



Relationship Issues, Emotion Regulation and Everyday Discrimination Among Transgender Individuals

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ABSTRACT

Transgender individuals face a unique constellation of challenges that intersect social, psychological, and structural domains. Central to their experiences are relationship disruptions, difficulties in emotion regulation, and pervasive everyday discrimination, each compounding the risks of adverse mental health outcomes. Despite growing social visibility, many transgender individuals grapple with family rejection, strained romantic relationships, and social isolation, all of which erode their psychological resilience and exacerbate feelings of alienation.

This review paper draws on secondary data from peer-reviewed journals and empirical studies published between 2019 and 2025, synthesizing contemporary research on the psychosocial stressors impacting transgender individuals. Special emphasis is placed on how maladaptive emotion regulation strategies and chronic experiences of microaggressions intensify mental health vulnerabilities. The analysis further highlights the buffering effects of supportive relationships, adaptive coping strategies, and resilience mechanisms in fostering well-being. The paper critically evaluates existing interventions and underscores the need for inclusive, affirming, and culturally sensitive approaches to mental health care. This review serves as a comprehensive resource for mental health professionals, advocates, and policymakers striving to dismantle systemic barriers and promote psychological health and social integration among transgender populations.

INTRODUCTION

Transgender individuals—those whose gender identity differs from the sex assigned at birth—have gained increased visibility in contemporary discourse. Despite this progress, they continue to face significant social, psychological, and structural challenges. Among these, relationship issues, emotion regulation difficulties, and experiences of everyday discrimination are particularly salient, collectively contributing to adverse mental health outcomes (Luz et al., 2022).

Interpersonal relationships play an important role in the well-being of transgender individuals. However, these relationships often become sources of stress due to societal stigma and lack of understanding. Family rejection, strained romantic partnerships, and social isolation are common experiences that hinder the development of a secure interpersonal foundation. Research indicates that transgender individuals frequently encounter disruptions in familial bonds and decreased parental support, which are associated with heightened psychological distress (Celemen et al., 2023). Conversely, affirming and supportive relationships have been identified as protective factors against depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation in transgender populations (Srinivasan & Chandrasekaran, 2023).

Emotion regulation—the ability to manage and respond to emotional experiences—is another critical area affecting transgender individuals. The chronic stress associated with discrimination and identity-related challenges can impair emotion regulation capacities. Studies have shown that transgender individuals often employ maladaptive strategies, such as suppression and

rumination, leading to increased vulnerability to mood disorders (Singh et al., 2023). Enhancing adaptive emotion regulation strategies, like cognitive reappraisal and mindfulness, may foster resilience and improve mental health outcomes in this population (Helminen et al., 2023).

Everyday discrimination encompasses subtle and overt acts of bias and microaggressions that transgender individuals encounter regularly. These experiences contribute to a hostile social environment, exacerbating psychological distress and undermining emotional coping mechanisms. The Minority Stress Theory posits that such chronic stressors lead to adverse mental health outcomes, including depression and anxiety (Chan et al., 2024). Moreover, internalized stigma resulting from persistent discrimination can lead to decreased self-esteem and increased risk of self-harm (Luz et al., 2022).

Understanding the complex interplay between relationship issues, emotion regulation, and everyday discrimination is essential for developing inclusive mental health interventions and policies. Addressing these interconnected challenges can promote equity and resilience among transgender individuals, ultimately enhancing their psychological well-being and social integration.

Objectives

- I. To explore the relationship issues, emotion regulation difficulties, and everyday discrimination experienced by transgender individuals, and how these factors contribute to their mental health challenges.
- II. To synthesize existing research on the psychological and social impacts of these challenges, and to highlight the need for inclusive mental health interventions and supportive policies that promote resilience and well-being among transgender populations.

METHODOLOGY

This review is based on a qualitative synthesis of secondary data gathered from peer-reviewed journals and empirical studies. A structured search was conducted using academic databases including PubMed, APA PsycINFO, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar. The review focused on studies published between 2019 and 2025 that addressed key areas such as relationship dynamics, emotion regulation strategies, and experiences of discrimination within transgender communities. Only studies with rigorous methodology and relevance to clinical and psychosocial outcomes were included. Articles emphasizing mental health interventions, social support mechanisms, and minority stress theory were prioritized. Research not directly related to transgender mental health or lacking empirical evidence was excluded to maintain focus on clinically and socially relevant findings.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Relationship challenges in Transgender Individuals

Relationships—whether romantic, familial, or social—are central to human well-being, and this is especially true for transgender individuals. However, transgender people often face unique challenges that shape their relational experiences in complex ways. Research over recent years has begun to unravel these complexities, highlighting both the difficulties faced during gender transition and the adaptive strategies that foster relationship satisfaction and emotional resilience.

