

"I'm Strong Enough to Face It": The Lived Experiences of Discriminated Muslim Trans Women

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Corresponding author: *Dhio Amirul Muqsith Fajriyan dhioamirul@gmail.com Article History Submitted : October 21st, 2025 Final Revised : February 23rd, 2026 Accepted : February 24th, 2026   This is an open access article under the CC-BY license Copyright ©2025 by Author, Published by Jurnal Psikologi Teori dan Terapan	Abstract Background: Trans women are one of the groups that are vulnerable to gender discrimination which causes internal pressure within individuals. Objective: This qualitative study was conducted with the aim of exploring the meaning of gender discrimination experiences among trans women at Pondok Pesantren Waria Al-Fatah. Method: Four participants who had experienced gender discrimination were recruited through snowball and purposive sampling techniques, data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews of up to 90 minutes conducted at the Pondok Pesantren Waria Al-Fatah, and the resulting data were analyzed using an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). Results: There are three themes produced, namely (1) the dynamics of interaction with the environment, (2) the path to inner peace, and (3) the efforts to blend in with society. Conclusion: Discrimination is not only a form of social suffering but also a transformative process that shapes resilience and self-formation in trans women. Through these experiences, they adapt, strengthen their faith, and strive to challenge stigma by contributing positively to society. The findings enrich psychological theory on resilience and meaning-making among marginalized groups. Keywords: Discrimination; interpretative phenomenology; muslim transgender; trans woman
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Abstrak

Latar belakang: Transpuan menjadi salah satu kelompok yang rentan terhadap diskriminasi gender yang menyebabkan tekanan dari dalam individu. **Tujuan:** Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi pemaknaan pengalaman diskriminasi gender pada transpuan di Pondok Pesantren Waria Al-Fatah melalui pendekatan kualitatif fenomenologi. **Metode:** Empat transpuan direkrut secara *snowball* dan *purposive* dengan kriteria pernah mengalami diskriminasi gender. Wawancara semi terstruktur digunakan untuk memahami pengalaman dan pemaknaan pengalaman diskriminasi gender para transpuan. Data kemudian dianalisis dengan *interpretative phenomenological analysis* (IPA). **Hasil:** Terdapat tiga tema yang dihasilkan, yakni (1) dinamika interaksi dengan lingkungan, (2) jalan menuju ketenangan batin, dan (3) upaya membaaur dengan masyarakat. **Kesimpulan:** Diskriminasi tidak hanya menjadi bentuk penderitaan sosial, tetapi juga proses transformatif yang membentuk resiliensi dan pembentukan diri pada transpuan. Melalui pengalaman tersebut, mereka beradaptasi, memperkuat spiritualitas, dan berupaya menantang stigma dengan berkontribusi positif kepada masyarakat. Temuan ini memperkaya teori psikologi tentang resiliensi dan pemaknaan hidup pada kelompok marjinal serta memberikan landasan praktis bagi profesional untuk mengembangkan intervensi yang responsif secara kultural bagi perempuan trans yang mengalami diskriminasi.

Kata kunci: Diskriminasi; Fenomenologi interpretatif; Transgender muslim; Transpuan.

Introduction

Indonesia is a country that adheres to heteronormative beliefs and cisgenderism (Afdholi, 2019; Wolter dkk., 2025). Heteronormativity is rooted in the belief that individuals are categorized into two genders, namely male and female, and each gender is associated with natural roles (masculine and feminine) according to the sex that people were born with (Toorn et al., 2020). Heteronormative beliefs assume that heterosexuality is the "normal" standard that humans should have, while sexuality outside of that is considered deviant (Regan & Meyer, 2017). Similarly, cisgenderism is an ideology that delegitimizes non-cisgender identities while privileging those whose gender aligns with the binary gender assigned at birth (Ansara & Hegarty, 2011). These notions then set off stigma against groups with various genders and sexual identities, such as lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgender (LGBT). Trans women—a subset of the transgender group—refer to a gender identity that is shown through gender expression that differs from biological sex (Hafford-Letchfield, 2017). When it comes to appearance, trans women generally wear makeup and normative feminine clothing as a form of self-expression. As they do not conform to heteronormative standards, they are vulnerable to gender discrimination and stigmatization.

