used to achieve the goals of the study. The socio-demographic features of the persons interviewed and the distribution of the study variables were summarized using descriptive statistics such as frequency, Percentage, Mean and Standard Deviation. In order to find out if the mean scores of the chosen social and legal opportunities variables differed significantly from the test value, one-sample t-test was conducted. The results were inferred at the 5% level of significance ($p < 0.05$) to arrive at meaningful conclusions on the social and legal problems handled by transgender indivduals in Vellore District.

2.9. Inclusion Criteria and Exclusion Criteria

The respondents included in the study met the following criteria (a) Self-identified as transgender persons, (b)Aged 18 years and above, (c)Permanent residents of Vellore District. (d)Willing to participate voluntarily in the study.

Provided informed consent prior to participation. Self-identified as transgender persons, (a) Aged 18 years and above, (b)All the non-permanent residents of Vellore District, (c)Visible enthusiasm to be involved voluntarily.

3. Review of Literature

Transgender individuals continue to experience social exclusion, rejection by their families, educational discontinuity, unemployment, housing insecurity and discrimination in health care institutions according to Indian studies. Such difficulties have a destructive influence on their economic situation, mental health and social inclusion. While there has been some improvement in constitutional recognition through legal reforms, they have not been sufficient to address structural inequalities and institutional discrimination (UNDP India, 2019).

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Later studies have continued to explore the evolution of transgender rights in India. Bhargava et al. (2024) analyzed the history of transgender rights and highlighted significant case laws and policies that have emerged since the NALSA judgment and the Act of 2019. Concurrently, the literature keeps highlighting issues of healthcare, job opportunities, social welfare and implementation. The findings demonstrate the need for a study of the impact of national legal changes at district and community levels.

Social Inclusion, Stigma and Discrimination

Social inclusion is a vital aspect of transgender wellbeing, due to the fact that recognizing a transgendered person in the legal sense doesn't take away the stigma and discrimination. King, Hughto and Operario (2020) analyzed the conceptualization and measurement of transgender stigma in empirical studies and pointed out the multidimensionality of stigma. They argue for a socioecological understanding that suggests that stigma can exist at an interpersonal, institutional and structural level. The present study is relevant to this framework as social inclusion can be shaped not only by the attitudes of individuals, but also institutional practices and access to public services.3

King and Gamarel (2021) performed a scoping review about social and legal gender affirmation of transgender communities. They concluded that there was several health outcomes linked to social and legal affirmation, while the evidence base was limited in number of studies, methodological limitations, and inconsistent measures. The authors highlighted the need to better conceptually define and measure social and legal affirmation. The finding is in line with the present study which has been trying to look at some measurable aspects like social inclusion, legal aid, political participation, and media awareness.

There are also international recent examples of the impact of legal recognition beyond documentation. In a systematic review and meta-analysis, Scheim et al. (2025) reported a reduction in suicidal ideation and psychological distress with legal gender recognition, with a low or very low level of evidence for some outcomes. Financial barriers and policy restrictions to accessing legal gender recognition were also found. The results show that legal recognition can help to enhance well-being, but that legal reform can help reduce structural barriers.

Legal Aid and substantive rights.

Substantive equality includes access to legal assistance, which transgender persons might need to obtain identity documents, fight discriminatory practice, seek welfare and insurance benefits, and seek redress for rights violations. The 2019 Act did not lead to tangible access to rights as shown by the work of Bhattacharya et al. (2022). They found that institutional and social obstacles can impede the ability of transgender people to enjoy rights that are legally recognized.

The literature thus distinguishes between the presence of law, and the actual use of the law, by the individual. Administrative and procedural barriers in implementing transgender-related laws in India was also highlighted by Jain (2022). The present study's variable which is access to legal aid is why such findings are relevant to this study, as legal awareness, availability of legal aid, administrative procedures and institutional responsiveness can influence the ability of transgender persons to exercise their rights.

Promoting civic engagement and political participation.

An additional facet of social inclusion is political and civic engagement. While formal citizenship rights may be secured through the law, substantive citizenship requires social acceptance, institutional accessibility, political representation and freedom from discrimination. Compared to the literature on health and discrimination, there is less empirical research on political involvement among transgender people. There is comparatively less empirical literature on transgender political participation than there is on health and discrimination. This imbalance is significant as it may constrain not only the use of welfare services by transgender people, but also limit their access to decision-making processes as citizens.

Bhattacharya et al. (2022) noted that representation and participation in institutional space is an important consideration where legal rights are not matched with substantive rights. They conclude that ensuring greater representation of transgender people in decision-making and rights-negotiation processes could enhance the enforcement of legal protections.

Media awareness and public perceptions

Media can shape perceptions of transgender people and help to diminish stereotypes and social stigma. It is especially relevant that the role of awareness is relevant as legal changes can be limited when there is no awareness of transgender rights in communities and public institutions. The United Nations Human Rights Office (2023) has made it clear that there is a need for awareness and actions against violence and discrimination against LGBT people.