One of the key insights emerging from the literature is the intricate interplay between gender-affirming transition and relationship satisfaction. Marshall et al. (2020), through their systematic review, revealed that while transitions can create personal and relational upheaval—such as renegotiating intimacy or facing shifts in sexual orientation labels—couples who engage in open communication and develop supportive social networks tend to navigate these challenges more successfully. The process of transition often demands flexibility and patience from both partners, but when met with understanding, it can lead to deeper connection and growth. Yet, the relative lack of extensive, methodologically rigorous research in this area points to a critical need for more focused clinical and community support initiatives.

This need for supportive relationships extends beyond romantic partnerships into family systems, particularly for transgender youth. Brown et al. (2020) underscored how affirming family relationships act as a powerful buffer against mental health problems, homelessness, and risky behaviors among transgender and gender-diverse youth. Yet, despite this clear protective role, research remains limited in exploring family influence on other important health outcomes like substance use. This gap suggests that strengthening family support mechanisms could have far-reaching benefits for transgender youth's overall health.

Romantic relationships during adolescence and young adulthood present additional layers of complexity. Araya et al. (2021) found that transgender adolescents actively seek romantic connections but face significant obstacles, especially regarding when and how to disclose their gender identity. Their study highlighted the dual role of gender-affirming medical care: while hormone therapy often boosted romantic confidence and self-esteem, pervasive fears of rejection and transphobia continued to shape their dating lives. These findings call attention to the critical role healthcare providers play—not only in delivering gender-affirming care but also in supporting the relational and emotional well-being of transgender youth.

Social relationships across the lifespan further illustrate the importance of identity affirmation and community dynamics. Lewis, Barreto, and Doyle (2022) painted a nuanced picture of transgender individuals' experiences within their social worlds, noting the constant balancing act of coming out and managing identities amid stigma and rejection. Supportive partners were often lifesavers,

providing essential affirmation and stability, while family and former friends sometimes became sources of pain. Interestingly, their research also found that experiences within LGBTQ+ communities could be ambivalent—while some found solidarity, others encountered new forms of stigma. This underscores the ongoing need for inclusivity efforts and policies that dismantle power imbalances within queer spaces.

The foundational role of social support in mental health is echoed in Alanko and Lund's (2019) quantitative study of Finnish transgender youth, where high-quality relationships with parents, friends, and partners consistently predicted better mental well-being. Their findings importantly revealed that the benefits of social support do not differ by gender identity, emphasizing that fostering strong, supportive relationships is universally protective. This points toward the value of family- and community-based interventions aimed at improving relational quality for transgender youth.

Partners of transgender individuals also navigate unique relational terrain. Platt and Bolland (2018) explored the lived experiences of these partners and found that gender transition often necessitated renegotiation of intimacy and personal identity, including sexual orientation labels. Their partners expressed fears of discrimination and social isolation but also reported an expanded understanding and appreciation of gender diversity. This highlights an often-overlooked population that requires dedicated mental health support and increased societal visibility.

Finally, Murchison et al. (2022) contributed a theoretical framework, the Identity Needs in Relationships Framework, capturing how transgender and nonbinary young adults manage romantic relationships under intersecting pressures such as cissexism, racism, and sexism. Their work highlights that these individuals often face constrained choices—sometimes remaining in harmful relationships due to structural barriers—but also develop resilience through learning and adapting. The framework underscores the importance of relational environments that affirm gender identity while also meeting broader emotional needs.

Transgender and gender-diverse (TGD) individuals face a range of challenges in their relationships and mental health, shaped by social, familial, and systemic factors. Recent research has started to unpack these complexities, though many gaps remain.

The Role of Emotion Regulation

Emotion regulation and coping self-efficacy emerge as pivotal factors influencing the mental health and social functioning of transgender and gender diverse (TGD) individuals, who frequently face stigma, discrimination, and complex psychosocial stressors. Recent research offers valuable insights into how these psychological processes can either buffer or exacerbate the negative impacts of minority stress, shaping outcomes such as emotional well-being, self-harm risk, and interpersonal relationships.

Dyar et al. (2024) provided an important contribution by examining how daily experiences of enacted stigma affect emotional well-being among TGD young adults assigned female at birth. Using Ecological Momentary Assessment (EMA), which captures real-time data, their study highlighted the protective role of coping self-efficacy (CSE)—an individual's confidence in managing stress. Higher CSE was found to significantly mitigate the immediate emotional toll of stigma, suggesting that believing in one's ability to handle challenges can reduce distress in daily life. The study also tells the effects of various emotion regulation strategies. While reflection—a thoughtful, constructive consideration of emotions—was linked to decreases in negative affect over time, rumination, characterized by repetitive negative thinking, intensified stigma's harmful effects. Notably, expressive suppression and distraction offered short-term relief but had different long-term consequences; suppression was associated with increased negative emotions later, underscoring its maladaptive nature. These nuanced findings emphasize the importance of fostering adaptive emotion regulation strategies and enhancing coping self-efficacy in interventions designed for TGD youth, aiming to build resilience against the emotional harms of stigma.

