

How Kerala transgenders are faring amidst the COVID-19 pandemic

Dear Editor,

We read the article by Asadi^[1] with great interest where the authors have described how an empowered transgender community gains the ability to handle adversities. The transgenders are a vulnerable group in this pandemic. The 2011 census and 2015 Kerala transgender survey estimates 3,902^[2] and 25,000^[3] self revealed transgenders, respectively, in Kerala. With a high literacy rate of 94%,^[2] the transgenders in Kerala depict a strong community with empowered members who actively voice their rights and needs.

An article by Madhavan^[4] and other literature^[5] reveal transgenders have high prevalence and risk factors for non-communicable, communicable diseases, HIV, high tobacco consumption and other conditions, which makes them prone to COVID-19 adversities. Older transgenders are at a higher risk due to weaker immunity, possible presence of comorbidities, emotional and financial issues. The pandemic scenario would leave many on hormone replacement therapy and with scheduled gender reassignment surgeries unable to continue with it. Lack of familial support, stress about COVID and non-COVID conditions including post-surgical care are major issues. Majority mostly rely on daily wage/unsteady jobs including begging and paid sex. The pandemic has impinged drastically on their outdoor work and income generation. Their stay in overcrowded circumstances makes social distancing difficult posing high transmission threat. Inability to pay rents during such periods of non-earning makes secure shelter difficult.

However, Kerala became the first state to provide relief in the form of temporary housing and food facilities to transgenders who had registered with the government during the lockdown. This falls in line with the State Policy for Transgenders in Kerala, 2015^[3] which noted inclusiveness of transgenders in the socio-economic and political spectrum as pivotal; and The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019 which has a component of access to welfare measures including healthcare. The Transgender cell,^[3] a first in the country, functioning under the Social Justice Department caters to this population's needs including operating a 24 × 7 distress counselling helpline. Many live together in large households and such clusters might need more provisions than an average household. Those who choose temporary shelters like lodges find cooking facilities inaccessible even after receiving raw materials. Steps to provide cooked food

are taken in transgender care homes. Special arrangements for vaccinating transgenders and providing kits containing sanitizers and masks are under process to ensure coverage in the second wave.

Kerala's Kudumbashree system (Women Self Help Group) has empowered transgender 'neighbourhood groups' in eight districts that enthusiastically worked towards public service during COVID-19. Augmentation of such groups across the state and country can prove highly effective. The government welcomed 0.015% transgenders who enrolled in as COVID-19 volunteers in the pandemic control activities of the state.^[6]

Transgender identity options are being included in all Kerala government application forms to aid in identification and improve service coverage to the invisible pocket-sects of this populace. Health workers may be motivated further to give equitable care by promoting provision for essential primary medical and advanced care through telemedicine services, addressing mental health issues to provide psychosocial support amidst the pandemic scare and infection.

Financial support and sponsorship

SHSRC-K

Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

Manju Madhavan, K. S. Shinu

State Health Systems Resource Centre- Kerala (SHSRC-K), Department of Health and Family Welfare, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, India

Address for correspondence: Dr. Manju Madhavan, Research Officer, State Health Systems Resource Centre-Kerala (SHSRC-K), Department of Health and Family Welfare, Government of Kerala, Thycaud, Trivandrum - 695 014, Kerala, India. E-mail: manjushsrc@gmail.com

References

1. Asadi M, Tabari F, Haghani S, Heidari ME. The impact of empowerment model-based education on quality of life of transgender people under hormone therapy: A randomized clinical trial. *J Family Med Prim Care* 2020;9:2794-800.
2. Transgender/Others-Census 2011 India [Internet]. Available from: <https://www.census2011.co.in/transgender.php>. [Last accessed on 2021 May 24].
3. State Policy for Transgenders in Kerala 2015.pdf. Available from: <https://kerala.gov.in/documents/10180/46696/State%20Policy%20for%20Transgenders%20in%20Kerala%202015>. [Last accessed on 2021 May 27].
4. Madhavan M, Reddy MM, Chinnakali P, Kar SS, Lakshminarayanan S. High levels of non-communicable

diseases risk factors among transgenders in Puducherry, South India. *J Fam Med Prim Care* 2020;9:1538-43.


5. Sahastrabuddhe S, Gupta A, Stuart E, Godbole S, Ghate M, Sahay S, *et al*. Sexually transmitted infections and risk behaviors among transgender persons (Hijras) of Pune, India. *JAIDS J Acquir Immune Defic Syndr* 2012;59:72-8.
6. GoK Dashboard | Official Kerala COVID-19 Statistics. Available from: <https://dashboard.kerala.gov.in/volunteers.php>. [Last accessed on 2021 May 28]

This is an open access journal, and articles are distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 License, which allows others to remix, tweak, and build upon the work non-commercially, as long as appropriate credit is given and the new creations are licensed under the identical terms.

Received: 04-06-2021

Accepted: 10-07-2021

Published: 05-11-2021

Access this article online	
Quick Response Code: 	Website: www.jfmipc.com
	DOI: 10.4103/jfmipc.jfmipc_1064_21

How to cite this article: Madhavan M, Shinu KS. How Kerala transgenders are faring amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. *J Family Med Prim Care* 2021;10:3943-4.

© 2021 Journal of Family Medicine and Primary Care | Published by Wolters Kluwer - Medknow