





RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Influence of work role on transgender's work engagement and social support

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## ABSTRACT

The research aims to find out the level of work engagement and social support among transgenders performing traditional work role and transgender's performing non-traditional work role. Cross sectional and correlational research design were used with purposive sampling of 200 transgenders (traditional work performer n=100 and non-traditional work performer n = 100) from different Non-Government Organizations of Lahore, Pakistan. A series of questionnaire as Utrecht work engagement scale and Multidimensional scale of perceived social support was administered to transgenders after taking consent. Regression and correlation analysis were used to analyse data. Results revealed that work engagement and social support were significantly high in non-traditional work performing transgenders as compared to traditional work performing transgenders. Research conclusion specifies that work engagement predicts social support among transgenders work role. Lastly, inclusion of more researches in this community recommended to make them active and contributing citizens.

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## INTRODUCTION

Transgender is a term used for a wide variety of people or groups who express their gender through their exceptional sexual orientation, such as; trans-sexual, cross-dressers, transvestites, drag lords, male-to-female, and female-to-male (Bilodeau, 2005; Bevan, 2014). Transgender people are a disregarded sector of society where the sex personality of transgender people is the inner feeling and perception of individuals to act like a man, a woman, or maybe none of them. Some transgender people take hormonal therapies and experience surgical activities to change their sexual orientation, which is considered a mentally and physically painful act (Wheeling & Seager, 2015). In Pakistan, any person whose sexual orientation and personality are different from the general public standards is characterized as transgender (Butterworth, 2018).

There is much research on transgender people's mental health, family rejection, sexual harassment, psychological distress, and Aids programming (Valentine & Shepherd, 2018; Katz-Wise et

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al., 2016; Birkett et al., 2015). The majority of transgender people confronted absurd behavior and physical harassment from society and the workplace (Ansari et al., 2021). It was the need of time to work on the well-being of this community with reference to traditional and non-traditional work roles, social support, and overall well-being.

Meanwhile, most transgender people earn their bread and butter through untraditional work roles such as dancing at birthday parties, ceremonies, weddings, childbirth, etc. Unfortunately, many transgender people face abusive and violent behavior from society, mishandled explicitly by the youth (Yunger et al., 2004). Transgender people in the community face biological, psychological, social, financial, and behavioral pressures from society and the community.

According to Schreiber (2016), there are 1.4 million people who are considered transgender in the United States. While approximately 6.7% of transgender people reported helplessness, 18% complained of psychological issues, almost 50% faced physical, psychological, and social issues, and 41% were vulnerable to suicide. In European culture, the transgender community faced the same challenges, such as low family and social support and workplace harassment (Abelson, 2016).

Pakistan is a country where transgender violence incidents were reported in the current year against the transgender community, and more regulations need to be applied for their survival. A report presented by The Express Tribune (2016) about the murder of a 23-year-old transgender person. The hospital where she was taken after being gunned down refused treatment. The reason for refusal was that hospital management was confused about her gender. According to calculations, 45 transgender people were killed in KPK in 2015. Unfortunately, in Pakistan, the situation is getting worse day by day because of insufficient job opportunities for the transgender community, as they are helpless to continue their living even with traditional work roles such as prostitution, dancing, etc. (Zia, 2016).

In Pakistani culture, the transgender community is considered disrespectful and useless. A report by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (2007) claimed that every individual has the equal right to get respect and privilege besides their race, color, gender, and religion. Unfortunately, Transgender community in Pakistan lives without basic facilities like security, education, health, employment, and governmental and social support.

In 2009, on the order of the Supreme Court of Pakistan, The National Data Base and Registration Authority provided three gender options on the Computerized National Identity Card's registration forms. In 2013, that further enabled them to cast their votes in the elections. Though this was a positive step towards achievement, social, healthcare, security, and equivalent rights were in the way (Akhtar & Bilour, 2020). In 2017, the Criminal Law Amendment was sanctioned by the assembly of Pakistan, in which the transgender people community saved their rights to work, vote, study, get jobs, and other fundamental civil rights. This law also comprises activities that protect the transgender community from rape and physical and sexual assault through governmental and non-governmental bodies such as; Gender Interactive Alliance (Bockting et al., 2013).

