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Awareness among Students of Higher Education Institutions about Transgender Issues in Malaysia

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Abstract

The issue of cross-gender or transgender is increasingly worrying among Muslims these days. The combination of both technology and countless social media applications makes it easy across all age, especially young people, to access various forms of discussion including those related to transgender. Much effort has been made by the transgender community towards normalizing this phenomenon in Malaysia. This is extremely worrying as young people are more easily influenced to follow the current trend as well as various other factors that contribute to the formation of this group. The lack of religious appreciation also causes them to do things that are contrary to Islam without taking into consideration the matter of both reward and sin. Therefore, this study aims to assess the level of awareness of IPT university students on transgender issues in Malaysia. To achieve this objective, a research questionnaire has been distributed to respondents who were university students in Malaysia. The data that was collected has been analyzed descriptively. The results of the study discovered that the respondents had a high level of awareness about transgender in Malaysia. This shows that students' understanding of this issue which is becoming more pervasive and widespread. However, there are a handful of respondents who are uncertain and unaware of the presence of this trans-gender group

Keywords: Gender, University Students, LGBTQ Normalization, Transgender

Introduction

Transgender has become a subject that is often discussed by all level of groups including scholars, religious leaders and the general public. As known, although the behaviour of the transgender group is against the norms of society and Islam, they are now increasingly brave in highlighting themselves and revealing their lifestyles for public exposure. It can be seen they are made up of various age groups starting from children to adults. However, the courage to reveal themselves begins to increase as they become teenagers and also due to the ease

of accessing the internet and social media. With the presence of today's social influencers on social media apps, many young people are influenced to develop their new identities (Ismail & Nasri, 2019). Not to mention those who are studying in the Public Universities are also involved in the transgender scene (Fadzilah & Noremy, 2019; Farah & Sharifah, 2011; Fadilah et al., 2007). This matter is very worrying for us because students are often envisioned as the future leaders of the country. Early awareness needs to be implemented among students so that they don't get caught up in this phenomenon. Various efforts have been made by responsible parties on this issue, among which include theatre performances (Mstar, 2013), recovery program for transgender groups and many more. Therefore, the aim of this study is to assess the level of awareness among Public University students regarding transgender groups in Malaysia.

Research Objective

This study aims to

- Assess the level of awareness of IPT university students on transgender issues in Malaysia.

Literature Review

Generally, transgender people are individuals who have a strong internal desire to present themselves against their birth gender. Their behaviour can be realized by changing themselves in terms of character and clothing. For the more extreme group referred to as transsexuals will carry out a surgical process known as Sex Reassignment Surgery (Benjamin, 1967; Teh, 2001) as well as hormonal treatments to encourage a change towards the opposite gender (Tayren et al., 2003). However, there are some other groups under the transgender such as cross dressers where they wear clothes and accessories that are different from their gender (Anna, 2013).

In Malaysia, these transgender phenomena are on a rise at a rapid pace. With today's technology, it gives them the space to showcase their presence, especially on social media. In fact, they are also given the opportunity to become product ambassadors or promoting merchandise for having a large following on social media. This somewhat provides space for this group to continue to tread firmly in Malaysia, even though it is well known that this transgender phenomenon is something that is contrary to the teachings of Islam. Several fatwas have been issued making it forbidden for an individual to change their gender either through gender surgical exchange or resembling the opposite gender. However, there are a handful of countries that recognizes transgender as a third gender such as Bangladesh, India, Iran, Pakistan and Egypt in their laws (Shah, 2021).

The discussion on transgender issues has been written about by many researchers. Variety of studies have been carried out in various aspects of which include factors that influence a person to get involved with this trend (Yusof & Timmiati, 2011, Azman & Ahmad, 2015, Rahim et al., 2017; Abdullah & Akhir, 2019), study on transgender from the legislation aspect in Malaysia (Shah, 2021; Abdullah & Akhir, 2017; Malib & Mustafa, 2014; Mohamad, 2015), a study on public opinion regarding transgender rights in Malaysia (Wiston et al., 2010), as well as a study regarding about suggestion and solution of these transgender issues (Afandi & Sabree, 2019; Azman et al., 2019; Hafizah et al., 2021; Zuraidah et al., 2018). Therefore, this study was undertaken to assess the level of awareness among university students on transgender issues in Malaysia. This study was undertaken to further expand the studies

related on transgender issues. This study was undertaken to further expand the studies related on transgender issues.

Methodology

This study uses a quantitative approach through data collection based on survey methods. The questionnaire instrument has been used. A total of 320 questionnaire forms have been distributed to students at a Public University in Malaysia. The questionnaire was divided into two parts. The first section is about the demographics of the respondents. The second part is related to the students' awareness of the transgender phenomenon. The awareness level was measured using a Likert scale between 1 and 5: (1) Strongly disagree, (2) Disagree, (3) Uncertain, (4) Agree, (5) Strongly agree. The data that has been collected is then analysed descriptively.