Discrimination experienced by transgender women occurs in both personal and public spaces. Research by Hasan et al. (2017), which involved 106 transgender individuals at Sanggar Swara Jakarta, found that 78.3% of them lacked family support, 36% had extreme family relationships, and 64.1% lacked support from friends. Within the family, discriminatory attitudes may stem from the perception that the transgender identity is a "disgrace" to the family. Meanwhile, in the social environment, prejudice against trans women presents challenges at work. A mixed-method study by the International Labor Organization (ILO) (2016) on discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity in the Indonesian workplace found that 67.65% of respondents felt uncomfortable working with transgender colleagues and superiors who identified as gender minorities. Discrimination at work and inadequate educational backgrounds to access formal employment are also reasons why some transgender individuals end up working in the informal sector, such as sex workers or hairdressers.

Meyer (2003), in the minority stress model, explained that individuals belonging to minority groups—such as trans women—face additional stress not experienced by the majority group. This pressure, called minority stress, emerges from their stigmatized position in society. This stress stems from social conditions, including culture, structures, and norms that predominantly reflect the values of the majority. As a result, minorities are more susceptible to rejection, discrimination, or exclusion (distal stressors). Simultaneous exposure to distal stressors will lead to the emergence of proximal stressors, namely pressures from within the individual, e.g., anxiety, fear of rejection, or attempts to conceal one's identity.

Discrimination against transgender individuals can have serious impacts on their psychological well-being. Stigmatization from society leads them to alter or suppress certain aspects of their behavior, appearance, or self-expression to avoid negative attention, poor judgment, or social exclusion, which can lead to loneliness (Pinazo-Hernandis & Carracosa, 2025). Another study has shown that transgender individuals who do not express their gender identity are at risk of experiencing anxiety and depression (To et al., 2020). Furthermore, awareness of discrimination risks fosters a need for connection, which in turn encourages the formation of transgender communities. Research by Bowling et al. (2020) indicates the positive impacts of joining a transgender community or association on transgender individuals, including validation and normalization of experiences among these individuals, freedom of expression, a sense of security and reassurance from various risks and stressors, and the exchange of key information on matters essential to their survival as minorities.

Meyer (2003) stressed that the pressures of being a minority can negatively impact one's mental health and well-being, but these effects can be minimized through protective factors, such as social support and resilience. Interpersonal contact within a community can improve resilience in transgender individuals when it comes to dealing with discrimination (Bariola et al., 2015). In this regard, identification and connection with members of a minority group allow individuals to exist in a social environment that minimizes stigmatization by others (Jones et al., 1984). Connection and attachment to an identity-based community can help minorities reframe stressful situations as less isolating. In the transgender context, research by Johnson and Rogers (2021) found that social support from the community of fellow transgender individuals is manifested through (1) opportunities for transgender individuals to feel validated in their identities and experiences and (2) assistance in mutual community development.

A sample of transgender communities in Indonesia is Pondok Pesantren Waria Al-Fatah in Yogyakarta. In addition to sheltering trans women in Yogyakarta, this community also serves as a safe space for them to worship and develop their potential (Ningrum, 2021). However, a raid in 2016 marked a dark moment for the transgender community in Yogyakarta (Yazid, 2022). Positive activities, such as communal worship and

entrepreneurship training, initiated by Ibu Mariani, were forcefully halted by a local community organization. The raid was initiated by the Islamic Jihad Front (FJI) based on the notion that the Al-Fatah Transgender Islamic Boarding School was disseminating Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) for trans women, which is deemed contrary to Islamic teachings (Munifah, 2018). Using the fact that the community did not meet the appropriate licensing requirements and its presence was considered disturbing to local residents, policymakers ultimately decided to temporarily close it. The seizure of a worship space for trans women demonstrates that they still do not have equal access to worship.