Complementing this, Kapatais et al. (2022) explored emotion regulation difficulties as a key mechanism underlying the elevated rates of self-harm observed in LGBTQ+ populations. Their cross-sectional study of nearly 500 participants found that LGBTQ+ individuals experience significantly greater challenges in managing emotions compared to their cisgender and heterosexual peers, resulting in a nearly sevenfold increased likelihood of engaging in self-injurious behaviors. Importantly, emotion regulation difficulties facilitated the relationship between minority status and self-harm frequency, independent of other sociodemographic factors. This mediating role points to emotion dysregulation as a critical psychological burden that links minority stress to harmful outcomes. The study suggests that emotion regulation-focused therapies could serve as both preventative and therapeutic approaches, offering targeted pathways to reduce self-harm risk and improve psychological resilience within sexual and gender minority groups.

Focusing on a culturally specific context, Noor and Rehman (2023) examined psychosocial predictors of interpersonal problems among transgender individuals in Pakistan, with particular attention to emotion regulation and self-concept. Their findings revealed complex relationships: while certain domains of emotion regulation, such as strategy use and impulse control, predicted greater interpersonal difficulties, heightened emotional awareness and clarity paradoxically correlated with less supportive interpersonal behaviors. Additionally, aspects of self-concept like autonomy were linked with more interpersonal challenges, while education acted as a protective factor. These results reflect the intricate ways emotional processing and identity clarity interact with social functioning in a context marked by cultural stigma and marginalization. Therapeutic efforts in such settings may need to balance enhancing emotional insight with practical strategies for improving relational support and social involvement.

Integrating these findings, it becomes clear that adaptive emotion regulation and a strong sense of coping efficacy are crucial protective factors for transgender and LGBTQ+ individuals facing stigma and discrimination.

The Impact of Discrimination and Stigma on Mental Health

Wolfe et al. (2021) provide empirical evidence that transgender-related discrimination significantly increases the likelihood of substance use disorders and histories of substance abuse treatment. This quantitative association highlights how minority stress, the chronic stress faced by stigmatized groups due to prejudice and discrimination, translates into concrete health risks. Their findings are echoed by Drabish and Theeke (2021), who conducted a systematic review establishing stigma as a multi-dimensional construct encompassing external discrimination, internalized negative beliefs, and structural barriers. Their review importantly stresses that internalized stigma—which entails adopting society's negative attitudes toward oneself—exerts a powerful influence on mental health by lowering self-esteem and increasing vulnerability to depression, anxiety, and substance abuse. This internalization also creates barriers to seeking care, worsening health outcomes.

Göksel (2024) further elaborates on the forms of violence and neglect experienced by transgender people in Turkey, showing how discrimination is embedded in social, familial, educational, and institutional settings. This violence is not only physical but also psychological, including rejection by families and bullying in schools. These adverse social environments limit opportunities for social integration and increase the risk of mental health problems. This study aligns with the minority stress theory by illustrating how persistent hostile environments elevate stress levels and lead to adverse outcomes.

Similarly, Price-Feeney et al. (2020) focus on structural discrimination, particularly in the form of bathroom restrictions and policies targeting TGNB youth. They demonstrate that such exclusions are not trivial inconveniences but are strongly linked to depression and suicidality, providing concrete evidence that discriminatory laws and policies have life-threatening consequences. Their findings highlight the critical role that structural factors play in shaping mental health beyond interpersonal discrimination.

Truszczyński et al. (2020) present a nuanced qualitative perspective on discrimination by categorizing the types of discrimination TGNB individuals encounter, including microaggressions such as misgendering and deadnaming, overt rejection, and systemic denial of rights. They also explore the coping mechanisms individuals use, ranging from adaptive strategies like seeking social support to maladaptive responses such as substance use. This highlights the complex interplay between discrimination, stress, and coping, reinforcing the need for trauma-informed mental health services tailored to these experiences.

At the macro level, Bränström and Pachankis (2021) explore how structural stigma—embedded in national laws, policies, and cultural attitudes—relates to life satisfaction among transgender individuals. Their cross-national analysis reveals a paradox: concealing one's transgender identity can sometimes protect against discrimination but at the cost of reduced well-being. This finding underscores the deep psychological toll of living in stigmatizing societies where authenticity comes with risk.