The inclusion of media awareness in the present study is thus an extension of the literature, which has not focused on the public communication as a part of social and legal opportunity. The striking finding in the present study is congruent with the overall literature suggesting that social recognition involves a change in public attitudes, as well as formal legal changes.

Legal assistance is an integral part of social justice and human rights. Legal aid can help transgender people protect themselves from discrimination, violence, harassment and denial of services and constitutional rights. Research shows, however,

that transgender communities still encounter challenges to accessing legal services due to limited legal literacy, financial constraints and legal institutional procedure and attitudes (Bhattacharya et al., 2022).

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4. Results and Discussion

The present study used descriptive quantitative research design to analyze opportunities among transgender of the environment of society and law in Vellore District. Fifty-one percent of the respondents were married, and 68.3% were living in town areas signifying higher participation of transgender persons living in semi-urban areas. This could be due to town areas having more access to employment, health, education, community networks and/or other support services. The finding mirrors the higher degree of social and economic marginalization among transgender people in India which is evident in their areas of employment, housing, healthcare and access to essential services (NHRC, 2018; United Nations Development Program India, 2019).

The one-sample t-test revealed that statistically significant differences ($p < 0.05$) exist in all the set dimensions: marital life status, use of legal aid, social inclusion, political involvement and media awareness. The role of media to raise public awareness of transgender issues was the best with the highest mean difference recorded by media awareness. This is in line with the recommendation by Kumar (2023) for the need of increased public consciousness and social recognition among transgender individuals to confront the struggles they face. Similarly, the results on social inclusion confirm the findings of King and Gamarel (2021) which proved that social and legal gender affirmation has a potential positive impact on health and social well-being of transgender communities.

There was also a statistically significant difference for access to legal aid with respondents also noting that there was a level of legal support. This is a finding that should be taken alongside with evidence currently available that legal recognition is not necessarily accompanied with equal rights and access to services. Persistent legal barriers have been found to impact transgender populations (Green, 2017) and supportive institutional and social environments have been identified to support legal gender recognition, leading to better health and social outcomes (Scheim et al., 2025). The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019 and the relevant Rules amended in the same year (Government of India, 2019, 2020) differ from the rest of the acts because of its significance in terms of protecting rights and preventing discrimination against transgender people in the Indian context.

Voting, however, as well as involvement in civic activities, had the lowest mean difference (1.800), as did political advocacy (1.900). The results show that formal recognition is not associated with equal political and civic participation. This observation reflects socially exclusive experiences and restrictions on the full enjoyment of rights of transgender people in today's society as reported in the work of the National Human Rights Commission (2018) and the United Nations Development Program (2017). In general, the present results corroborate earlier literature indicating that having transgender people legally recognized is essential for transgender inclusion but this must be coupled with social acceptance, effective policy implementation, access to legal services, institutional accountability and meaningful, substantive civic engagement. Improving legal aid, political representation, community-based awareness initiatives and transgender-inclusive social work interventions are therefore important tools to be developed to meet the targets of equality, social justice and sustainable inclusion.

Table 1: Distribution of data based on Martial status

Marital status	Frequency Percent	Cumulative
Single	47	39.2
Married	62	90.8
Willing to Marry	11	9.2
Total	120	100.0

Source: Primary data (Field Study)

Table 1 indicate the highest number of respondents, 62 (51.7%) were married. 47 respondents (39.2%) were single and 11 respondents (9.2%) were willing to marry. The results indicate that there are significant numbers of transgender individuals who are in stable marital or long-term conjugal relationships despite social stigma and discrimination experienced. Being married can also offer emotional, social and economic support, leading to better well-being and quality of life. However, the high percentage of single people points to the ongoing problems of social rejection, family rejection and restricted legal rights of transgender partnerships. The relatively limited population that would be willing to marry suggests a vision of the future family life, but also points to a need for a higher level of social acceptance and legal security. As a whole, the results highlight the need to establish policies and environments that are inclusive and protect the rights of transgender individuals and their families to maintain their relationship.

Table 2: Distribution of data based on Domicile

Domicile	Frequency	Cumulative Percent
Village	22	18.3
Town	82	68.3
City	16	13.3
Total	120	100.0

Source: Primary data (Field Study)

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Table: 2, the largest numbers proportion of the study people were living in the town areas (82 respondents, 68.3%). This was followed by 22 respondents (18.3%) from villages and 16 respondents (13.3%) from city. The majority of the respondents from the towns indicate that there are more transgender people who are concentrated in semi-urban areas where employment, healthcare, education and support services are relatively better. The underrepresentation from villages/cities may be due to livelihood opportunities, social acceptance and migration patterns. The study findings indicate the need for further strengthening of the inclusive welfare programs and social support services in all residential settings in Vellore District.