Discrimination against transgender women at the Al-Fatah Transgender Islamic Boarding School demonstrates that the value of justice, as stipulated by the fifth principle of Pancasila, namely "*Social justice for all Indonesian people*," has not been fully realized. The discrimination experienced by trans women also contradicts Article 28I Paragraph 2 of the 1945 Constitution, which guarantees the right of every person to be free from discriminatory treatment. Although numerous studies have discussed stigma and discrimination against trans women from a social and legal perspective (Azzahraa et al., 2025; Amrianto et al., 2023), few studies have explored the subjective experiences of trans women in interpreting the discrimination they experience. Previous studies tend to position trans women as social objects experiencing discrimination, rather than as subjects with awareness and meaning to their experiences. Therefore, this study aims to fill the gap in the literature by employing a phenomenological approach to understand the meaning of discrimination experiences from the perspective of trans women themselves, thereby providing a deeper understanding of how they deal with the social pressures they experience. Thus, the research question to be answered in this study was "*How do transgender women interpret discrimination they have experienced?*"

Method

This qualitative research employed a phenomenological approach, an approach that focuses on human lived experiences and utilizes them as a tool to better understand the socio-cultural, political, and historical contexts in which those experiences occur (Syahrizal & Jailani, 2023). Phenomenological research attempts to understand human life events within the framework of thought and behavior as understood or experienced by the individual (Nasir et al., 2023). This approach is suitable for this study because it is relevant to the research objective, which is to uncover the subjective experiences of transgender women regarding discrimination and the meanings they attach to those experiences.

Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews lasting 60-90 minutes (Alase, 2017). Prior to data collection, participants completed an informed consent form that explained the purpose of the study and data security. Three main questions were addressed in the interviews: (1) how they experienced discrimination as transgender women, (2) how they interpreted these experiences, and (3) how these experiences affected their current lives. The interviews were recorded using a voice recorder and then transcribed. Credibility and trustworthiness were strengthened following Rodham et al. (2015) through collaborative analysis, including joint listening to interview recordings, sharing field notes, maintaining reflexivity of potential biases, and conducting critical team discussions to refine and integrate interpretations.

Participant

This study involved four members of the Al-Fatah Transgender Islamic Boarding School, selected by snowballing and purposive sampling based on the criterion of having experienced gender discrimination. Four participants are sufficient for an IPA study because this approach emphasizes the use of small, purposively selected, and relatively homogeneous samples to enable in-depth exploration and rich descriptions of participants' lived experiences (Alase, 2017). All four participants knew each other as members of the boarding school and the transgender community. To maintain confidentiality, pseudonyms were used throughout the study, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Participant Information

No.	Name (pseudonym)	Age	Occupation	Origin
1	Anna	58 years old	Freelancer	Yogyakarta
2	Bella	56 years old	Busker	Medan
3	Cinta	65 years old	Entrepreneur	Jakarta
4	Desi	60 years old	Busker and advocator	Tangerang

The first participant was Anna from Yogyakarta, who was 58 years old at the time of the study. She works as a freelancer and has made a significant contribution to Islamic boarding school activities. The second participant was Bella from Medan, who, at that time, was 56 years old. She works as a busker. When she was a teenager, she left home and moved to Jogja to escape violence from her brother. The third participant was Cinta from Jakarta, and at the time was 65 years old. Currently, she works as an entrepreneur. The fourth participant was Desi from Tangerang, who was 60 years old. Her current job is a busker, and she is active in several social organizations that advocate for community issues.

Data Analysis

This study employed a phenomenological approach and analyzed data interpretively. Interpretive phenomenology aims to explore how individuals interpret their experiences (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Transcribed interviews were then subjected to exploratory commentary to highlight key points related to the participants' experiences. Emergent themes were then formed from each participant's experiences. The emergent themes of each participant were collected and grouped into superordinate themes per participant. The themes of all participants were then compared with each other and regrouped into superordinate themes across participants. Eventually, master themes were formed based on the similarities between the superordinate themes across participants. An experience checklist was created to check for similarities in participants' experiences, facilitating theme formation (La Kahija, 2018).

Result

There are three themes unveiled in this research: (a) the dynamics of interaction with the environment; (b) the path to inner peace; and (c) efforts to integrate with society as the essence of the experience of gender discrimination against trans women.

1. The Dynamics of Interaction with The Environment

This theme describes the interaction patterns between transgender women and their social environment, beginning with the family as the earliest social context. Family rejection of trans women's gender identity was a common experience for nearly all participants. The identity as a trans woman caused a family to treat the participants differently. Cinta, one of the participants, felt unwelcome and treated like an outcast at home. She emphasized that the rejection came more strongly from her father and brothers, while her mother and older sister continued to show concern for her. Bella experienced similar experiences, receiving beatings from her older brother as a child, which contrasted sharply with her mother and older sister, who were more accepting of her presence.