While the challenges are extensive, Tankersley et al. (2021) review the literature on risk and protective factors influencing TGNB youth mental health. Their findings suggest that affirming family support, the use of chosen names and pronouns, and inclusive school environments act as buffers against the negative effects of stigma. These protective factors foster resilience, enabling youth to navigate hostile environments with greater psychological strength.

Bretherton et al. (2020) expand this understanding in the Australian context, documenting how social exclusion and discrimination limit access to employment and healthcare, further jeopardizing mental health. Their emphasis on the need for healthcare provider training in gender-affirming care aligns with Allison et al.'s (2021) qualitative study on emergency department experiences. Allison et al. show that lack of provider knowledge and systemic barriers create a hostile healthcare environment for trans/NB patients, deterring them from seeking necessary care and exacerbating health disparities.

Kumar et al. (2022) and Chakrapani et al. (2021) contribute valuable data from India, highlighting culturally specific obstacles faced by transgender and transmasculine individuals. Both studies identify challenges such as difficulties in obtaining identity documents, educational discrimination, employment discrimination, and healthcare barriers as critical stressors contributing to psychological distress. Despite these systemic challenges, community networks, selective disclosure strategies, and acts of resistance serve as important resilience mechanisms that help individuals sustain their mental health. These findings emphasize the necessity of context-specific interventions that consider local sociocultural and legal realities.

Clinical Perspectives and Intervention Implications

From a clinical psychology standpoint, understanding the relational challenges faced by transgender individuals requires an integration of minority stress and attachment frameworks. Chronic exposure to stigma and rejection can disrupt secure attachment patterns, leading to difficulties in forming and maintaining intimate relationships (Meyer, 2003; Budge et al., 2013). Affirmative therapeutic interventions are therefore essential, as they not only validate clients' gender identities but also equip them with skills to manage relationship renegotiations during gender transitions. Family therapy approaches that focus on increasing parental acceptance have demonstrated reductions in youth mental health risks and improved family cohesion (Ryan et al., 2010). Couple therapy interventions tailored to transgender partnerships emphasize communication around changing sexual identities, intimacy needs, and coping with external stigma (Vincze et al., 2020). Additionally, building clients' emotion regulation capacities and coping self-efficacy through cognitive-behavioral strategies can bolster resilience against minority stress-related relational strain. Mental

health professionals must also be attuned to intersectional factors, tailoring interventions to accommodate diverse cultural and social experiences that influence relational dynamics.

Synthesis and Gaps

Taken together, this body of research highlights the complex web of factors shaping the lives of transgender and gender-diverse individuals. Romantic relationships are often sites of both affirmation and challenge, as identity, transition, and structural barriers intersect. Family and social networks can provide crucial support—or exacerbate distress. Meanwhile, discrimination and stigma continue to fuel poor mental health and risky behaviors, though resilience strategies and supportive relationships can buffer against these impacts.

However, several gaps remain. Much of the existing research focuses on Western contexts, with limited representation of transgender individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. There is also a lack of longitudinal research tracking changes in relationships and well-being over time. Future research should adopt intersectional approaches that consider the unique experiences of older transgender adults, people of color, and those in non-Western settings. Importantly, there's a pressing need to translate these findings into practice, ensuring that interventions and policies are not only informed by evidence but also responsive to the lived realities of transgender and nonbinary people.

CONCLUSION

This review highlights how relationship problems, difficulties with managing emotions, and experiences of everyday discrimination all work together to affect the mental health of transgender people. Many transgender individuals face stress and rejection from family members, difficulties in romantic relationships, and feelings of isolation. These experiences can cause deep emotional pain and create barriers to forming healthy and supportive connections with others. At the same time, struggles with managing emotions—like feeling overwhelmed, sad, or angry—can make it even harder for them to cope with the challenges they face. Constant discrimination, both in big and small ways, further adds to this stress and can make people feel ashamed, lose confidence, and even harm themselves.

All of these factors can combine to create a cycle where transgender people experience repeated emotional pain and struggle to find ways to cope or get support. However, research also shows that positive and affirming relationships—whether with family, romantic partners, friends, or community groups—can act as a buffer, helping to protect mental health. Learning healthy ways to handle emotions and stress can also make a big difference in how well people are able to cope with the difficulties they face. To help break this cycle and promote better mental health, it is important to create mental health services that are sensitive to the unique needs of transgender people. These services should focus on building supportive relationships, teaching helpful coping skills, and fighting against the discrimination and stigma that transgender people often experience. Future research should focus on learning more about how these challenges affect transgender people over time and in different cultures, so that mental health professionals and policymakers can create better support systems that promote healing, acceptance, and overall well-being.

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