According to the report of the National Center for Transgender Equality (NCTE) (2009), approximately 90% of transgender people faced workplace harassment and exploitation, workplace While 50% of them experienced disrespect, denial of promotion, low wages, and firing at the workplace. The situation of law and order by the government is not sufficient to deal with their issues. Meanwhile, many non-government organizations are working on their well-being as much as they can. NGOs are giving them small businesses and low-salary jobs like washerman, tailor, etc. (Ahmed, 2020).

This study is based on transgender workers' work roles, work engagement, and social support from society. The nature of work is related to the physical and psychological well-being of the employee as it enhances the chances to create and consume capabilities, social positions, and character building. Likewise, the socially unaccepted nature of work negatively impacts the worker's mental and physical health, which affects their overall well-being (Harcourt et al., 2001).

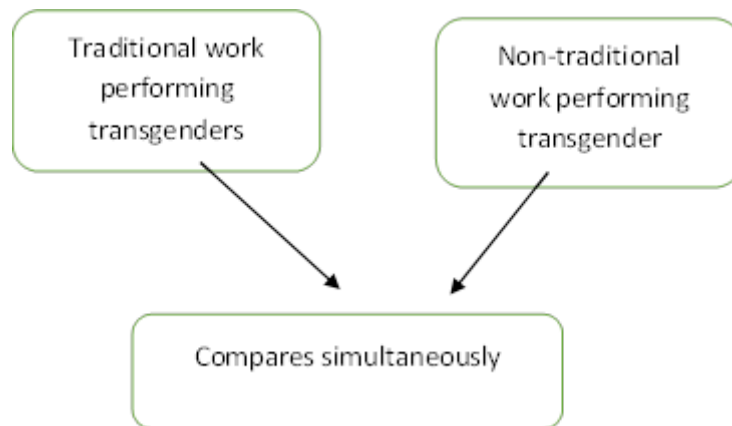
Work engagement is the employee's positive and gratifying state of mind that can be categorized as devotion and strength (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Engaged employees are more attentive not only at their workplace but also to social activities and healthy hobbies (Rich et al., 2010). The employees with higher work engagement get social support, which enhances their overall health and well-being. A study stated that job relevance leads to work commitment and engagement (Mostafa & Motalib, 2020)

Social support is a term in which a person receives care, efficacy, and warmth from society, peers, friends, and community (Eray et al., 2017). It is specifically beneficial for the transgender community, who feels substantial societal and relational rejections from the community and families (Budge et al., 2014). The transgender community experiences stigma and discernment, putting them in danger of psychological distress (Mizock & Mueser, 2014).

Research revealed that the traditional work roles of transgender such as sex workers, dancing and begging, etc, are associated with low social support, increased stigma, discrimination, and abuse which leads to low work engagement and vulnerability among the transgender's community (Milner et al., 2016). Unsupported responses from colleagues and managers at job places decreased work engagement, commitment, and social support among transgender employees who work in non-traditional work roles such as running small businesses, blue-collar employees, working in non-government organizations, etc. (Chope & Strom, 2008). In most cases, transgender employees felt unsupportive and insecure at the workplace while working in organizations performing non-traditional work roles (Alexandra et al., 2018).

Although gender discrimination has biological roots, still, it is a social structure. Society defines the taboos and myths about the genders and their roles that are responsible for the behavior of parents, peers, institutes, media, government, and community. The researcher felt the need for time to investigate the issues and problems faced by the transgender community in Pakistan. Although, in this technological era, many transgender people use the mass media and the internet to raise their voices on international platforms for the betterment of their community, they are significantly fewer in numbers with limited resources.