Participants described leaving home at a young age as a common response to family rejection and discrimination, though shaped by different personal circumstances. Cinta moved to Jakarta with her friends and engaged in sex work (*nyebong*) while avoiding returning home due to fear of family conflict; Desi left to avoid bringing shame to her family and chose to hide her identity to prevent bullying towards her family, seeing separation as a way to express herself more freely while protecting family's honor; and Bella who left to escape physical violence from her brother, believing that living independently and surviving through informal work would offer greater safety and autonomy.

"The hallmark of transgender women is leaving their homes. Er, many are embarrassed, afraid of neighbors bullying them, or meeting relatives, or embarrassing their families, so they'd rather leave. From there, the important thing is to prevent our families from being affected by us... Later, my family was bullied by the neighbors' kids. 'Your younger brother is a sissy, your older brother is a sissy.' It was a shame. In the end, I decided not to stay home. I left. So no one knew at home. It was better that way." (Desi)

Beside the family context, public spaces also emerged as sites where transgender identity was negatively perceived, as participants reported receiving stares, expressions of disgust, and spontaneous jeers from people unfamiliar with transgender individuals. Desi described such reactions occurring even in everyday situations like lining up at ticket counters, while Anna recalled being teased and stared at from a young age because she was seen as different. Despite this, Anna interpreted these experiences as reflecting how minority status increases exposure to stereotypes that can lead to discrimination. Similarly, Cinta noted that transgender people are often labeled as "delinquent," which she attributed to societal misunderstanding and overgeneralization of others' actions, emphasizing that trans women are also capable of positive contributions. Desi further

understood self-expression as a trans woman as involving acceptance of discrimination risks, highlighting self-acceptance as essential for coping with them.

Societal stigmatization creates various obstacles for trans women. Desi, who actively works as an advocate, was once belittled when trying to advocate for a friend who was detained. She was deemed untrustworthy because she is a trans woman, even though credibility should be judged based on one's abilities and skills. Anna experienced difficulty renting a place to live due to her gender identity. She believed that many communities still categorize housing requirements based on binary gender, making it difficult for transgender people to meet these requirements. Cinta also faced difficulties when trying to rent a place to open a food stall. She was discredited because of her identity as a trans woman and had to struggle to explain that she had the right to rent the space just like anyone else.

"I wanted to rent a food stall there in the X area...it was a bit difficult. It was made difficult, a mix of pros and cons. He said, 'That's a transgender woman,' which I mentioned earlier, that a trans woman did bad things. So, he assumed all trans women are like that. And finally, I said to him, 'Sir, as an Indonesian citizen, I have the right to live anywhere. I have an ID card.' And I gave it to him, 'Do I have a criminal record? What did I do wrong?' Finally, I succeeded. The proof is that I can survive opening a food stall anywhere. And now the people here are really nice." (Cinta)

Discrimination from family is interpreted by trans women as a difficult experience that motivates them to take control of their lives by becoming more self-reliant and, in some cases, distancing themselves in pursuit of security and independence for both themselves and their families. At the same time, these experiences are understood as consequences of their identity as members of a stigmatized minority group, fostering awareness that social stigma can develop into discrimination and create barriers to equal rights, which they believe must be navigated with resilience and wisdom.

2. The Path to Inner Peace

This master theme illustrates the range of trans women's responses to their experiences of discrimination, encompassing shifts in emotional and psychological reactions as well as their motivation to draw on spirituality as a central source of strength. Bella shared that she felt inferior because of her dominant femininity, which discouraged her from pursuing a career in the formal sector, as she believed such work would require her to express her gender according to her birth sex and behave more masculinely, something that did not align with her personality. Ultimately, she chose to work as a busker, where she felt more psychologically comfortable. However, being a busker does not necessarily protect trans women from the negative emotions of discrimination since another participant, Desi, shared that she received insults from strangers while busking that made her feel angry and sad, although she gradually grew accustomed to and ignored them.

Despite the initial pain, experiencing repeated discrimination has made the participants stronger. Anna said that she tended to be indifferent and considered strange looks from others as entertainment. However, Anna insisted that she could not tolerate discrimination in the form of physical violence. For her, physical violence must be dealt with differently and more firmly. Meanwhile, Cinta's attitude toward discrimination is evident in her belief that everyone has their own path in life. Trans women emphasize the importance of not dwelling on negative comments from others, as this can negatively impact their personal lives. Cinta believed this mindset helps her move on and achieve success.

