



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ACADEMIC RESEARCH IN BUSINESS & SOCIAL SCIENCES



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ISSN: 2222-6990

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Vikneshvaran A/L Masalamani, Asma Perveen

To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v11-i6/10181>

DOI:10.6007/IJARBSS/v11-i6/10181

Received: 02 April 2021, **Revised:** 23 April 2021, **Accepted:** 17 May 2021

Published Online: 11 June 2021

In-Text Citation: (Masalamani & Perveen, 2021)

To Cite this Article: Masalamani, V. A., & Perveen, A. (2021). The Study of Gender Difference of Undergraduate Psychology Students on Perception towards Transgender. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 11(6), 570–579.

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Vol. 11, No. 6, 2021, Pg. 570 - 579

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The Study of Gender Difference of Undergraduate Psychology Students on Perception towards Transgender

Vikneshvaran A/L Masalamani

Department of Psychology and Counseling, Faculty of Human Development
Sultan Idris Education University Malaysia

Asma Perveen

Department of Psychology and Counseling, Faculty of Human Development
Sultan Idris Education University Malaysia

Abstract

The primary objective of this study is to explore the impact of gender factor on the perception of undergraduate Psychology students of Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSI), Tanjung Malim towards transgender. The overall perception of this sample and the correlation between factors of instruments, which are Interpersonal Comfort, Sex/Gender Beliefs, and Human Value are investigated in this research, as well. In this quantitative research, a cross-sectional, online survey questionnaire was participated by 209 students ($S=209$) which consisted of 53 males (25.36%) and 156 females (74.64%) from the Faculty of Human Development of UPSI participants through a Google Form link. The Transgender Attitude and Beliefs Scale (TABS) instrument is used to explore the perception of the participants. As result, the independent sample t -test analysis showed that there was no significant difference in the scores for male students ($M=142.48$, $SD=32.26$) and female students ($M=136.37$, $SD=36.46$) conditions; $t(207)=1.11$, $p=0.270$. Moreover, the simple mean comparison analysis revealed the mean scores of males and females are 142.48 and 136.37, respectively. Also, the Pearson correlation analysis among the three factors of perceptions ranged from 0.44 to 0.61. Thus, the gender of students has no significant effect on perception towards transgender. Generally, this sample showed less positive perception and less supportive attitudes towards transgender. The correlational strengths among the factors are from moderate to good. The implication of this study is the revelation of students' perception towards transgender, especially Psychology students. Future studies should focus more on the perception of students from Psychology courses in Malaysia.

Keywords: Perception, Undergraduate Psychology Students, Gender, Gender Difference and Transgender.

Introduction

Transgender people have been the topics of interest in many types of research and studies over the years around the world. According to the American Psychological Association (APA) (2015), transgender is defined as

adjective that is a umbrella term used to describe the full range of people whose gender identity and/or gender role do not conform to what is typically associated with their sex assigned at birth. While the term “transgender” is commonly accepted, not all TGNC people self-identify as transgender (p. 863).

Transgender people are facing distortions of mental stability and mental health due to stress and depression (Grant, Mottet, Tanis, Harrison, Herman, & Keisling, 2011; Reisner, Vettes, Leclerc, Zaslow, Wolfrum, Shumer, & Mimiaga, 2015). In fact, transgender faces more depression compared to normal or cisgender people because of their identity as a minority group and social discrimination. Concerning this phenomenon, social discrimination plays an important role as one of the factors of stress for minority groups, especially transgender (White Hughto, Reisner, & Pachankis, 2015; Chodzen, Hidalgo, Chen, & Garofalo, 2018). Gender is a vital indicator of social discrimination because the perception varies from male to female. Based on studies over the years, the only conclusion to be deduced is ‘male students show more negative perception towards transgender than female students’ (Kelley, Chou, Dibble, & Robertson, 2008; Winter et al., 2008; Costa & Davies, 2012; Worthen, 2012; Strong & Folse, 2014; Worthen, 2016). Nevertheless, the term transphobia is closely related to the negative perception of students towards transgender (Winter et al., 2008). According to Hill and Willoughby (2005), transphobia is defined as “feeling of revulsion to masculine women, feminine men, cross-dressers, transgenderists, and/or transsexuals’, manifesting itself in ‘the fear that personal acquaintances may be trans or disgust upon encountering a trans person” (pp. 533–534). Nonetheless, the nature of females to be positive towards transgender was emphasized and proven (Worthen, 2012).