This study opened new horizons for researchers, scholars of psychology, gender studies, and sociologists about human sexual orientation and their work role with reference to social support. Current research filled the research gap with respect to our community and organizations. This research provided experiential evidence to the new researchers in the field of psychology, policy-making, and sociology in government and non-governmental sectors. This article aims to compare the levels of work engagement and social support among traditional and non-traditional work-performing transgender people, to know about the relationship between work engagement and social support in traditional and non-traditional work-performing transgender people, and to inspect the predictive relationship among work engagement and social support in traditional and non-traditional work-performing transgender people.



**Figure 1.** Cross-sectional Research

## METHOD

This study used cross-sectional and correlational research design to observe the causal effects in two groups of transgender people: transgender people engaged in traditional work roles and transgender people engaged in non-traditional work roles. Through the purposive sampling technique, 200 participants (n = 100, transgender from traditional work role & n = 100 performing non-traditional work role) were included in the sample. Participants were taken from two non-government organizations in Lahore, Pakistan: Fountain House and Akhuwat. The target population was transgender (Participants not identified with a specific gender) from ages 18-55 who were performing traditional and non-traditional work roles.

Before collecting the data, a short meeting was conducted with the transgender people, and they received complete research instructions, the purpose of the research, and the terms of the ethical code of conduct. Then they were guided to sign the consent form first and then requested to fill out the demographic sheet along with a series of questionnaires such as Utrecht work engagement scale (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2001), Multidimensional social support (Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet & Farley, 1988). Reliability analysis revealed that coefficient alpha values of all scales have righteous reliability, ranging from .50 to .73. Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22 was used for statistical analysis.

**Utrecht work engagement scale:** This scale measures the work engagement in individuals and groups Schaufeli and Bakker (2003). The UWES is a 17-item scale that measures three domains: vigor, dedication, and absorption. Vigor denotes a high level of energy and mental controllability at the workplace. Dedication is about feeling pride and fulfillment while working. Absorption is considered as focused and absorbed in one's work. It is a seven-point Likert scale starting from 0-7, where 0 indicates "never" and 7 signifies "always," with an alpha reliability of 0.80 (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003).

**Multidimensional scale of perceived social support:** This scale measures social support from friends and family (Zimet et al., 1988). It contains 12 items with a 7-point Likert scale, where 0 indicates "always never," and 7 implies "always." The alpha reliability of the scale is .91, with strong factorial and construct validity

## RESULT

The results verify the hypothesis that "There is a significant mean difference between traditional work roles and non-traditional work roles of transgender people related to work engagement and

social support.” An independent sample t-test proved that levels of work engagement and social support are higher among non-traditional work roles of transgender people.

**Table 1.** Work engagement and social support in non-traditional and traditional work performers

Var.	Traditional workgroup n = 100		Non-traditional group n = 100		Mean difference			95% CI of the mean difference		
	M	SD	M	SD	t	MD	p	df	LL	UL
WE	19.51	8.46	92.30	2.67	-65.155	- 72.790	< .01	198	-74.9	-70.6
SS	26.07	8.431	69.36	8.157	-36.903	- 43.290	< .01	198	-45.7	-40.9

An independent sample t-test finds that work engagement and social support were higher in transgender people working in non-traditional work roles than in working in traditional work roles. It reveals that transgender people performing their duties in non-traditional work roles, such as driver, watchman, washerman, tailor, salesperson, house helper, etc., have had higher levels of work engagement and social support.

**Table 2.** Reliability of the scales (n = 200)

Variable	M	SD	Minimum	Maximum	$\alpha$
Utrecht work engagement scale	55.90	37.33	3	102	.99
Multi-dimensional scale of social support	47.71	23.23	12	84	.97

The table indicates that Utrecht's Work engagement scale and multi-dimensional scale of social support are highly reliable.

**Table 3.** Correlation among work engagement and social support among transgenders

	Work engagement	Social support
Work engagement	1	
Social support	.93	1

Pearson correlation finds that work engagement was positively correlated with social support CI ( $r = .91 - .94$ ). Results exposed that there is a high correlation between work engagement and social support among transgender people. When work engagement increases, social support increases, too.