"...that's why I responded, 'Your life isn't necessarily better than mine.' Let's just face it, let's live our own lives... That's why I said that if people bully or insult me, I don't regard it at all. I don't care what you say about me anymore. This is my life. I'm strong enough to face it, no matter how you treat me. Life has to be lived, right? If we don't live it, we think about what people say, and our lives fall apart. After we achieve success, we look at their circumstances. What have you achieved, [which one is] better, you or me? That's how it is." (Cinta)

Alongside cognitive reframing, belief in God's authority and justice played a central role in shaping participants' interpretations of discrimination, as spiritual connection helped them ground their life perspectives in religious values. Anna emphasized that others' subjective judgments and negative treatment did not obstruct the blessings she believed God had granted her, reflecting her view of divine mercy as ultimately just for all people. Similarly, Bella expressed belief in karma, trusting that good and bad deeds would be repaid accordingly, which led her to ignore hurtful comments and leave recompense to God. For

Cinta, spirituality enabled forgiveness toward those who discriminated against her, including family members, as she believed each person bears their own moral consequences before God, who is All-Forgiving; she therefore felt compelled to embody the same forgiveness and tended to tolerate discrimination, understanding it as stemming from ignorance or social influence.

"We forgive others, and we also forgive those who frequently bully us. Maybe they don't know, don't understand what trans women are like, or they could be influenced by others. That's why I say we should get to know each other first. If we don't know each other and don't understand, don't immediately judge negatively. We should guard our words to protect our hearts. In Islam, it's strictly forbidden to put others down. If someone understands the religion, it's impossible for them to do that. So, forgiving each other is important... After all, God is All-Forgiving, so why shouldn't we be?"
(Cinta)

Experiences of discrimination are ultimately interpreted by trans women as both a source of suffering and a formative process that builds resilience, as rejection, ridicule, and belittlement may leave psychological wounds that gradually foster coping strategies such as accepting circumstances, regulating negative emotions, and continuing with life. In this process, discrimination is also understood as a life test to be faced with faith and sincerity toward God, where belief in divine justice encourages patience, prayer, and forgiveness rather than retaliation, allowing them to maintain inner peace while reconciling with past wounds and affirming their existence in a society that has not yet fully accepted them.

3. The Efforts to Bend in with Society

Participants described strategic self-regulation of identity expression as a key way to navigate discrimination across different social contexts. Awareness of the potential discrimination against trans women encouraged participants to adjust their behavior and ways of expressing themselves in society. In daily life, all participants chose to express themselves modestly to avoid standing out or attracting attention. This self-expression was shown in how they dress and groom themselves. Anna emphasized that being yourself is important, but it still requires adjustments to the situation and context of the activity. For her, dressing simply, such as wearing a long dress and a shawl, was sufficient and made her feel comfortable. Meanwhile, Desi preferred dressing up and appearing feminine only when she was with other transgender women. This felt safer because she believed others would not discriminate when she was together with the group in a crowded environment.

"Being yourself is important. It just means being able to adapt to the situation. You know, right? Because 99% of people judge you based on your physical appearance. So, if I go in and watch a movie, and my makeup is somewhat outrageous, it's going to attract attention." (Anna)

Most participants also designated specific times and places to express themselves as transgender women. Not everyone could see them dressed up and wearing feminine clothing. Bella shared that when she returned home, she chose to wear a plain t-shirt and trousers so that her neighbors would not notice her presence. Cinta did the same; she never dressed as a woman when she was with her family. She only showed this appearance to a few of her nieces who were with her in Yogyakarta. Desi, like Cinta, also never identified as a trans woman in front of her family. To this day, Desi's family is unaware of her identity. Desi did not want to reveal her gender identity because she believed she would not be accepted due to her family's strong religious values. Not only when with family, some participants also chose not to dress up when working or applying for jobs. Anna shared that it was difficult for trans women to find jobs that accepted their gender expression. She herself was once forced to present herself as a man to be accepted. Desi experienced a similar situation, choosing not to dress up when working as a hotel employee. Dress codes in the formal sector have led many trans women to choose to work in the informal sector. Informal sector jobs—such as busking, running a salon, and selling newspapers—are considered safer for trans women because they allow them freedom of expression.