Table 3: One sample T test between Martial status vs Social legal Opportunity

Variables	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
Marital Life Status	27.486	119	.001 Significant P <0.05	2.042
Access to legal aid	20.811	119	.001 Significant P <0.05	2.008
Society is more inclusive of TG	21.001	119	.003 Significant P <0.05	2.033
Voting and participate in civic activities	17.975	119	.001 Significant P <0.05	1.800
Political parties advocate for your rights	23.077	119	.007 Significant P <0.05	1.900
Media messages help to raise awareness about your problems	20.134	119	.001 Significant P <0.05	2.208

Source: Primary data (Field Study)

The Table 3 present the one-sample t-test which was performed to test whether the mean scores of the social and legal opportunity variables differed significantly from the given test value are presented in Table 3. The number of respondents for analysis is 120 with 119 Degrees Of Freedom (df = 119). The mean score observed for all the six variables were significant at 5% level of significance ($p < 0.05$) meaning the mean scores were significantly different from the test value. All t values are fairly large and the validity of the observed responses can be statistically proven.

Marital life status recorded the highest t-value (t = 27.486, df = 119, p = .001), with a mean difference of 2.042. Access to legal aid also was statistically significant (t = 20.811, df = 119, P = .001; MD = 2.008). However, individuals' perceptions that the society has become more accepting of transsexual/ transgendered people were also statistically significant (t = 21.001, df = 119, p = .003; mean difference = 2.033). The results show that, the respondents' score in marital life status, legal aid coverage and perceived perception of social inclusion was significantly different from the test value.

Another statistically significant difference was seen in the scores for political advocacy (t = 23.077, df = 119, p = .002) with a mean difference of 1.900. The largest mean difference (+2.208) and statistically significant t (+20.134, df = 119, p = .001) were found for media messages that helped raise awareness about transgender people's problems. However, it shows a relatively high score in regard to awareness on media than the other measured variables. The mean difference for voting and civic involvement was .800 even though it was statistically significant (t = 17.975, df = 119, p = .001). On this basis, it can be seen that all 6 variables were seen as significant, with its elementary level reflected by the

differences in the means from the respondent perceptions of the variables in each dimension. In general, the findings showed that respondents had positive perceptions with respect to each of the opportunity measures identified in the social and legal domains but there is a need to keep working on civic participation and political engagement.

4.1. Hypotheses Testing

Based on this study and the result of one sample t test, hypothesis can be tested as follows:

Null Hypothesis (H_0):

The difference in the mean scores of select social and legal opportunity variables and test value with respect to transgender persons in Vellore District is neither statistically significant.

Alternative Hypothesis (H_1):

The mean scores of all the selected social and legal opportunity variables are found to be statistically significant in the case of transgender persons in Vellore District when compared with the test value.

4.2. Hypothesis Testing Results

The results of one sample t-test revealed that all of the six variables selected studied were statistically significant at 5% ($p<0.05$). Since this was found it is accepted that therefore the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is accepted for the overall set of selected variables

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5. Recommendations

- Enhance the capacities of district legal aid centers catering to transgender groups.
- Improve legal-literacy training in government departments and social work institutions.
- Expand visibility of Transgender individualism local governments and political decision-making.
- Raise awareness and encourage civic involvement of transgender individuals.
- Promote positive transgender representations in media campaigns, with an emphasis on inclusivity.
- Increase livelihood support and psychosocial assistance in the community.
- Improve inter-agency, inter-NGO and community collaboration with the Transgender community.
- Establish District Level Policies for the monitoring and evaluation of transgender welfare programs.

6. Conclusion

The present study it is revealed that the transgender people in Vellore District have moderate opportunities in social & legal level. The results indicate that there is some improvement in the legal recognition, social awareness, and access to legal aid and media visibility, whereas there are still gaps in political participation and civic engagement as well as social acceptance and legal support. The provision of strengthened inclusive governance, accessible legal services, community based social work interventions and public awareness programs is vital to ensure dignity, equality and social acceptance as well as sustainable empowerment. The study is subject to a few limitations, such as data were collected on only the transgender residents in Vellore District, which does not allow its results to be generalized to other districts. The selection of snowball sampling and the use self-reports to extract responses might also have limited representativeness and could have resulted in recall or social desirability bias. The cross-sectional design makes it difficult to assess changes over time and/or causal relationships.

Larger samples, that encompass multiple districts and regions, should be included in future research to generate more evidence on the social and legal opportunities of transgender persons. A set of longitudinal and mixed methods studies might yield a better understanding of the social inclusion changes, legal awareness, political participation and access to welfare services. District-level effectiveness of the current transgender welfare programs and district-level legal measures could also be discussed in future research. The research of such studies can provide more evidence of designing effective social work interventions that support the equality of transgender individuals in terms of their rights, dignity and sustainable empowerment, as well as institutional accountability and inclusive policies.

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