Negative perception on transgender is virally spreading in the education sector, as well. Whereas, from the view of Ehranhalt (2018), he unveiled the hardships faced by transgender students through verbal abuse and discrimination. For instance, “mocked for using the locker room that aligns with their identity, each time they’re coldly informed they’re in the wrong bathroom, each time they exit a stall and are greeted by another exaggerated double take” (para. 4). Students who are “transprejudice, then, may provide the psychological and social foundations for the dehumanization, social distancing and social discrimination, as well as the legal delegitimization of transpeople” (King et al., 2009, p. 20). Adding to this, a transgendered woman named Jess, shared that a group of boys tried to force her to perform oral sex. They threatened to beat her up as she refused to do as they forced. Transgender students were being the target of bullies and discrimination by other students. Transgender students were facing unprecedented, untold abuse physically and verbally (Sa’dan, Awang & Nur Farhana, 2018). Evidently, discrimination of students towards transgender is a significant occurrence in transgender issues. The researcher intends to investigate the actual perception of students, especially undergraduate Psychology students because they would potentially and probably pursue careers such as social workers, psychologists, and counselors that involve transgender individuals. Besides, not many studies were documented on the perception of students towards transgender in Malaysia, especially to discover the perception of students from Psychology courses towards transgender.

This research's main objective is to know the difference of perception related to the gender of undergraduate Psychology students in Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSI) towards transgender people. The hypotheses to be tested are; (H_0) or null hypothesis: Female and male students do not show positive perceptions towards transgender; (H_1) or alternative hypothesis: Female students have more positive perceptions towards transgender than male students.

The significance of this study is that it could encourage improvements in the syllabus and education contents of medical and sociology courses that address the issues of sexual minorities, particularly transgender to prevent any transprejudism among students in Malaysia. Next, this study reveals the importance of exploring the perception of psychology students in Malaysia towards transgender because they are potential and eligible future psychologists who may have to help transgendered clients. In general, this research would set a direction of urging to carry out numerous efforts in the future to identify the mentality and perception of psychologist and other healthcare takers as the reality in Malaysia is to fulfill the needs of this society's social issues, those may include transgender cases, too.

Methodology

Research Method

The research method used in this study is quantitative method. In particular, online close-ended surveys are to be administered. This survey is done through a cross-sectional method to acquire adequate participants of different backgrounds at once.

Sample of Research

In total, 209 undergraduate Psychology course students from Faculty of Human Development, regardless to their race, religion and education level (first year or semester until the fourth year or eighth semester) participated as the sample for this study. These participants are comprising of both male and female students and should be aged 18 years old and above.

Instrument of Research

This survey consists of informed consent and 4 parts or sections. The section of informed consent contains study procedures, the requirement of participants, condition of participation, benefits of participation, risk of participation, confidentiality, researcher contact details, and the decision of accepting or not accepting to continue the survey. Part 1 to inquire about demographic information. From Part 2 until Part 4 covers the factors adopted from an instrument named Transgender Attitude and Behaviour Scale (TABS). TABS is to explore the beliefs and attitudes towards transgender individuals, specifically the perception of undergraduate Psychology students for this study. Indeed, this scale was invented by Kanamori et al. (2017). It is a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 'Strongly Disagree' to 'Strongly Agree'. This instrument comes with 29 items and three factors. Firstly, Factor 1 to explore the interpersonal comfort consists of 14 items (stated as 'Part 2: Transgender Attitude and Behaviour Scale (TABS) - Section 1' in the survey). Secondly, Factor 2 to evaluate sex or gender beliefs with 10 items (stated as 'Part 3: Transgender Attitude and Behaviour Scale (TABS) - Section 2' in the survey). Finally, Factor 3 to measure human value comprises 5 items (stated as 'Part 4: Transgender Attitude and Behaviour Scale (TABS) - Section 3' in the survey).