Results and Discussions

The level of awareness among students regarding the transgender phenomenon was assessed through questions related to the situation of this phenomenon in Malaysia. The results of the study can be seen in detail in tables 1 and 2.

Table 1

Respondent demographics

Item	Total (%)
Men	29.4
Women	70.6

Table 1 is the demographics of the respondents who took part in this research study. It was found that 29.4% were from male respondents and as many as 70.6% were from female respondents.

Table 2

Awareness of Public University students on transgender phenomenon in Malaysia

Item	Awareness (%)				
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly agree
Q1. I am aware of the existence of transgender groups around me.	1.3	1.3	9.4	36.9	51.2
Q2. Transgender people can interact normally within the general community.	3.8	6.3	29.4	29.4	31.3
Q3. I need to help in stopping the transgender culture.	0.0	0.0	3.8	21.3	75.0
Q4. I need to have gender sensitivity towards individuals (recognizing male and female based on existing gender).	0.6	1.3	5.6	20.0	72.5
Q5. I reject the term 'man trapped in a woman's body'.	1.3	2.5	18.8	15.6	61.9
Q6. I need to help transgender groups return to their true nature.	0.0	0.6	3.1	17.5	78.8

Q7. I easily recognize transgender groups around me.	1.3	1.9	27.5	38.8	30.6
Q8. Transgender groups have certain characteristics that can be easily identified.	0.6	2.5	19.4	41.3	36.3
Q9. Transgender groups are prevalent among those who are studying in Higher Learning Institutions.	1.3	5.0	33.8	33.1	26.9
Q10. Transgender groups exist only within their own group.	4.4	16.3	38.8	21.3	19.4

Based on table 2, it can be seen in Q1 that 88.1% of the respondents agree and strongly agree of the existence of transgender groups around them. Whereas 9.4% are uncertain and 2.6% are not aware of the existence of these groups. For Q2, 60.7% of the respondents agree and strongly agree that this group interacts normally within the general community. While 29.4% of the respondents were uncertain and 10.1% of respondents were not aware of this. For Q3, 96.3% of the respondents agree and strongly that they need to help to combat transgender culture, but 3.8% of the respondents are uncertain about this. For S4, 92.5% of the respondents agree and strongly agree of being sensitive to an individual's gender. For Q4, 92.5% of the respondents agree and strongly agree of being sensitive to an individual's gender. However, 5.6% of respondents were uncertain and 1.9% of respondents were not aware of this issue. For Q5, 77.5% of the respondents agree and strongly agree on rejecting the term "man trapped in a woman's body". Whereas 18.8% of the respondents were uncertain and 3.8% of the respondents were not aware of this matter.

For Q6, 96.3% of the respondents agree and strongly agree that they need to help transgender groups to return to their original nature. While 3.1% of the respondents were uncertain and 0.6% of the respondents were not aware of this. For Q7, 69.4% of the respondents agree and strongly agree that they could easily recognize transgender groups around them. Whereas 27.5% of the respondents were uncertain and 3.2% of the respondents were unaware of the presence of this group around them. For Q8, 77.6% of the respondents agree and strongly agree that transgender groups have certain characters that are identifiable when coming in contact with them. Whereas 19.4% of the respondents were uncertain and 3.1% of the respondents were not aware of this issue. For Q9, 60.0% of the respondents agree and strongly agree that transgender issues were prevalent in the university. Whereas 33.8% were uncertain and 6.3% were not aware of this. For S10, 40.7% agree that transgender groups were within their group only. Whereas 38.8% of the respondents were uncertain and 20.7% of the respondents were not aware of this issue.

The study findings show that university students are aware of the existence of transgender groups around them (88.1%). They also acknowledge the need to help these transgenders return to their original nature (96.3%) and to eliminate this phenomenon from continuously spreading (96.3%). In fact, this transgender group were easily recognizable by a certain common trait based on items Q7 (69.4%) and Q8 (77.6%). However, the group can interact normally within the community (60.7%) because they are only in their group without considering others (40.7%). In addition, it is also found that transgender group to be prevalent among those who are in the university (60.0%).

Conclusion

Based on the study, it can be seen that the majority of university students are aware of the transgender phenomenon in Malaysia. This shows that it is important to make sure this issue is known by the whole community, especially Muslim students, so that they are not drawn into this phenomenon. This is because Allah SWT strictly forbids the act of imitating a gender that is contrary to the original gender. However, there are some who are less familiar with this issue. Hence, there is a need to ensure that students are more engaged and knowledgeable about current issues happening in our country. It is recommended that the authorities share related information regarding to this phenomenon so that it can be stopped from continuing to spread to future generations. In addition, the strengthening of religious values also needs to be emphasized in every individual in Malaysia.

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