Besides, maintaining good attitudes and behavior is considered crucial to reducing discrimination. Bella believed that if a trans woman behaved kindly, others would be kind to her because interacting and forming relationships with good attitudes could create a positive public perception of her. In fact, she was often greeted on the street by people she had interacted with. Similarly, this principle motivated Desi to educate trans women about social etiquette. Furthermore, not only to trans women, Desi believed that demonstrating empowerment and helpfulness to broader society is another key aspect of reducing discrimination. Desi has done various advocacy efforts to help communities fulfill their rights, such as accessing healthcare and education. Anna has

done the same. She provided training at the boarding school to improve the abilities and skills of trans women so they could achieve independence. In line with Desi's principles, Cinta acknowledged that her family began to accept her because she was able to support them financially. Her contributions to others (her family) had successfully broken the stigma attached to her and encouraged reconciliation with her family.

"So, at the end, we've become more welcomed. We've learned how to strategize to be accepted, how to do good in the community, how to benefit the community, things like that. I advocate for people around me who don't have BPJS (Social Security) and I help them get scholarships. I ask for scholarships for those who need them... Well, in the end, this sissy has some use, haha... Now I'm also educating my fellow trans women to express or become agents of change in how we behave in public, and to maintain etiquette and good manners." (Desi)

In this subtheme, discrimination is interpreted as a form of social rejection that pressures trans women to conform to dominant gender norms in order to feel accepted and safe, operating through both overt actions and subtle constraints that restrict identity expression and shape life choices, including dress, disclosure, and employment paths. At the same time, participants reinterpreted these experiences as motivation to demonstrate their worth and challenge stigma, prompting them to regulate their behavior, uphold ethical conduct, and contribute positively to their communities as adaptive strategies to be recognized as capable and deserving of social acceptance.

Discussion

This study offers several theoretical contributions by extending existing perspectives on minority stress and resilience through culturally grounded evidence from transgender women in Indonesia, demonstrating that discrimination may function not only as a stressor but also as a context for meaning-making, spiritual strengthening, and agentic adaptation. At the same time, several methodological limitations should be acknowledged, including the small and relatively homogeneous sample, the context-specific setting, and the interpretative nature of the analysis, which may limit transferability beyond similar populations.

This study found that transgender women experience discrimination in the form of violent rejection from their family members due to their gender identity. This rejection, particularly from fathers and brothers, stems from a desire to maintain the family's honor and social image, as the family members of transgender individuals are often viewed as disgrace (Syahrir et al., 2024; Rogers, 2017). This aligns with research by Bosse (2023), which found that compared to female family members, male family members tend to express stronger rejection of children identifying as transgender. However, this discrimination is interpreted as a turning point for self-reliance. In this situation, leaving home becomes a strategy chosen by trans women to reduce discomfort, both for themselves and other family members, and to achieve independence. Butt et al. (2025) stated that this phenomenon is particularly common among transgender women who are rejected by their families. DeChants et al. (2022) also revealed that transgender women, especially adolescents, often leave home with a strong motivation to achieve independence so they will not rely on their families. Finding ways to prioritize their own needs and to take control of their decision-making process help transgender navigate their way to well-being (Asakura, 2017).

In public spaces, there are various forms of discrimination experienced by transgender women, ranging from demeaning stares, difficulty renting housing, to pressure to adopt a "masculine" appearance in the workplace. Those manifest from the stigma that forms when someone labels certain individuals or groups as "different" and negative stereotypes that create a separation between "us" and "them", which lowers the status or esteem of the labeled group (Link & Phelan, 2001). The stigma attached to transgender women occurs structurally and systematically through social conditions, norms, culture, and institutional policies that limit opportunities, resources, and well-being for the group (Hatzenbuehler & Link, 2014). Compared to other groups within the LGBTQIA+ umbrella, previous studies found that transgender people are more vulnerable to discrimination and stigmatization (Evje et al., 2024; Septarini et al., 2023). Trans women experience this from a young age, negatively affecting their emotional well-being (Strauss et al., 2019; Heino et al., 2021).