Procedure of Research

Convenience sampling technique was used in this study to acquire the targeted participants easily. The undergraduate Psychology students from the Faculty of Human Development are selectively requested to participate in this study to achieve the precise objective of this study. However, the snowball technique, also, was used by sharing the link of an online survey with batch representatives of Psychology course-students to be spread among their batch mates respectively because this technique could potentially “locate hidden populations. This method relies on referrals from initially sampled respondents to other persons believed to have the characteristic of interest” (Johnson, 2014, p. 1). The survey questionnaire is developed and distributed as the questionnaire is approved by the research supervisor. It is recreated in a virtual format by producing an online survey in Google Forms. Once the exact online copy of the survey questionnaire is produced, the research has proceeded with survey distribution. The link of the online survey (<https://forms.gle/VNDj3E9sde6oPxVN8>) is sent to the undergraduate Psychology students personally. Also, the link is shared with batch leaders of Psychology students from every semester to be sent to their batch mates through the snowball technique. In data collection, the responses are automatically recorded in an online excel sheet that would facilitate the data analysis process.

Data Analysis

The descriptive analysis is used by calculating the overall *M* score, and standard deviations based on the gender of undergraduate Psychology students of UPSI. On the other hand, for inferential analysis, the sum of the mean for total scores would be calculated according to gender to interpret the significant difference between attitude and behavior of males and females towards transgender through independent sample *t*-test.

Findings

Demographics

A sample (*S*) of 209 participants comprise 53 males (25.36%) and 156 females (74.64%) responded to the online survey questionnaires. The age range of this sample is from 19 to 29 years old ($M=5.73$, $SD=1.87$). Notably, 100% of participants showed their willingness to participate in this study by responding ‘Yes’ to the agreeableness question (“Do you wish to continue the survey?”) at the end of informed consent. The majority of the participants are Malays with 99 individuals (47.37%). Followed by 88 Indians (42.11%) and then, 12 Chinese (5.74%) respondents. Finally, the remaining 10 persons (4.78%) are from other races such as Siamese, Brunei, Dusun, Arabic, Orang Asli, Sabahan, Indonesian, and Suluk. However, only 3 (1.44%) out of 209 participants are Non-Malaysians; the remaining 206 individuals (98.56%) are of Malaysians (refer Table 4 below for further information on the demographics of participants).

Table 1. Demographics Characteristics of Undergraduate Psychology Students' Sample

Characteristics	S=209	
	<i>n</i>	%
Sex		
Male	53	25.36
Female	156	74.64
Race		
Malay	99	47.37
Chinese	12	5.74
Indian	88	42.11
Others	10	4.78
Semester		
1	9	4.31
2	38	18.18
3	9	4.31
4	22	10.53
5	8	3.83
6	36	17.22
7	7	3.35
8	80	38.28
Nationality		
Malaysian	206	98.56
Non-Malaysian	3	1.44

Descriptive Analysis Result

The descriptive data analysis is initiated by calculating the overall *M* score and standard deviations based on the gender of undergraduate Psychology students of UPSI (refer to Table 2).

Table 2. Overall Mean Scores and Standard Deviations by Gender

Gender	Undergraduate Psychology students' sample		
	S=209	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Male	56	142.48	32.26
Female	153	136.37	36.46

According to Table 2, the overall *M* score of undergraduate Psychology male students is 142.48 and 136.37 for females. By comparing the standard deviations of males (*SD*=32.26) and females (*SD*=36.46), males show more positive attitudes towards transgender by obtaining a higher score in this survey than females. Unexpectedly, this result opposes the norm around the world which reveals negativity and objections projected by males would be more than females.