**Table 4.** Work engagement as a predictor of social support among transgender people (n = 200)

Models	Variance explained				Fit of model		Regression coefficient			
	R	R <sup>2</sup>	SE	R <sup>2</sup> Adjusted	F	p	B	SE	B	p
Social Support	.94	.87	8.56	.87	1266.83	< .01	.579	.016	.930	< .01

A simple linear regression finds that work engagement is a significant predictor of social support. It stated that work engagement among transgender employees increases, which leads to higher social support. Work engagement accounts for 86% variation in social support with significance ( $p < .05$ ).

## DISCUSSION

The results of the present study showed that transgender people performing non-traditional work roles (shopkeepers, small entrepreneurs, tailors, house helpers, etc.) experienced higher levels of work engagement and social support compared to transgender people performing traditional work roles (dancing, prostitution, beggars, etc.). According to a study of work conditions, societal pressures impact the overall well-being and work engagement of employees (Rasheed, 2023). According to Leppel (2016), transgender people face discrimination and less social support at work, which lowers their engagement and satisfaction. Overall, the financial and societal conditions of the transgender

community have always been miserable as they used to be threatened, sexually assaulted, bullied, and stigmatized in any society worldwide. Meanwhile, this community experienced social support comparatively while performing non-traditional work roles, which increased their work engagement (Myung & Jahee, 2016).

This study also found that Work engagement is a significant predictor of social support among non-traditional work role performers transgender people. Research suggests that social support (e.g., friends, family, and significant other) is an important factor in increasing the work engagement of any minor community (Gorman et al., 2022). There is a positive interpersonal relationship between work engagement and social support. When one variable increases, the other increases, too. The psychological health and work-life wellbeing of any transgender grows when they meet up or connect with people who respect them besides their gender (Matsuno & Israel, 2018).

Moreover, the findings of this study confirmed the results of a study that work engagement and social support are highly associated with each other. Workers with higher devotion at work received more social support than employees who were less motivated and engaged (Mokalake, 2015). A study supports these findings that correlation and prediction were statistically strengthened in the non-traditional work role of transgender people than in traditional work play. Transgender people in any community face many challenges from their co-workers, administration, and sometimes from their employer as well. Employers who hire transgender employees have had many training and techniques, but still, they are unaware of maintaining a discrimination-free work environment for their employees (O'Neil et al., 2008).

The nature of work plays a vital role in the work-life of the employee. Performance increases if the workers are motivated, devoted, and have positive social support (Rasheed, 2022). The availability of resources, required training, occupational training centers, and psychological counseling help boost the productivity and well-being (psychological, social, and economic) of sexual minorities (Jin et al., 2016).

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the quest for employment remains a fundamental challenge for individuals, particularly within the transgender community in Pakistan, where social, economic, and psychological barriers significantly hinder their ability to secure reputable jobs. Despite their capabilities, transgender individuals often engage in traditional and non-traditional work roles out of necessity rather than choice, revealing a stark disparity in social support and work engagement based on the type of roles they occupy. The reluctance of those in traditional employment to share their experiences underscores the urgent need for a discrimination-free work environment that promotes skill enhancement, social support, and professionalism for all genders. Future research must focus on policy development to clarify the roles and rights of the transgender community, fostering a societal shift that prioritizes respect and inclusivity from an early age. This initiative should include the establishment of job and educational quotas to ensure equitable opportunities, thereby addressing the health, education, and overall well-being of the transgender population, which is essential for the advancement of moral values and social cohesion within society.

## DECLARATION

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#### Author contribution statement

All the work was done by Asma Shahzadi (First author) under the supervision of Dr. Naheed Atta. Dr. Ayesha Rasheed wrote and restructured the research, specifically rephrasing, re-checking, and proofreading the manuscript (research article).

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#### Data access statement

The research data associated with this paper is readily available on demand through email.

#### Declaration of interest's statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

#### Additional information

No additional information is available for this paper.

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