This study found that the discrimination experienced by trans women drives them to conform constantly. They must adjust their dress and expression to avoid negative treatment. Falomir-Pichastor et al. (2019) stated that societal pressure causes trans women to be more selective in their gender expression. To et al. (2020) explained that within the transgender community, trans women have lower levels of visual conformity (the extent to which a person's appearance reflects their perceived gender identity) than trans men, leading them to opt not to fully present themselves as feminine in public spaces. Among trans women, identity concealment often arises from fear of potentially dangerous or life-threatening violence (Rood, 2017). This aligns with the

"minority stress model," which explains that minority groups exhibit different adaptation patterns from majority groups due to specific pressures unique to minority groups, known as proximal stress (Meyer, 2003).

Furthermore, trans women also adapt their career choices. Trans women tend to choose jobs perceived as "safer" from discrimination, such as busking and self-employment. Baboolall et al. (2021) revealed that many trans women feel a lack of support in the workplace due to the strong cisgender culture. Transgender workers in the formal sector are more likely to experience discrimination than those in the informal sector (Holman, 2018). Ramalingam (2024) found that transgender people in Malaysia also experience workplace discrimination, forcing them to suppress their gender expression and act like "others" to avoid reprimand. However, authenticity (being yourself) at work can impact one's work performance and influence attitudes toward the job itself (Martinez et al., 2017).

Although discrimination is considered a social affliction, the transgender women in this study also viewed the discrimination experience as a process of resilience building. Repeated exposure to discrimination encourages trans women to adapt by practicing acceptance and forgiveness based on rationality and spiritual values. Oorthuys et al. (2022) similarly reported that transgender individuals rationalize as an effort to understand their environment and themselves and to contextualize negative comments or opinions, thereby alleviating emotional distress. Furthermore, Kirac (2016) explained that some individuals in the LGBTQ+ community experience internal conflict due to their non-binary gender identity and religious beliefs. However, if this conflict is minimal, religion can be a protective factor. A positive perspective derived from religious values provides confidence in overcoming difficulties, a sense of security, and a connection with God (Dolcos et al., 2021). Butt (2018) explained that this mechanism helps transgender individuals maintain composure because God is the only one who can alleviate the situation. For transgender people, practicing religious values helps them cope with psychological stress and fosters hope in life (Schmitz and Woodell, 2018).

This study also found that transgender women interpret discrimination as a drive to prove themselves. They continue their lives by contributing to society to demonstrate their own empowerment while empowering others, both within the transgender community and other groups. These findings support DeChants (2022), who found that LGBTQIA+ people possess a strong sense of altruism and can connect with others. This group not only seeks support but also wants to support others. In the context of transgender women's empowerment, these efforts can help mitigate the negative effects of discrimination. This is because the transgender community plays a crucial role in building resilience and well-being for its members, providing a sense of belonging, validation, and hope in striving for a quality life (Syahrir et al., 2024). The connection with other LGBTQIA+ peers allow transgender to share the burden of marginalization and lighten the loneliness in navigating the world (Asakura, 2017). In addition to empowerment, the trans women in this study also frequently participated in advocacy activities. Asakura (2017) explained that activism, such as advocacy, can be a form of collective recovery and resilience of the LGBTQIA+ group. It helps them to make sense of their pain and seek justice for both themselves and others with a similar experience.

Conclusion

The discrimination experienced by trans women not only becomes a social hardship, but also a development process of self and resilience. The experience of discrimination encourages them to take control of their lives and survive through various means. They strive to adapt to achieve comfort, such as adjusting their means of self-expression and picking jobs. Discrimination also serves as a moment to strengthen their relationship with God and motivate them to break down stigma by contributing positively to society. Theoretically, this research can fill a research gap regarding the meaning of discrimination experienced by transgender women in Indonesia. Practically, it can serve as a basis for developing psychosocial interventions focused on strengthening resilience, self-acceptance, and spiritual support for transgender women. Policymakers can also consider the study findings to create more inclusive work and social environments and encourage public education about gender diversity to reduce stigma and discrimination.

Future research is recommended to further explore the role of age and socioeconomic background that may influence how trans women interpret and respond to discrimination. Research with a longitudinal design is also recommended to provide a deeper understanding of the development of resilience, coping strategies, and spiritual meaning over time.

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