Inferential Analysis Result

Table 3. Independent T-Test of Difference Between Scores of Male and Female Students

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means							
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2- tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	99% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
								Lower	Upper	
ΣOverall	Equal variances assumed	3.018	.084	1.105	207	.270	6.10959	5.52763	-8.26108	20.48027
	Equal variances not assumed			1.170	109.744	.245	6.10959	5.22273	-7.58112	19.80031

Note: Significance level at 0.01

Secondly, an independent sample *t*-test was conducted to compare scores obtained by males and females. There was no significant difference in the scores for male students ($M=142.48, SD=32.26$) and female students ($M=136.37, SD=36.46$) conditions; $t(207)=1.11, p=0.270$. These results suggest that gender does not have an effect on the score of TABS. Specifically, the perception towards transgender is not significantly influenced by gender.

Discussion and Implications of Research

Discussion

This research is an initiative to examine the effect of the gender of undergraduate Psychology students on their perception towards transgender. The major research objective is to know the difference of perception according to the gender of undergraduate Psychology students in UPSI towards transgender people. The perception of students is measured using an instrument named TABS; positive and affirmative behavior and attitude towards transgender would be represented through higher scoring of this scale by an individual. Relatively, individuals with a positive perception towards transgender would avoid any situations that could harm or discriminate against transgender. Equally important, perception towards transgender is influenced by some determinants such as personal beliefs, principles, and mentality. However, TABS is developed with three distinct, yet, important elements, those are Interpersonal Comfort, Sex/Gender Beliefs, and Human Values. Firstly, items in the Interpersonal Comfort factor are to evaluate the tenderness towards transgender which encompasses values of familiarity, care, and respect. Next, Sex/Gender Beliefs factor is created with items assessing “cognitive evaluation were refocused to target underlying beliefs regarding gender and sex as dichotomous” (p. 1506). And, the aspect of variations in attitudes from one person to another is inspected under Human Values (Kanamori et al., 2017).

The results of data analysis proof that gender is not a significant determinant of perception towards transgender for the sample of undergraduate Psychology students. Shortly, male and female students are acceptably equivalent in perceiving transgender.

Overall, the participants show lesser positive views towards transgender. Prior to this *t*-test, overall mean scores for males and females were calculated and the researcher found that both genders score lower (less positive perception towards transgender). In conclusion, this study has successfully tested the research objective and the findings of this research could contribute to the education system, medical field, policymakers, and government of this country.

Implications

This study has set an important benchmark to observe the perception of undergraduate Psychology students towards transgender. Thus, through this study, the thoughts and beliefs of Psychology students on gender minority groups, especially transgender are revealed. Besides, this initiative could be a prediction effort of Psychology course students in the future attitudes and behavior towards marginalized populations such as transgender during their work. Finally, based on the result of this study, many efficient syllabus and intervention could be planned and implemented by the higher authority of the education sector such as the Education Ministry of Malaysia to educate students, specifically social science students about transgender and other gender minority group. Adequate exposure and knowledge about these portions of society would cultivate the younger generations and students into well-mannered and understanding individuals who would not embrace discrimination and stigmatization in any situation of encountering these people.

Conclusion

Recommendations for future directions are to conduct longitudinal and qualitative method, gathering the information on sexual orientation and gender identity of participants to examine the relationship of these variables with perception towards transgender, and take an initiative on a bigger scale by conducting a research that includes all degree, masters, and doctorate students of Psychology courses from all governmental and private institutions in Malaysia. These recommendations suggested could lead the upcoming research initiative and encourage the inspection of new topics. In summary, future studies addressing issues related to the perception of students and healthcare takers towards transgender and other sexual minority groups around Malaysia would be an appreciative and noble beginning.

Corresponding Author

Dr. Asma Perveen – University Supervisor/ Corresponding Author – Pakistan - asmaperveen@fpm.upsi.edu.my - Faculty of Education and Human Development, Department of Psychology and Counselling, Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris, 35900 Tanjong Malim, Malaysia.

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